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Conference to Explore Experiences of Jewish Refugees and Other Forced Migrants in the Global South, 1940–1960

Against the backdrop of ongoing debates about global migration and its consequences, the German Historical Institute Washington and its Pacific regional office have organized a series of conferences on the history of forced migration and the experiences of refugees in collaboration with the German Historical Institute London and the Beijing and Delhi offices of the Max Weber Foundation. Following the opening conference in Delhi last year, the series resumes in Berkeley, May 20–22, 2019.

What does it mean for people driven from their homes when they can find only temporary refuge? What it is like to spend years “in transit” with no prospect of permanent settlement, much less return home? What does “everyday life” mean for forced migrants who might have to relocate once again on short notice? What knowledge do they need to survive? How is that knowledge shared? How do refugees restart their lives once they have put the experience of transit behind them?

These questions are as pertinent today, as upwards of 65 million people live as refugees, as they were in during the era of Nazi hegemony and the early postwar decades. The Jews who fled Nazi persecution often had to make their way to safety in stages, moving from one country to another in pursuit of the opportunity to settle permanently. The musician and composer Ruth Schönthal, for example, left Austria and, via Berlin, Stockholm, and Moscow, eventually made her way to Mexico, where she was able to remain after 1945. For many other Jewish refugees, by contrast, the end of the war meant the resumption of life in transit. Those who had found wartime sanctuary in Shanghai, Iran, and India joined millions of other refugees – including displaced persons, expellees, and decolonization migrants – in a search for someplace they could call home. The conference *In Global Transit: Forced Migration of Jews and Other Refugees (1940s–1960s)* is bringing together more than 30 leading researchers from Argentina, Colombia, Germany, Great Britain, India, Mexico, and the United States to explore the transit experience and thereby open new perspectives into the history of forced migration.

In Global Transit takes as its point of departure a fundamental shift of focus. As Simone Lässig, director of the German Historical Institute Washington and organizer of the conference, explains, “research on Jewish refugees from Nazi persecution has concentrated on their final destinations, above all the United States, Britain, and Palestine. The countries of the Global South, where many found protection but rarely permanent homes, have been largely overlooked, as has the fact that many Jewish refugees found themselves on the move again after 1945 and ended up spending a substantial portion of their lives in transit.”

Berkeley is a particularly fitting venue to bring together experts on the history of forced migration, as the Bay Area has offered a home to countless refugees from across the world over the past century.

Bringing a historical dimension to topics of present-day debate is one of the core objectives of the Max Weber Foundation. Through its institutes in Beirut, Istanbul, London, Moscow, Paris, Rome, Tokyo, Warsaw, and Washington, the foundation supports advanced research in the social sciences and humanities. It has recently established offices in Berkeley, Delhi, and Beijing to open new avenues for international scholarly dialogue and coloration especially on the migration topic.

For information and the In Global Transit program: <https://www.ghi-dc.org/events-conferences/event-history/2019/conferences/in-global-transit.html?L=0>

Weitere Informationen zur Konferenzreihe:

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