

DPs, Refugees, and Escapees: Washington's Cold War Taxonomy of Statelessness

Susan L. Carruthers

Two broad assumptions underpin many analyses of the international refugee regime that emerged under U.S. auspices in the aftermath of World War II: first, that Washington's attentiveness to the plight of refugees represents a guilt-stricken response to the Holocaust; and second, that America's Cold War rivalry with the USSR ensured that refugees from the Eastern bloc were warmly welcomed into a state eager to present itself as the "asylum of all asylums." On closer inspection, however, neither of these claims conveys the complexity of postwar America's approach to refugee issues. In practice, U.S. attitudes were considerably more conflicted toward Jewish displaced persons (DPs) and Eastern bloc escapees than conventional wisdom maintains.

This paper will explore the contradictions in Washington's early Cold War approach to refugees from Europe. At precisely the time that political leaders were striving to present the United States as leader of the "free world"—with prominent opinion-formers calling on the Truman administration to embrace a "Fifth Freedom," namely freedom of movement—Congress supported stringent curbs on immigration. Truman struggled to secure acceptance for legislation that would bring greater numbers of DPs into the United States.

Refugees from the Eastern bloc posed a particularly vexing issue to early Cold War America. The administration was rhetorically committed to encouraging flight from the "slave world" of communism. But this valorization of escape didn't find a counterpart in Congressional willingness to admit entry to Eastern European and Russian refugees in any great number—stigmatized twice over as both undesirable (putatively unassimilable) Slavs and as individuals tainted by proximity to communism.

As this paper will show, U.S. policymakers self-consciously labored to devise distinct new categories, striving to distinguish desirable "defectors" and "escapees" from less welcome immigrants. However, the escapee's valorization in popular culture and Cold War pageantry failed to overcome reluctance to admit Eastern bloc refugees into the United States, resulting in an array of ever more fanciful projections as to where they might go.

The Golden Age of European Refugees 1945-1960

Daniel Cohen

This paper examines the central place of European refugees in international politics from the end of World War II to the early 1960s. The European refugee question heavily impinged on the outbreak of the Cold War, on the rise of Jewish nationhood, on the contested "human rights revolution," and on the emergence of United Nations humanitarianism. Contrary to millions of ethnic German expellees or non-European dislocated people, European displaced persons and escapees ranked high in Cold War politics. This paper explains how and why, in the words of a postwar refugee worker, political displacement in Europe was deemed by the West as "the best show on earth."

The Challenge of Eligibility: UNRWA and the Definition of a "Palestine Refugee"

Ilana Feldman

Since its establishment in the early 1950s, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has operated with what seems to be a clear definition of a Palestinian refugee: a person "whose normal residence was Palestine for a minimum of two years preceding the outbreak of the conflict in 1948 and who, as a result of this conflict, has lost both his home and means of livelihood." On closer inspection, however, this definition is anything but straightforward. In contrast to the definition outlined by the 1951 refugee convention, UNRWA's definition is an operational one, meant to identify those persons eligible for assistance and not to declare anything about the political meaning of refugee status. This operational status has been tremendously complicated as well. The question of eligibility and registration—whom UNRWA should assist and whom it should represent—has been the subject of considerable debates and transformation within UNRWA and has been a site of political struggle for the Palestinians whom UNRWA is meant to service. This paper investigates some of these challenges, and their significance for the humanitarian order within which so many Palestinians live, by drawing on documents from the UNRWA archives. The focus is on the period of the 1960s—a time when the immediacy of the *nakba* [catastrophe] was beginning to recede a bit, when the crisis of survival was contained, but when UNRWA was still providing full services (rations included) to a large portion of the registered refugees. The paper considers changes in the definition of a Palestine refugee, the gap between qualification and eligibility, and the politically charged question of whether to represent, as well as assist, displaced Palestinians.

The Making of the Modern Refugee, 1945-1960

Peter Gatrell

This keynote has three main aims. One is to pinpoint global sites of population displacement after 1945; another is to suggest where the period 1945-60 belongs in the broader history of population displacement in the twentieth century; finally, I want to ask what is meant by writing “refugee history.”

The post-1945 world was a “violent peacetime” characterized by continued conflict and Cold War, complicated by the demands of economic reconstruction. These interlocking features were closely connected to the “refugee problem.” Beyond Europe there were extraordinary political-territorial upheavals in the Indian sub-continent, the Middle East, and the Far East in the space of three short years, 1947-49, whose consequences continue to reverberate.

What was distinctive about the decade and a half following the end of World War II? At least half a dozen answers suggest themselves, although none is entirely satisfactory. One is about scale, until one realizes the extent of earlier mass movements of people in Europe as World War I came to an end. Second, the post-1945 Cold War undeniably cast a long shadow, although anti-communist rhetoric also informed the refugee crisis during the 1920s. Third, the postwar era was characterized by decolonization, but post-1918 imperial collapse in Europe led to widespread population displacement. Fourth, the 1950s witnessed the emergence of the UNHCR as a major international institution, but the creation of a global role was slow and tortuous and for a while it looked more like Nansen’s shoestring operation. Fifth, the extraordinary efflorescence of NGOs after 1945 represented a continuation of interwar developments rather than a new departure. Finally, the emerging emphasis on “development” as a panacea for displaced persons had been anticipated between the wars.

In the final section of my talk I discuss some of the challenges in attempting to write a refugee history of the modern world. This is partly a question about the sources and methods that historians have at their disposal. But it is also about the paradoxical consequences of putting refugees at the center rather than the margins of historical inquiry.

Representing Jewish Refugees in American-Occupied Postwar Germany

Jay Howard Geller

In the years immediately following the Holocaust, as many as 300,000 Jewish refugees, known as displaced persons (DPs), spent time in Germany, then occupied by the victorious Allied powers. Many refugees considered the presence of Allied forces to be a guarantee against the threat of renewed persecution, and many hoped that displaced persons camps would merely be a temporary stop before immigration to America or British-controlled Palestine. In fact, with restrictions on immigration to the United States still in place and Britain unwilling to admit the DPs to Palestine, the refugees found themselves seemingly stranded in Germany. As a result, the displaced persons camps developed into settled microsocieties under the supervision of the Allies and international organizations. Nonetheless, the refugees often faced poor living conditions and a lack of empathy, or even hostility, from the Allied occupiers.

To alleviate the situation in the American zone, U.S. Army officials appointed an official adviser for Jewish affairs to mediate between the DPs and the occupation authority. Drawn from the ranks of army chaplains, Jewish communal officials in the United States, or Jewish administrators in relief agencies, the successive advisers for Jewish affairs were critical in winning understanding for the DPs’ plight and improved conditions.

In addition to the army’s Jewish adviser, the DPs established their own representative bodies to advocate for improved social and political conditions. Camp committees led to zonal committees, which then led to the interzonal Interest-Representation of the Jewish Communities and Religious Associations. However, the U.S. Army was reluctant to grant recognition to the DPs’ Central Committee of Liberated Jews in the American Zone, fearing that it would become a state within a state. Ultimately, the army did accept the Central Committee and worked with it. With the adviser for Jewish affairs representing the DPs from above and the Central Committee and camp committees representing them from below, the DPs were able to improve their situation in the camps and prepare for eventual emigration.

Placing Displaced Jews in Postwar Germany: A Spatial Perspective

Anna Holian

This paper examines the history of Jewish displaced persons in postwar Germany from a spatial perspective, focusing on efforts at segregation and self-segregation. The DP policies implemented in the U.S. occupation zone of Germany were premised on the social and spatial isolation of displaced persons from the rest of the population, with the DP camp serving as the primary means of enforcing isolation. Displaced persons were viewed as a temporary “unsettled” group whose presence on German soil should not fundamentally impinge on Allied plans for Germany. Segregation served various purposes: general “care and control”; repatriation; and, after repatriation had run its course, resettlement. Simultaneously, many Jewish DPs themselves desired separation from the rest of the population. For Zionist activists, the creation of distinct Jewish worlds in the DP camps served as a dress rehearsal for the creation of a Jewish state. For a number of reasons, however, a clear policy of segregation proved impossible to implement. With the memory of National Socialism still fresh, it was deemed impolitic to confine displaced persons, especially Jewish DPs. Thus policies towards displaced persons and “persecutees” allowed them to live outside the DP camps and even granted them priority in housing. Among Jewish DPs, the desire for isolation was also incomplete. Access to the world outside the camps was seen as essential to procuring valuable resources. Moreover, in the aftermath of confinement, freedom of movement was viewed as a fundamental human right. Through this dual perspective, focused on both policymakers and DPs, the paper sheds new light on the spatial practices of the emerging international refugee regime and on Jewish consciousness in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

“Free-Living DPs” and Life in the Allied Occupied Territories

Andrew Janco

This paper discusses the postwar experiences of Soviet civilians in Europe who were either “free-living” DPs or lived independently in the “German economy.” When compared with other nationalities, a substantially higher percentage of Soviet DPs lived outside of Allied assembly centers and DP camps. Where as many as 80 percent of Jews and Poles sought refuge inside camps administered by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), only 30 percent of Soviet DPs lived there. Those in the camps were predominantly individuals who did not wish to return to the Soviet Union and claimed to be Polish or “stateless” during registration. Given the uncertainty of living under an assumed identity and changing Allied policies, over two-thirds of Soviet refugees chose to live on their own. Using autobiographical texts and personal archives, this paper details the options available to liberated Soviet civilians and the variety of strategies they utilized when finding housing, food, and work in postwar Germany. This includes various “legitimate” efforts, such as construction, shoe making, and translation work as well as the black market, armed robbery, and extortion. Rather than viewing DPs as passive recipients of Allied relief, this paper works from a “refugee perspective” to detail the active process of procuring needed goods and services from UNRRA, humanitarian agencies, ordinary Germans, and other sources.

Borders and the Making of Refugees in Hong Kong, 1949-1967

Laura Madokoro

In 1950, the land border between Hong Kong and China changed forever as masses of people fled the Chinese Communist Party’s rise to power. For the first time, in an era of peace, the border was closed to migrants from China. Over the intervening years, the government of Hong Kong used a variety of strategies to keep this border closed: quota systems, categorization and re-categorization of migrants, deportation, and coercion. Simultaneously, a humanitarian agenda emerged in the colony, inspired by the plight of the thousands who struggled to escape the economic turmoil and devastating famines born of China’s modernist projects. As a result, the 700,000 postwar refugees in Hong Kong assumed a paradoxical character, at once victims to be helped and unwanted migrants. This paper considers borders at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels and argues that the porous physical, emotional, and political borders between China, Hong Kong, and the international community played a fundamental role in recasting migrants as refugees and refugees as illegals in the postwar period.

Who is a Pakistani Refugee? Violence, Sacrifice, and the Crisis of Muslim Nationalism

Tahir Naqvi

The official “transfer of population” that occurred in the wake of the violence of Partition (of British colonial India) was an event that irreversibly transformed intimate and public circuits of domesticity, community, and civilization in the subcontinent. Regions most affected by mass communal violence were designated by the Indian and Pakistani state as “agreed areas” for official evacuation. By contrast, the minority-Muslim provinces of India were categorized as “non-agreed” areas, whose inhabitants were consequently discouraged from leaving their “native homelands” in India. What is significant about these dividing practices, I contend, is the unquestioned nationality of any Muslim who managed to enter Pakistan, including those who violated the state's interdiction against migration. This paper addresses the formative tension between mass violence and Muslim nationalist ideology in organizing the political belonging of certain Muslim refugees and the inclusive exclusion of others.

Probing the Contradictions and Ambiguities of the Postwar International Refugee Regime in East Asia: Evidence from China, Hong Kong, and Indonesia

Glen Peterson

This paper examines the experiences of three distinct refugee crises in order to shine a light on the contradictions and ambiguities of the international refugee regime that was created with the establishment of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in December 1950. The three refugee populations examined in this study are European, mainly Russian, refugees in the People's Republic of China; Chinese refugees from the People's Republic of China in the British colony of Hong Kong; and ethnic Chinese refugees from Indonesia in the People's Republic of China. Despite significant differences, all three of these refugee situations shared one feature in common: the central role played by the People's Republic of China, a communist state that was also forcibly excluded from membership in the United Nations. In this paper I recreate the logic of UNHCR decision-makers' attempts to solve these three refugee crises as they grappled with questions of entitlement, authenticity, and fairness within the constraints of a mandate whose guiding assumptions seemed increasingly out of touch with realities on the ground. Finally, I also examine the outcomes of these three refugee crises by asking what became of the refugees themselves.

Kashmiri Refugees and the South Asian Refugee Regime, 1947-1971

Cabeiri deBergh Robinson

In this paper, I examine the emergence of a regional refugee regime through a close examination of the national contexts in which “Kashmiri refugees” emerged as rights-bearing political subjects. I argue that after 1947, the dominant modes of interpreting what it means to “be a refugee” in Pakistan and in India established Kashmiri refugees as active political subjects with rights claims over political institutions. In the first part of the paper, I discuss the distinction between the refugee regime that was developing in Europe at the end of World War II and the refugee regime that was developing to handle the integration of Partition refugees into the new nation-states of Pakistan and India during the partition of British colonial India in 1947. This “South Asian refugee regime” had its own distinctive cultural representations of displacement and forced-migration and the creation of a set of legal and administrative practices. Second, I describe how the “Kashmiri refugee” emerged as a distinct political subject within the South Asian refugee regime through Indo-Pak treaties and provincial legal provisions, designated administrative practices by the national governments, civil society philanthropic activity, and the eventual creation of a “refugee electorate” in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. I argue that the constitution of a modern regional refugee regime which recognized refugees as inherently political subjects enables a critical perspective on the concept of humanitarianism and the globalizing claims of the “international refugee regime.”

“Help the People to Help Themselves”: The UNRRA Mission and European Displaced Persons **Silvia Salvatici**

This paper focuses on the policies of displaced persons’ “care and maintenance” implemented by United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) officers in occupied Europe. U.N. employees not only shaped the definitions of the different categories of DPs needing help (single mothers, unaccompanied children, etc.); since their task was “one of human engineering,” they also drew up the programs each category of beneficiaries was required to attend in order to achieve moral and social rehabilitation. For example, vocational training courses and employment programs were, in the words of a former welfare officer, “aimed at the reestablishment of work habits and new skills, [so that] DPs could again face the world as free human beings.” (Re-)education for work (since employment was deemed “the best possible morale building factor”) represented the primary component of a specific pattern of social and moral rehabilitation devoted to DPs. This pattern was also based on the strengthening of refugees’ national values (despite UNRRA’s internationalism) and on the reestablishment of the family and specifically of traditional domestic roles (as demonstrated by programs focused on cultivating female homemaking skills). However, DPs’ response to UNRRA solutions was anything but passive; it introduced spaces for negotiation, providing a complex overview of displacement experiences. UNRRA strategies in postwar Europe undoubtedly served as laboratories for the formation of political and social meanings in displacement management, and they had a continued impact on population movement policies implemented by national and international bodies in subsequent decades. The wartime legacy has been long-lasting and has played a leading role in the transition to later western approaches to forced migrations.

Otto Kimminich from Right to Left: The Audiences of a Sudeten German Legal Expert **Lora Wildenthal**

The expellee issue in the Federal Republic of Germany may have quickly taken on a predictable and confining form in West German politics, but the influence of jurists associated with the expellee lobbies was not so confined or predictable. As these jurists’ field of international law developed from what had been orphan status in pre-1933 Germany’s law departments to ever greater prominence after 1949 (especially in the context of European unification), their legal ideas spread into the scholarly apparatus of international law that today underpins human rights activism in Germany. They worked on international human rights law, including refugee, asylum, and minority rights, at a time when hardly anyone did and when such topics were obscure and lacking in prestige. When the topics gained greater prominence in the field of law, the existing scholarship on those topics in West Germany was thoroughly dominated by experts concerned with the expellee cause. My paper will focus on one particularly prolific expellee jurist, Otto Kimminich, whose own politics were far to the Right but who was a favored expert not only in that milieu but also in mainstream and progressive human rights organizations. His career spanned the 1960s to his premature death in the mid-1990s.