

Call for Paper: “Environments of Exile: Refugees, Nature, and Representations.” Biennial Conference of the North American Society for Exile Studies - September 23-25, 2021, at Queen’s University in Kingston/Ontario

Forced migration always takes place within specific cultural, social, and political environments, but also within specific natural environments: natural disasters and conservation efforts trigger migration. At the same time, escape also takes place in nature – for example, when people hide in forests, flee across unguarded ‘green’ borders, or cannot reach safety behind oceans or mountains. Migration brings people into different climates they are not familiar with. These considerations affect survival in different ways because specific knowledge about nature and the environment influences flight and exile too: both about the conditions of survival in nature during flight (shelter, food, health) and also the possibilities of arrival and integration during exile, for example through specific knowledge about nature in agriculture, mining, or forestry. Consequently, exiles and refugees had an impact on the environment if their knowledge about nature was not ignored or subdued. Furthermore, natural spaces, especially at borders, were places of resistance to persecution and oppression; here, nature became a political space where knowledge circulation took place, and relief was organized. Finally, exile and environment are also related to the transformation or conservation of identity. These processes can be reconstructed, for example, in memories as well as in artistic representations about environments of exile.

The Biennial Conference of the North American Society for Exile Studies follows recent debates about the human right to landscape (Egoz/Mahkzoumi/Pungetti 2011) and approaches in the Environmental History of Modern Migrations (Amiero/Tucker 2017) by extending them to historical perspectives on forced migration: to spatialities and temporalities of environment in contexts of escape and exile in the first half of the 20th century and, in particular, the flight from Nazi-occupied Europe. Nevertheless, papers dealing with other refugee movements or comparative perspectives are also invited. Possible topics include but are not restricted to:

Nature and escape: In which natural spaces did escape take place, and how did humans influence these natural spaces? Under what conditions do natural spaces protect, and under what conditions is nature not a refuge but rather a threat for refugees? How did the processes of knowledge production and circulation about natural hideouts and survival strategies evolve? How and where was knowledge about natural boundaries circulated, for example knowledge on insurmountable seas and mountains? Where can professionalization be localized to overcome natural borders, for example on escape routes through mountains like the Alps or Pyrenees?

Nature and resistance: What role did natural spaces play in organizing resistance to the causes of flight and oppression? In which spaces did this resistance succeed and in which did it fail, and why? What is the relationship between rescue, relief, solidarity, and natural spaces?

Nature and integration: What resources do environments provide for integration? What role does the ‘feeling of beauty’ for new natural environments play? To what extent is environmental knowledge a resource for the integration of forced migrants? What is the relationship between previously acquired environmental knowledge and knowledge acquired in migration? How did ‘receiving societies’ respond to such knowledge in the context of escape and exile, and what impact did it have on new natural spaces?

Nature and representation: Where, when and how were environment and nature discussed in the context of flight and exile, how was nature portrayed and what role was assigned to it? In particular, how was the change to another climate zone described – as liberation or as part of a continuing threat? What similarities and differences can be found in literature, music,

painting, and movies? What role did nature and the environment play in recollections or stories? Is there a specific representation of nature in memoirs, autobiographies, and biographical writing of exiles or former refugees?

Please send a brief CV and a proposal of no more than 400 words by October 31, 2020, to Swen Steinberg (swen.steinberg@queensu.ca). Proposals for complete panels (three papers, with or without commentator) are welcome, as are proposals for individual papers. The conference takes place September 23-25, 2021, at Queen's University in Kingston/Ontario and is organized by Swen Steinberg (Queen's University, Kingston | German Historical Institute Washington, DC with its Pacific Regional Office at the University of California, Berkeley) and Helga Schreckenberger (University of Vermont, Burlington | President of the North American Society for Exile Studies).