

Call for Papers

Internment Camps: The (Enforced) Placement and “Custody” of Refugees in the Past and the Present

Annual Conference of the Austrian Association for Exile Research (öge) in cooperation with the Department for Contemporary History (University of Vienna) and the research network “Migration, Citizenship and Belonging” (Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Vienna)

3-4 December 2020, Vienna

The placement and detention, often through force, of refugees and asylum-seeking individuals in camps is not a practice that has only recently been used by states to regulate and control the movement of humans across borders. During World War I, for example, tens of thousands of civilians were kept in internment camps as so-called “enemy aliens”. Before and during World War II, Jewish refugees and other individuals persecuted by the National Socialist regime were also targeted by such measures. A wide network of camps for displaced persons emerged in 1945, after the liberation. Displaced persons included, amongst others, Jewish survivors of the Shoah. Furthermore, in other cases of flight and exile in the postwar period, camps of various types proved to be a crucial instrument for the limitation and control of the movements of refugees.

The internment of refugees and asylum seekers continues today, yet the concrete circumstances are continuously changing: Both inside and outside Europe, various types and concepts of camps, guaranteeing the internment of refugees, are currently being discussed, trialed, and realized on a massive scale. The recent practices of immobilization and “encampment” (Michel Agier) of refugees reflect a general development within the areas of asylum and migration: States and governments are treating the individuals looking for protection and asylum primarily as a potential source of danger, a notion which corresponds with repressive policies, with detention pending deportation and forced deportation itself having become very commonly applied measures employed by migration and asylum regimes worldwide today. These measures often contradict fundamental human rights and are at odds with the agendas of NGOs aiming to support and help refugees.

In its annual conference in 2020, the Austrian Association for Exile Research aims to facilitate an extensive engagement with the past and present of the organized, state-led, and forced placement of refugees. The emphasis will be on a comparative perspective – synchronic as well as diachronic. One aim of the conference is to make visible parallels and differences between the practices and types of internment in the

past and the present in different countries – while considering the specific historical contexts. Another focus will lie on the nexus of relationships and agencies which constitute the camps in question as transitory spaces.

The call for papers is addressed to academics of various disciplines, to members of civil society, as well as to people working within an artistic or cultural domain who deal with the topics of camps and forced placement of refugees in their work. The contributions should engage with one of the following periods or should relate to some of the following periods: Period of National Socialism and World War II (1933–1945); camps for displaced persons after 1945; developments starting in the 1960s; and particularly developments in the present. Engagements with extra-European and global contexts are especially welcome. The National Socialist camp system (concentration camps, extermination camps, and forced labor camps) is explicitly not a topic of this congress.

The call for papers is geographically and disciplinary open. The contributions can consist of analyses of local phenomena or case studies as well as comparative engagements from an international or historical perspective. Accepted languages for the presentations are English and German.

Possible contexts and topics include the following:

- The situation in different countries and the reality in specific internment camps; case studies: history of the development of the site; condition, state, and structure of the camp; composition of the camp community; etc.
- Living situations and conditions in camps: forms of (self-)organization, solidarity, resilience, and resistance; gender-specific experiences and dynamics; memories and biographical reports; etc.
- Relationships to the outside world (extent of isolation and control; linkages; etc.); the role of supporters and NGOs; etc.
- Political and institutional conditions; actions of states and officials; repression, violence, discrimination, and their consequences for the targeted individuals.
- Camps as “business models” (private and public actors).
- Reactions of local populations: solidarity, rejection, benefit etc.
- Biographies of camps: transformation/use in different contexts.
- Boundaries (whether distinct or fluid) between organized reception, humanitarian aid, and forced internment.
- The typology of camps; differentiation from forms of forced internment practiced by the National Socialist regime, fascism, and Stalinism.
- Camps as transitory spaces: aspects of time, space, and identity.

- Life after the camp (repatriation, "integration"); associations of formerly interned individuals; etc.
- The role of media and public discourse.
- Collective memory and remembrance initiatives, memorials.
- The (non-)recognition of internment camps in compensation processes after 1945.

Deadlines

29 February 2020: submission of presentation proposals (200-300 words) and a short biography of the contributor(s) can be sent to nora.walch@exilforschung.ac.at

31 March 2020: selection of presentations

31 October 2020: submission of written presentations

Organizing Committee

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