

Displacement and Resettlement During and After the Second World War in a Global Perspective – a Digital Humanities/Social GIS Approach

Veranstalter: Kerstin von Lingen, Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Universität Wien

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Unprecedented violence, not only on the battlefields in Europe and Asia, but also against civilians who suffered large-scale deportation and forced migration, form main themes of 20th century history. This conference, held by Kerstin von Lingen from the Institute of Contemporary History at Vienna University, aimed at historicizing these events and practices, visualising geographies, tracking movements and unearth levels of agency and decision-making on structural and individual levels, forming the point of departure for further research into patterns of displacement and resettlement.

Opening the floor KERSTIN VON LINGEN (Vienna) laid out three approaches that lead to a better understanding of Displaced Persons (DPs) and their strategies of resettlement.¹ These approaches centre on DPs' wishes and intentions during the years following the Holocaust, mass violence, destruction, forced labour and displacement of the Second World War. How can historians get a grip on the temporal and spatial dimension of being in transit? How do historians deal with ambiguities that arise from mapping and reconstructing pathways of life? How did DPs and refugees adapt to changing hosting societies and accompanying tensions? How did migration's administrative logic, its institutions, structures and legal frameworks evolve over time? Turning to the global perspective, how did „institutional logics“ in Europe and Asia influence each other? How can historians track patterns of political thought and governance of migration regimes and displacement?

The opening panel was devoted to methodological questions. International institutions such as the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and

the International Refugee Organisation (IRO) produced vast amount of data sets after World War II until their dissolution in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Participants agreed that the field of migration studies and the history of mass violence have the potential of enriching one another. Challenges and opportunities of a Digital Humanities inspired approach to displacement were at the heart of the debate. Social GIS², established by the IMIS team around CHRISTOPH RASS (Osnabrück), employs the analysis of personalised historical mass data. Rass aims at evaluating and visualising these data sets to get a more profound understanding of DPs' and refugees' trajectories. ISMEE TAMES (NIOD) argued that while mapping movements of DPs or refugees, their experience of being in transit must be at the heart of historians' interest. The concept of liminal spaces³ she proposed allows historians to trace the impact of being in transit on DPs' perceptions of themselves, their actions and attitudes.

Accumulated data on DPs and refugees such as questionnaires, passenger manifests collected by state and international institutions during and after World War II, allows for historians to produce maps of DPs and their struggle to reach desired or avoid unwanted locations. Sources offering the kind of spatial information needed to create these maps might often be ambiguous. Rass stressed that interviewees altered their responses frequently, a common practice when DPs tried to navigate the system they found themselves confronted with. What DPs deemed possible to say and what produced the desired outcome varied greatly, a point also stressed by HENNING BORGGRÄFE (Arolsen Archives) regarding language in official contexts.⁴ Therefore historians should

¹ Peter Gatrell, Refugees – What's Wrong with History?, in: *Journal of Refugee Studies* 30/2 (2016), pp. 170-189.

² Social GIS: History and Migration, University of Osnabrück, [https://www.socialgis.uni-osnabrueck.de/\(08.10.2019\)](https://www.socialgis.uni-osnabrueck.de/(08.10.2019)).

³ Ismee Tames / Peter Romijn, Transnational Identities of Dutch Nazi-Collaborators and their Struggle for Integration into the National Community, in: *Journal of Modern European History* 16/2 (2018), pp. 247-268.

⁴ Peter Becker (ed.), *Sprachvollzug im Amt. Kommunikation und Verwaltung im Europa des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, Bielefeld 2011.

find a way to present these ambiguities in maps they create. Rass and Tames proposed that maps merely function as a starting point of historical research and not its endpoint. SEBASTIAN BONDZIO (Osnabrück), working with Gestapo index cards of Osnabrück, showed how to access data too vast for non-computered research via Social-GIS. Each period of historiography reaches limitations of coping with historical big data. Bondzio demonstrated how careful cultivation of data sets enables historians to unearth previously inaccessible information. The individual takes a step back and mechanisms of knowledge production and repressive actions become accessible.

CHRISTIAN HÖSCHLER (Arolsen Archives) proposed revisiting the research on UNRRA and IRO and including under-researched institutions like the *American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)*, the *Jewish Relief Unit (JRU)* and the *Unitarian Service Committee (USCOM)*. Attempting a critical organisational analysis of these institutions' operations should bolster historian's understanding of their role in displacement processes. Höschler still considers Louise Holborn's⁵, Wolfgang Jacobmeyer's⁶ and Mark Wyman's⁷ books some of the most comprehensive studies, although published in 1956, 1985 and 1989 respectively. However, a comprehensive study on DPs' historiography combining the multiple strands and traditions of research is still a research gap. Besides institutions not yet thoroughly researched, also zooming in into national groups warrants a closer look. PAWEŁ SEKOWSKI (Kraków) exemplified this gap by presenting the complicated historiography of displaced Poles, Ukrainians and Polish Jews. IRO's role in dealing with these nationalities shows the impact of the politically unstable situation in post-war Europe.

RODERICK BAILEY (Oxford) opened the field of health management and discussed state and military authorities' attempts of managing large populations' movements. Bailey researches allied sanitary personnel's medical records and proceedings in dealing with typhus in the area of Flossenbürg after World War II. Medical professionals' goal to contain the disease influenced their handling

of the population they encountered. Historians can attempt to decode regulations put forward for the treatment of DPs and refugees by mapping diseases and those who carried them.

HINKE PIERSMA (NIOD) researched the feeling of property loss. Piersma interpreted the loss of property as a form of being uprooted from society. Various forms of dispossession, not always under the label of „Aryanisation“, presented just the first step on the road to expulsion or annihilation. Piersma's research focuses on the additional form of trauma enforced on returning refugees during the process of recovering homes or property items after World War II.

Historians of displacement have yet to bridge the divide between microanalysis and macro level studies. They need to incorporate non-European views on DPs and resettlement. RANA MITTER (Oxford) opened the second day titled „Case Studies Global Perspectives – Asia and Latin America“ and stated that comparisons between post-war and still pre-communist Europe as well as on China should be attempted. The level of destruction sustained during the Second World War and the number of people on the move in China allow for comparative approaches. Mitter stressed that the relief efforts of the *Chinese National Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (CNRAA)* warrant further research. Putting forward another working theory, Mitter suggested that rehabilitation efforts' implementation in belligerent or occupied countries ran into fewer problems than in allied countries as was China.

MILINDA BANERJEE (Munich/St Andrews) argued for a strong strand of research focused on post-colonial thought and DPs and refugees. Colonial subjects resisted rehabilitation efforts in an attempt to question colonial rule. Banerjee suggested looking at transnational networks of political thinking undertaken under global intellectual history's

⁵ Louise W. Holborn, *The International Refugee Organization: a specialized agency of the United Nations: its history and work, 1946-1952*, Oxford 1956.

⁶ Wolfgang Jacobmeyer, *Vom Zwangsarbeiter zum heimatlosen Ausländer*, Göttingen 1985.

⁷ Mark Wyman, *DPs: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945-51*, Ithaca 1989.

auspices.⁸ Historians need to trace trajectories of the concept of humanity to reveal how actors used humanity in different contexts to achieve their own goals. Banerjee provided an example of Bengali solidarity and identification with Jews suffering from persecution in Europe.⁹ Historians need to chart these networks. Understanding flows of knowledge and political ideas adds to the understanding of non-European traditions of political thought. Additional motives for opposing British colonial rule, Nazi persecution or imperial Japanese occupation become accessible.

The next speakers centred on the process of decolonizing the „Dutch East Indies“, today Indonesia. RALF FUTSELAAR (NIOD), using the Moluccan army’s history after the end of colonial rule, established displacement and occupation as rather ordinary practices exercised by colonial regimes. Futselaar showed how the method of text mining opens up new bodies of knowledge. Moluccan’s experiences of displacement and being uprooted in their new homeland Netherlands become visible. Tracking texts over space and time and creating so called „time-space boxes“, historians can access perceptions of displacement. ANNE VAN MOURIK (NIOD) emphasised that the chaos after the end of Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia, the following war and the consecutive revolution, resulted in distinct migration patterns. Specific circumstances such as forced labour, delay of repatriation, lack of colonial control and/or staff and revolution influenced those patterns – historians need to track them.

Turning to Latin America, LINDA ERKER (Vienna) presented an approach that allows to follow post-emigration career pathways, in a compared perspective by focusing on fates of academics having to flee from Nazi persecution. Erker strives to determine if individual histories of forced emigration were „success stories“ and what prevented or aided this outcome. She does so by looking closely, and in addition to their professional careers, at receiving societies, the socio-economic and educational background (e.g. Chile, Argentina) as well as the culture of remembrance back in Austria. SEBASTIAN HUHNS (Osnabrück) presentation centered on the receiving society of Venezuela. Huhn aims at deciphering

DPs’ expectations towards their new home and state officials’ policies directed at the citizens to be.

Turning to Austrian examples, RENÉ BIENERT (VWI Vienna) described, from the perspective of an archivist, aspects of Simon Wiesenthal’s early post-war life as a DP in Linz. Besides „hunting“ Nazi perpetrators Wiesenthal worked closely with DPs which in turn aided his quest of collecting evidence of Nazi atrocities. Bienert showcased a card index, located in Yad Vashem, as a promising source for further research. This index, set up to link evidence of crimes to certain perpetrators, locations and camps contains over 3.000 questionnaires distributed in DP camps after World War II. Bienert added a spatially oriented view on Wiesenthal’s work, by researching this index.

CHRISTIAN CWIK (St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago) opened up the question of internal displacement within Holocaust refugees and those fleeing Civil War torn Spain. DPs and refugees encamped in the neutral zone between British Gibraltar and Spain were subjected to frequent state intervention. British fortification efforts in Gibraltar and the fear of Franco aligning Spain with the Third Reich turned civilians into refugees, resulting in transportations to Jamaica.

Combining the micro and macro level RICHARD GERMANN (Vienna) proposed enrichment and comparison of sources from the *Arolsen Archives* and files collected by the *Jewish Community Administration* under Nazi rule. By looking closely at both types of sources Germann derived DPs’ strategies in dealing with the IRO, to map patterns of DP’s motives and aims at matching them to IRO procedures. Germann researches these patterns and endorses the sources ambiguities in his project „Born in Vienna – Lost in Europe. A Sample of Viennese DPs“.

By way of conclusion, the workshop established a wide variety of approaches of using Social-GIS and data driven research based on big data sets. Historians still develop and test these approaches. All participants stressed

⁸Samuel Moyn / Andrew Sartori (eds.), *Global Intellectual History*, New York 2013.

⁹Salil Sen, *Natun Ihudi [The New Jew]*, Indiana 1951.

that the results must be based in theoretical frameworks and viewed as points of departure for further research. The human dimension of DPs and refugees navigating their struggle to find a new home, be repatriated or avoid exactly the former, forms the baseline for future research.

Conference overview:

Jour 1: Possibilities of Digital Methods and Samples

Kerstin von Lingen (Vienna): The Management of Migration: A Short Intro

Ismee Tames (NIOD): The Experience of Being in Liminal Space. Ideas about Linking War and Society Studies and Migration Studies

Christoph Rass (Osnabrück): Biographies, Violence-Induced Mobility and Migratory Effects. Revisiting Categories, Perspectives and Narratives

Henning Borggräfe (ITS): Postwar DPs and their Representation in the (Digital) Collections of the Arolsen Archives

Christian Höschler (ITS): From Authorized Histories to Big Data: The Historiography of Europe's Postwar DPs

Sebastian Bondzio (Osnabrück): Big Data and Historical Research. How to Utilize Personal Data in GIS

Pawel Sekowski (Kraków): The Resettlement Policy of IRO – A New Approach of the International Community Towards the Issue of Refugees in Europe. Case Study of DPs and Refugees from Poland

Roderick Bailey (Oxford): Disease and Data Collection: Allied Health Surveillance of Displaced Persons in Europe, 1944-45

Hinke Piersma (NIOD): The Meaning of Property Loss for Jewish Victims in Relation to Persecution and Flight

Jour 2: Case Studies Global Perspectives/Asia and Latin America

Rana Mitter (Oxford): UNRRA in China: The Rebirth of the Developmental State and the Legacy of Imperialism in Asia, 1943-47

Milinda Banerjee (LMU Munich): Forced Dis-

placements and the Conceptual Production of 'Humanity' in the Mid-20th Century: Bengali Texts and Digital Archives in Global Intellectual Geographies

Anne van Mourik (NIOD): Mobility in and out of the Dutch East Indies/Indonesia 1940-1950.

Ralf Futselaar (NIOD): Colonial Soldiers as Loyal Servants, Unwanted Aliens and Enemies Within

Linda Erker (Vienna): Forced Jewish Migration as a Career Opportunity? The Austrian Archaeologist Grete Mostny in Chile after 1938

Sebastian Huhn (Osnabrück): Negotiating Resettlement towards Venezuela

Christian Cwik (Trinidad and Tobago): Between Evacuation and Repatriation: The Case of Gibraltarian Displacement between 1940 and 1951

René Bienert (VWI): Help(ing) Survivors – Between Displacement and Resettlement. Simon Wiesenthal and the Early Search for Nazi War Criminals

Richard Germann (Vienna): Born in Vienna – Lost in Europe. A Sample of Viennese DPs

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