

Call for Papers

Conference “Erzwungen und eingeschränkt: Mobilität im Exil“ / “Forced and Limited: Mobility in Exile“ (Neuchâtel & Bern, September 2024)

Annual conference of the Gesellschaft für Exilforschung e.V. in Neuchâtel and Bern from 6 to 7 September 2024 in cooperation with the Swiss Literary Archives (SLA), the nccr “on the move”, the Swiss Forum for Migration and Population Studies (SFM) and the Chaire d'histoire contemporaine of the University of Neuchâtel

In migration history, attention has long been drawn to the fact that migration and mobility are not the exception but the rule of human behaviour. The understanding of migration as an anthropological constant has also meant that the focus of research has for a long time centred on movement, the crossing of borders or the process of fleeing and migrating. Exilforschung, on the other hand, has repeatedly drawn attention to the restricted mobility of people in exile, who in past and present are confronted by instruments of the state that slow them down and restrict them physically, mentally or creatively, be it through bureaucratic obstacles (e.g. in obtaining visas), be it through travel and work bans or internment. This conference aims to shed light on the ambivalence and simultaneity of mobility and immobility in the context of exile and to invite migration, refugee and exile studies to engage in interdisciplinary reflection.

The notion of (im)mobility proves to be useful in that it expands the view beyond the initial arrival in a country of exile and is able to capture levels of experience that, despite (or precisely because of) one's state of exile, are always also characterised by immobility, interruption, aimlessness, isolation and stagnation. This ambivalence can manifest itself in various ways that go beyond the physical component. Exile and transit have repeatedly been characterised in art, literature and science as a state of being in-between, be it geographically, literarily, politically or emotionally. It is no coincidence that the metaphor of the waiting room is often used in the context of exile, as in Lion Feuchtwanger's Wartesaal-Trilogie, but also in the history of displaced persons in the immediate post-war period (cf. Königseder and Wetzel 1994). In addition to the mobility of people, the concept can furthermore be applied to the literal and metaphorical movement of ideas, texts or objects (cf. Greenblatt 2010).

However, its comprehensive meaning also raises the question of the difference between migration, mobility, flight and displacement. According to Edward Said, the word "refugee" invariably conjures up the image of confused masses, whereas "exile" carries with it "a touch of solitude and spirituality." (cf. Said 2000). What is the analytical gain when these (and other) phenomena are considered under one umbrella and is there not a danger of equating the cosmopolitan intellectual with the nameless displaced individual?

The ambivalence of forced and limited mobility in exile in all its forms is at the centre of the annual conference of the Society for Exil Studies / Gesellschaft für Exilforschung in 2024, which is being held this year in Bern and Neuchâtel in collaboration with the Swiss Literary Archives (SLA), the nccr "on the move", the Swiss Forum for Migration and Population Studies (SFM), and the Chaire d'histoire contemporaine of the University of Neuchâtel. Possible contributions and topics to be explored in case studies include:

- The tension between (im)mobility and transit in literature and art, in political writings or in the testimonies of people in exile
- Waiting in exile or exile as a waiting room: experiences and representations (for example in film, literature and art)
- The mobility of refugees beyond the departure/arrival duality
- Narratives and discourses of (im)mobility
- Refugees in border situations: Creating meaning and agency in times of crisis
- Practices of refugee mobility: hitchhiking, flying, driving, walking, swimming
- Places of (im)mobility (e.g. refugee camps, border crossings)
- Migration, mobility, flight and displacement as research categories
- Practices of immobilisation by national and international refugee regimes
- The circulation and censorship of refugee knowledge in letters, newspapers and periodicals
- Knowledge as cultural capital in the migration process

We welcome presentations of approx. 25 minutes in English or German from all disciplines. The organisers will endeavour to provide funding for travel and accommodation. As far as possible, the organisers are open to the implementation of alternative forms of presentation, which should be described in more detail in the proposal. Abstracts (max. 1,500 characters) of proposals for contributions are requested with a short CV (please in a single file) by 01.03.2024 to the following email address: ramon.wiederkehr@unine.ch.

As in previous years, a thematically open workshop for doctoral students will be held in the run-up to the conference (5 September 2024). A call for papers will be issued separately at the beginning of 2024.