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Friday, 23 June 2023, 17:00
Main Ceremonial Hall, University of Vienna

Polish refugees arriving in Wellington, and at the Polish Children's Camp at Pahiatua, 1944. Source: Archives New Zealand, CC BY 2.0



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Keynote speaker

Jessica Reinisch

'Auntie UNRRA', or UNRRA, the super-state

Writing histories of displacement and resettlement, and drawing lessons from them, requires a sense of chronologies and change over time. The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration was not primarily created as a refugee agency, but existed as an organisation in a long line of largely piecemeal and provisional bodies, instruments and mechanisms tackling population and refugee questions. In this talk I would like to discuss UNRRA's place in the history of efforts to 'manage' refugees. By some criteria, UNRRA fits neatly into a lineage of organisations that stretches from the first Nansen office to the UNHCR. But in significant ways UNRRA's approach was different from earlier and later programmes. UNRRA's overall significance lays in its uniquely 'connected' approach, which emphasised that broken infrastructures, economic and agricultural underdevelopment, lack of expert knowledge, and mass displacement were all part of the same set of problems highlighted and magnified by war. With the end of UNRRA, a self-consciously multilateral approach was replaced by arrangements that were significantly narrower in scope, vision and extent of political support.

Jessica Reinisch is Professor of Modern European History at Birkbeck, University of London. She is Director of Birkbeck's Centre for the Study of Internationalism and editor of a book series, Histories of Internationalism, published by Bloomsbury. She has a long-standing research interest in UNRRA, alongside interests in war and post-war reconstruction, migration and displacement, internationalism, and, most recently, the history of international conferences.

Programme

Registration by 8 June 2023: szilvia.steiner@univie.ac.at

Friday, 23 June 2023, 17:00

Main Ceremonial Hall (Großer Festsaal)
University of Vienna
Universitätsring 1, 1010 Vienna

17:15

Welcome

Dean **Christina Lutter**
Project Leader **Kerstin von Lingen**

17:30

Keynote lecture

Jessica Reinisch
Professor of Modern European History, Birkbeck,
University of London

18:30

Reception

Food & drinks
will be served in the Arcaded Courtyard of the University

zum Stream:



Global Resettlement Regimes: Ambivalent Lessons Learned from the Postwar (1945-1951)

The 20th century saw unprecedented violence, not only on the battlefields in Europe and Asia, but also against civilians who suffered displacement and deportation on a large scale in both, the European and the Asian theatres of war. The displacement of millions of people after the end of the war and their subsequent resettlement, be it back to where “home” had been, or to new places, became not only one of the most challenging needs for the international community, but also for the displaced themselves, who played a crucial part in the negotiation of their paths.

In Europe, after the end of the Second World War, forced labourers from countries occupied by Nazi Germany, Holocaust survivors and concentration camp inmates, as well as millions of expelled and displaced people from Central and Eastern Europe were seeking ways back into normal life. Many of them resettled in Germany or Austria, others opted for overseas emigration. In Asia, the situation in China, ravaged by Japanese imperialism and civil war, provided even larger challenges, not to mention returning slave labourers and, as a special group, Japanese settlers.

The complex repatriation and resettlement of millions throughout the world during the late 1940s was a litmus stress tests for the operability of the emerging international migration regime. It later on found an institutionalized home within the United Nation’s UNHCR and the 1951 refugee convention. Understanding International Humanitarian Law as one crucial legacy of the 20th century and the aftermath of world war violence in particular, we argue that the agency of refugees helped form an international migration regime and was one of the postwar era’s global success stories, despite obvious setbacks. Understanding its formation and negotiation can offer us not only a better understanding of the past, but also prepares us for challenges which lay ahead.

global-displacement-and-resettlement.univie.ac.at
