

Being a Refugee A European Narrative

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The research project *Flucht europäisch erzählen. Being a Refugee: A European Narrative* set itself the goal of presenting the European dimension of the refugee experience. It was undertaken in the context of the *European Remembrance* strand of the EU Commission's *Europe for Citizens* programme, reflecting its emphasis on the shared history and values of the European Union's member states and the EU's goal of promoting peace, the values of the European Union and the well-being of its inhabitants.

Each year, in the context of the *European Remembrance* strand, the EU Commission suggests specific historical points of reference, usually the anniversaries of major historical turning points in recent European history. It is no coincidence that the refugee experience played a crucial role in 2016. The massive impact of the refugee movements of 2015 had demonstrated both that challenges on this scale can only be met jointly and how complex and difficult it is to do so at the European level in a spirit of solidarity.

The research project *Flucht europäisch erzählen. Being a Refugee: A European Narrative* was undertaken to contribute to greater awareness of the fact that flight and expulsion are not new phenomena but have in fact shaped Europe's history for centuries. Initiated by a wide range of well-respected cultural, academic and educational institutions in Austria, Germany, Poland, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia, it set itself the target of rendering the refugee experience visible within the shared

European memory. Flight and expulsion have shaped European societies profoundly for centuries. They should be studied comparatively and should feature as a shared experience in European cultural memory. This holds true especially of official *lieux de mémoire* (like museums) dedicated to nurturing European citizens' appreciation of the EU's history and long-standing diversity.

We hope that, by showing how integral the refugee experience has been to the formation of a European identity, our findings can foster reflection and solidarity in times of crisis such as the one Europe is currently experiencing, given the influx of large numbers of refugees from the Near East and various other Asian as well as African countries. In this context, a particularly obvious point of comparison is the experience of the huge numbers of refugees and expellees seeking refuge all over Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War.

We hope that, by bringing together the experiences of refugees and expellees from seven European countries (not all of whom are EU member states), we can contribute to a shared culture of remembrance and thus, by extension, to greater mutual understanding between citizens from various European countries. The focus on the shared refugee experience emphasizes the commonalities across national borders, a concern of particular relevance to the participants from the accession candidates Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia. Given this focus, *Flucht europäisch erzählen. Being a Refugee: A European Narrative* has consistently relied on a transnational approach to European history.

Five Central and South East European museums—the Wien Museum in Vienna, the Museum of Eastern Bosnia in Tuzla, the Maritime and History Museum of the Croatian Littoral in Rijeka, the Museum of Vojvodina in Novi Sad and the National Museum of Contemporary History in Ljubljana—have each contributed three objects from their collections, which are particularly well suited to convey a sense of the refugee experience. Each of the mu-

seums put their three objects on display in a special exhibition juxtaposing them to images of the other museums' chosen objects. All the objects have, finally, been gathered for a joint exhibition running from 16 May 2018 to 13 January 2019 in the Wien Museum. Thus the history of flight and expulsion is told in fifteen objects. They include official documents and personal objects, including a baby's cardigan, a Care Package, and the keys to a lost home, to name just these three. Together they tell the stories of individual refugees and offer glimpses of flight and expulsion as a twentieth- and twenty-first-century European experience.

This scholarly publication substantiates the relevant historical background. In it, distinguished authors – including the authors from the three project partner universities: University of Leipzig, Lazarski University (Warsaw) and Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen – offer accounts of important European refugee movements and their historiography and conceptualization, bringing together historical and sociological analyses, the concrete experiences of twentieth- and twenty-first-century refugees and discussions regarding the representation and musealization of these experiences. We hope that it can help stimulate an approach to the refugee movements of the twentieth and twenty-first century that focuses not only on the experiences of violence and loss but also takes into account how the individual and collective experiences of refugees and expellees have contributed to the way in which Europe sees itself. As the contributions to this volume show, being a refugee is very much part of Europe's cultural legacy.

We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to all those in Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Germany, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia and elsewhere who supported us at an individual, collective or institutional level. Without them we would never have been able to complete this publication.