

Transnational Humanitarianism und Refugee Policy in the Age of the World Wars.

A Relational History of Political Actors and Humanitarian Activists

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The DFG-funded project focuses on protagonists of transnational humanitarian aid and refugee policy in the era of world wars. The thematic-geographical emphasis lies on Italy, Southern Europe, and the Mediterranean as an important transit sphere for Jewish migration between Italy and Palestine, as well as a place of origin for fascist regimes and the implementation of colonial forms of rule in North Africa. Another accent is on the role of the Catholic Church, the Vatican and international Catholic circles in humanitarian organizations and initiatives.

The actors in question regard politicians, diplomats, and lawyers linked to the League of Nations and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as well as activists and scholars engaged in humanitarian organizations. The most important source material of the project are hitherto largely unexplored ego-documents, in particular unpublished letters, diaries, autobiographical texts, and memoirs of the persons involved. Based on their biographies, political ideas, cultural encounters, and socio-political initiatives, the work examines the relationships, convergences, and contradictions between these actors from a long-term perspective, ranging from the end of the First World War to the early period of the Cold War.

The source-critical approach accentuates the innovative potential of an actor-centred perspective. The focus on ego-documents also emphasizes gender-historical questions that have lately come to the fore in humanitarian history. Particular interest is given to the ideological and religious motives of humanitarian engagement, which have been increasingly questioned, and to the formation of transnational networks and epistemic communities. It is assumed that the analysis of private documents can open up new and different perspectives on experiences of violence, ideological and religious self-positioning, but also political controversies and conflicts between state actors and humanitarian activists in the age of world wars. The project is designed as a contribution to transnational and global history, to the new history of humanitarianism, and to the history of migration. The results achieved will be published in a monograph.