In July 1934, the American Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars (EC) published a press release on relief activities for scholars driven out of German institutions of higher education by the National Socialists. The report judged the situation as follows:

Of all classes affected by the National-Socialist revolution in Germany the academic group and the professionals have suffered the most. More than 1300 scholars were displaced, of whom 600–700 have emigrated or are likely to leave Germany within the next few months. In addition, between 5200 and 5500 professional people have had to emigrate because they have lost their positions in Germany and find themselves without any means of livelihood. Some 7000 students had to leave the universities and other institutions of higher learning before completing their studies. Of these, 1500 to 1600 have sought refuge outside Germany. Thus, the total number of people belonging to the academic and professional groups who at present have to create a new existence for themselves in foreign countries is more than 7500.1

The press release described an issue of great urgency: the targeting of people because of their political opinions, religious convictions or ethnic classification, their purposeful isolation from public life, and the destruction of their livelihoods.2 Between April and May 1933, this emergency triggered the foundation of the British Academic Assistance Council (AAC),3 the Notgemeinschaft deutscher Wissenschaftler im Ausland (NdW), the American EC and the Geneva-based Comité Inter-
national pour le Placement des Refugiés Professionnels. These organisations facilitated emigration, placed scientists at host institutions, acquainted them with a distinct academic culture and provided everyday assistance.

This article focuses on the AAC and the NdW and posits that the comparatively low significance of humanitarian rhetoric was a striking feature of their efforts. Instead, they primarily cast aid for refugee scholars in professional terms. As a whole, their humanitarian activities are best understood if they are written back into the institutional history of higher education.

Both the AAC and the NdW were defined by national frameworks, despite their transnational reach and their engagement with purportedly internationally-minded academics. In the case of the refugee scholars, humanitarianism was shaped by three intersecting factors: a tense political climate, a humanitarian campaign and a distinct professional ethos. By comparing the AAC’s access to the higher echelons of British academia with the institutional and territorial detachment of the NdW, the article points at different forms of self-interest and self-preservation. In the course of their campaigns, urgent aid and assistance became part of national professional and educational politics.

1. Humanitarianism as Politics: The Case of Academic Assistance

Recent scholarship has drawn attention to the intertwined nature of humanitarianism and politics. Historians of humanitarianism have contextualised humanitarian relief and interventions, questioning narratives that present charity and humanitarianism as purportedly universal values. For instance, Davide Rodogno has demonstrated how campaigns concerning conditions in the Ottoman Empire were based on the presumption of civilisational superiority and thus characterised by the intersection of humanitarian and imperial aspirations. Likewise, Emily Baughan and Brownen Everill have stressed the connection between humanitarianism and political agenda-setting. In their words, humanitarian action «express[es] a number of ideologies, hierarchies and indeed choices about which «distant others» qualify for concern, and which do not». In his widely acknowledged study on the Empire of Humanity, Michael Barnett has described the rise of a professional «humanitarian community» during the twentieth century which claimed neutrality, impartiality and independence as its key principles and thus «rendered humanitarians apolitical». But, as Barnett underscores, this apolitical stance came into practice only in the second half of the twentieth century when, for political reasons, relief organisa-


The Support Networks for Refugee Scholars in the 1930s

Such scholarly approaches resonate with the recent historiography on refugees. Michael Marrus points to the intrinsically political character of refugee aid, which surfaced as an urgent problem for the international community of states only after the Great War, when protection and civil rights became part of battles over the meaning of citizenship and when national borders and passports were transformed into markers for national belonging and exclusion. Clauedena Skran has analysed the creation of international institutions to assist refugees in the interwar period as the beginning of an international refugee regime. Although most attempts to adopt international conventions on behalf of refugees remained half-hearted in this period, Skran attaches considerable importance to the practical relief work of voluntary organisations. Elizabeth Borgwardt and Mary Ann Glendon have pointed to the connection between changing international power relations and the rise of a human rights regime in the post-war era: they stress the crucial role that American philanthropists and policymakers played in the rescuing of European Jewry and refugees since the 1930s and interpret their activities as prelude to the formulation of human rights ideas and agendas from the 1940s. Peter Gatrell goes a step further when suggesting that the modern refugee was «construed as a «problem» amenable to a «solution»», a thinking that emerged from population displacement in the course of war and, more importantly, from organised programmes of humanitarian assistance. Speaking of the «humanitarian international», Gatrell highlights the asymmetrical relations between relief workers, donors and refugees.

Applied to the history of the refugee scholars, this approach raises questions about the nature, motivations and ends of assistance campaigns for German academics. Compared to the significant number of ordinary people forced to leave Germany from 1933 onwards, the refugee scholars stood out as a small group which nonetheless received considerable attention. By 1938, around 39 per cent of German university teaching staff had lost their position; estimates for the humanities even assume 43 per cent. If we add other persecuted academic groups – professional, teachers, students, intellectuals, journalists, artists and writers – approximately 12,000 highly educated individuals were banned from their occupation. Unable to continue their former life, most of them opted for emigration, hoping that host

7 Ibid., 5–6.
12 Ibid., 8.
countries such as Great Britain, Switzerland or the United States would facilitate the continuation of their work.

The last decades have seen many studies on the refugee scholars. They discuss individual fates, experiences of exile including successful or failed attempts to bring scholarly knowledge into different disciplinary traditions and academic cultures, emigration as a (forced) transfer of knowledge and the transformation of knowledge triggered by the arrival of the refugee scholars. As there were few academic assistance organisations with a lasting impact, many studies have dealt with the AAC and the NdW. These studies have been concerned with the role of both organisations within academia, their workings, placement strategies and protagonists. Although they provide the reader with a comprehensive insight into motivations, functioning and problems, they often neglect the critical assessment of the nature and limits of their humanitarianism. The book marking the 75th anniversary of the AAC (today CARA – Council for Assisting Refugee Academics) is a case in point. It sets out with the observation that the historiography on the refugee scholars tends to reiterate a narrative built upon notions of «foresight» and the «generosity of British institutions of learning». Although Shula Marks continues by critically objecting that «the support of the academic community [was not] as unanimously generous as the heroic narrative suggests», it reminds us that many studies refrain from embedding the relief efforts of the AAC and the NdW in the critical scholarship on humanitarianism and transnational solidarity networks. As a consequence, the


Ibid., 6.

For a detailed account, see my review of Marks’s volume in geschichte,transnational [7.9.2012]. Exceptions are: J. Feichtinger, Wissenschaft zwischen den Kulturen. Österreichische Hochschullehrer in der Emigration 1933–1945, Frankfurt am Main 2001; C. Fleck, A Transatlantic History of the Social Sciences, Robber Barons, the Third Reich and the Invention of Empirical Social Research, London 2011;
extent to which the campaign was shaped by non-humanitarian, professional considerations does not always come to the fore. As the following discussion will show, it is important to distinguish between solidarity and compassion and to be aware that humanitarianism is less an analytical category than a context-dependent, social and political argument of historical actors.

2. «A Kingdom of their Own»: The Agenda behind Academic Support Networks

The intrinsic connection between relief for scholars and the world of universities was an important factor for the creation of transnational support networks, but it also explains why such acts merged with professional concerns. Although academics had already experienced substantial state intervention during the Weimar Republic, matters took a turn for the worse under Nazi rule. Within a few months, the regime enacted legislation that drove Jewish or politically dissenting professors out of German universities. The best-known measure was the so-called Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service, passed in April 1933. It forced teachers, professors and judges of Jewish descent as well as opponents of the regime to retire or be dismissed from the civil service.19 Foreign observers interpreted the instrumental use of German universities as an attack on both the academic production of knowledge and the advancement of science and learning.20 While these political interventions were initially restricted to German universities, parts of European and North American academia related events in Germany to their own professional existence. Within weeks, academics expressed fears that the toleration of this oppressive policy could have far-reaching consequences for the relationship between national governments and institutes of higher education in general.21

This interpretation was rooted in the shared notion of a world of universities. Recent studies on the history of higher education have pointed out that it would be misleading to write this history only from a national perspective. Instead, historians informed by methodological debates on transnational and global history emphasise the constitutive role that transfers and cross-border connections played in the making of the modern university.22 This is particular true when it comes to the interwar period. The 1920s were characterised by efforts to reconstruct the international


20 See the pamphlet of the Dutch Academisch Steunfonds: Committee of University Professors on behalf of Jewish Students and Graduates from Germany, June 1933 (New York Public Library, Manuscripts and Archives Division, Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars Records, Academisch Steunfonds, 1933–1935, 160/3).

21 A telling example was the dispute over the participation of foreign universities at the 600th anniversary celebrations of Heidelberg University in 1936: Heidelberg and the Universities of America, New York 1936.

scientific community, with American philanthropy playing a leading role in the transnationalisation of science. Building on previously institutionalised academic exchange programmes such as the Rhodes scholarships or North American university branches in the Middle East, American foundations aimed to sustain and reorient reconstruction efforts in the field of higher education after the First World War. Most notably, the Rockefeller Foundation implemented grant-in-aid programmes for scholarly exchange and supported institution-building in many European countries.

This dynamic interplay between the nationalisation of educational systems and the simultaneous transnationalisation of scientific communities was crucial for the construction of transnational academic support networks as early as spring 1933. As will be argued in the following sections, border-crossing mobility and state-directed education policies were not mutually exclusive. What recent studies have shown for the history of globalisation processes also holds true for the history of higher education. Transnational support networks are characterised by their «playing with scales». On the one side, universities were deeply rooted in nationalisation projects, both as education institutions for national elites and as hubs for international competition and rivalry. On the other side, the same institutions and scholars developed their research as part of a continuous dialogue with colleagues abroad. This occurred either through project-based transnational cooperation, knowledge exchange via print material and conferences, or through the critical observation of professional standards abroad. As Eduardo Zimmermann has put it, «local elites have had a «recourse to internationality» both as a source of professional legitimacy and as a common discourse. Nevertheless, this search for a common transnational paradigm was constantly challenged by national identities and scientific cultures.»

The geography of these intellectual networks could be used strategically both for the nationalisation of science and for encouraging scholarly mobility. Accordingly, the transnational support networks can only be understood...
if we acknowledge the multi-layered spatial frames of reference in which higher education unfolded.  

A glance at the reaction to the displacements illustrates this point. Disapproval and indignation seized academics in Europe and North America and events in Germany were read as attacks on the university as such. Lord Rutherford of Nelson, board member of the AAC, stated in an article in The Times «that the universities form a kingdom of their own, whose intellectual autonomy must be preserved».

Commentators portrayed the universities as «the storehouses and the manufactories of the culture of a society. An attack upon them is an attack upon the very symbols by which a state lives». Here, the American EC put forward the concept of the university as custodian of core principles of modern society. This point of view was backed up by other organisations. The International Student Service, for example, justified the creation of a sub-committee for student relief in 1933 as follows: «More than 2000 students have been compelled to leave the German Universities. Many of these students are brilliant. [...] We are not concerned with isolated incidents, but we are concerned with those who are denied the elementary rights of citizenship.»

The advocates of assistance to German scholars were guided by a self-perception in which the numerous national and cross-border affiliations collapsed in the actors themselves. First and foremost, they assisted scholars who intended to emigrate in order to re-establish their academic career; they were perceived as refugees only in the second instance. In this respect, the importance of the actors’ mental maps comes to the fore. University teachers were part of a national system but at the same time devoted to science as an intrinsically transnational endeavour. Thus, the impetus to help was overshadowed by scholarly notions that emphasised a professional ethos.

3. Limits of Humanitarianism: The National Foundations of Transnational Solidarity

Working on behalf of academic refugees, the AAC and the NdW had to develop an organisational infrastructure for fundraising, networking with potential employers and the collection of information on professional profiles. Yet, their ability to do so depended on their capacity to engage with national agencies and systems of higher...
education. In this respect, the AAC and the NdW followed distinct paths: the former emerged out of the British university system while the latter was an exile organisation and thus not embedded in a paramount organisational structure. These trajectories affected their methods of campaigning, the way future employers were addressed and the extent to which the fate of the refugee scholars was brought to the public’s attention.

The AAC was established in May 1933 on the initiative of William Beveridge, the then president of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). The AAC set out with a global agenda for «the defence of science and learning against attacks such as those from which they are suffering in Germany and elsewhere». The number of scholars that it managed to place abroad confirms its global reach. Out of the 2541 academics that the AAC registered until 1945, it found permanent positions for more than half: 612 stayed in Britain, 624 travelled onward to the United States, 80 scholars took up positions in Latin America, 74 went to universities within the Commonwealth, 66 scholars emigrated to Palestine, and 62 scientists found jobs in Turkey and the Middle East.

Despite this global scope, the financial and technical support of British institutions remained the main resource for the placements. From the beginning, the AAC therefore worked towards its integration into the landscape of major scientific institutions in Britain. Its first public appeal in May 1933 was signed by several Nobel Prize laureates: the physicists William Henry Bragg, Joseph John Thompson and Lord Rutherford of Nelson, and the physiologists A.V. Hill and Charles Scott Sherrington. Hill remained vice-chairman of the AAC until the post-war years and Rutherford of Nelson agreed to serve as president until his death in October 1937. In addition, the AAC sought close cooperation with universities. Prominent institutions such as the LSE or the universities of Cambridge and Oxford were involved via personal connections, as vice-chancellors or prominent academics joined the council, the executive or the allocation committee of the AAC. Formal cooperation was arranged with the British Academy and the Royal Society, of which Hill had been a fellow since 1918. The Royal Society provided office space for the AAC at short notice. In a letter asking for continued accommodation, the chemist C. S. Gibson, Honorary Secretary of the AAC and of the Chemical Society, stated that

33 «Memorandum approved by the Executive Committee on 19th December 1933 for submission to the Council recommending the formation of a Society for the Protection of Science and Learning», in: Beveridge, A Defence, 130.
prolonged «hospitality and patronage» would «mean so much to the standing of the Council».\textsuperscript{37} It is therefore hardly surprising that the AAC advertised its residence in bold letters on the title pages of its first annual reports.\textsuperscript{38}

From 1936 onwards, the relationship was institutionalised further. The provisional Academic Assistance Council was transformed into a permanent body, the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning. The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Royal Society and the British Academy agreed to act as trustees of the Academic Assistance Trust, which formed part of this organisation and ran a fellowship programme for displaced scholars.\textsuperscript{39} Although the scholarships enabled researchers to emigrate — which in many cases meant survival — the AAC affirmed its purely scientific interest. This purpose was explicitly recorded when the Royal Society and the British Academy wrote down the terms of the trusteeship.

The trustees shall administer funds at their disposal to assist scholars and scientists of any nationality or race who are prevented from continuing their intellectual activities [...] In giving assistance, the trustees shall pay special attention to the capacity for original research of a candidate as shown either by his previous work or by his evident promise.\textsuperscript{40}

The absence of any language pointing to humanitarian motives already characterised the first public appeal of May 1933. The guidelines from 1936 continued this strategy and even went further with the provision that «the trustees may remove a fellow from his fellowship if they consider he no longer needs their assistance or his retention of it is no longer consistent with the purpose of the trust».\textsuperscript{41} Behind this strict policy lay a concrete worry. The interwar period witnessed a growing number of enrolments, due to the slight lowering of social barriers and the increased number of women with a university education.\textsuperscript{42} Yet, in the aftermath of the Great Depression with its high unemployment, contemporaries feared that refugees — and the refugee scholars in particular — could put too great a strain on financial resources.\textsuperscript{43} For this reason, the members of the executive committee were concerned

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that over-generous assistance and the use of a moralising language might jeopardise public sympathies. As Lord Rutherford of Nelson pointed out, «young British scientists were apprehensive of obstacles being put in their way and it was important that assistance should be rendered in such a manner as not to prejudice the interest of British workers. This should be emphasised in publicity.»

This maxim was put into practice. The fellowship programme relied on a series of fundraising rallies, which complemented the Academic Assistance Trust by means of donations. These campaigns were organised either as national appeals or as public meetings at the local level. Both kinds of events, however, followed a similar pattern: renowned scholars would present the cause of the AAC, emphasising the duty to preserve knowledge and the great advantages that support for the refugee scholars would entail for British society. In October 1933, a major fundraising rally took place at Royal Albert Hall, where Albert Einstein shared a platform with Rutherford of Nelson, Beveridge and Austin Chamberlain. Speakers performed a balancing act between the request for donations and the assurance that the employment of foreign researchers would not be at the expense of the domestic labour market. Most contributors presented refugees as the embodiment of particular skills worth rescuing. As the physicist and mathematician James Jeans put it in his opening words, the object was «to save their skill and experience for the benefit of humanity». He did not miss the opportunity to reassure his audience that most of the scholars «do not, indeed, need continued charity in the ordinary sense. What they want is such temporary help as will carry them through a period of re-adjustment and re-orientation, until they can once again make their own way in the world».

Help for refugee scholars meant to benefit from their talents. The insistence on academic excellence was not simply a smokescreen that hid a humanitarian mission from a sceptical public. As the grant-giving practice reveals, the concern for academic standards and self-interest predominated. The Allocation Committee was the responsible body that handled applications and decided on the award of fellowships. In one of its first meetings, Gibson, Hill and Lionel Robbins, then head of the LSE’s Economics Department, agreed to restrict the grants to applicants who seemed certain of a successful career. Despite the stock phrase of the «advancement of science and scholarship», the accent lay on a different aspect. It would not be, the committee argued, «a real kindness to give temporary assistance to persons unlikely to prove suited for an academic or research career; the Council

45 See the personal notes of William Beveridge for a public meeting on 14 March 1935 at the Town Hall Oxford, which he ran jointly with Frederic Kenyon and Gilbert Murray (LSE Archives, William Beveridge Papers, Beveridge/9A/45/7).
should, therefore, be purely a fellowship awarding body». Following this line of thought, the AAC set up procedures that dispelled any doubts about its self-understanding as a scientific organisation. Again, the Royal Society was invited to act as «referee and advisor». It was asked to use the expertise of its members and form committees to assess the applications. The proposed rating was rather simple: it ranged from «A. Outstanding» and «B. Good» to «C. Average» and «D. Weak». Future employers were addressed on the basis of these ratings. If host institutions provided laboratories or office space, they could benefit from the capacity of a foreign scholar whom the AAC funded with a two-year scholarship. Most importantly, host institutions did not have to commit themselves to integrating the scholars as permanent staff after the scholarships had expired.

However, the dependence on the willingness of British institutions to support the cause of the AAC meant that its geographical scope remained limited. The impressive statistics of the world-wide placements do not accurately mirror the share of the AAC. The American labour market was closed to British influence as it was in the hands of the EC. Attempts to find additional placements in the Commonwealth or mainland Europe via cooperation with the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace proved complicated and eventually failed. The links to a distinct national institutional context imposed limits on the ability to transcend borders and engage in transnational support networks – which, of course, was crucial as the enormous number of displaced scholars could not be absorbed by the British system alone. Hence, the AAC relied on cooperation with less territorially confined organisations such as the NdW.

4. Touchstones of Solidarity: the Constitutive Role of Self-interest

The NdW was the main assistance organisation on the continent. As an organisation run by exiles, it suffered from a lack of funds, could not draw on the support of a «home nation» and faced questions about its legitimacy. Although it recorded successful placements, it lacked one crucial resource compared with the AAC, which spoke in the name of British institutions of higher learning. Yet the NdW knew how to transform its free-floating activities into a source of strength by pushing for scholarly placements beyond Europe and by collaborating with the League of Nations.

49 Zimmermann, «The Society», 36, 44.
51 A. E. Cohn to W. M. Kotschnig, 22 March 1935 (New York Public Library, Manuscripts and Archives Division, Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars Records, High Commission for Refugees Coming from Germany, 165/3).
The NdW was founded by the pathologist Philipp Schwartz in Zurich in April 1933. Schwartz himself was a refugee scholar who had left Frankfurt University shortly after the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service had been passed. He embedded his relief work in the Swiss community of Russian exiles that had settled in Zurich in the wake of the 1905 revolution. From there, the NdW received diverse forms of support, including donations, free office space and volunteers. Today, the NdW is still present in Turkey’s political memory as obstetrician of the modern Turkish higher education. In autumn 1933, the NdW had been successful with a group placement of about 30 refugee scholars at the university in Istanbul. This placement had been made possible due to Schwartz’s contact to the Swiss educationalist Albert Malche, a consultant of the Turkish Minister of Education. Eventually, Malche showed enthusiasm for the perspective to accelerate the modernisation of Turkish universities by employing German refugee scholars. In the following years, the NdW intensified its efforts to network beyond the geographical scope of the other European and North American organisations for academic refugees. As a result, it gradually gained expertise in Latin America and the Near East. Unfortunately, detailed numbers of the settled scholars are missing. Fritz Demuth, the NdW’s secretary from 1934 to 1945, stated that it was involved in 1200 placements in the USA, 190 in Latin America and 500 within the British Empire. However, this information should be handled with care, as it contradicts American sources and lacks details on follow-up negotiations with Turkey and efforts to involve the Soviet Union.

The financial situation of the NdW was worse. It remained dependent on help from individuals who sympathised with the scholars in need. In most cases, the supporters were former refugee scholars who had found temporary or permanent employment at universities. In cases where the NdW had negotiated a placement, scholars were committed to subscribing on a regular basis. But this system proved ineffective as the majority of the scholars did not transfer any money. The financial situation stabilised slightly after the NdW’s headquarters had moved from Zurich to London in late 1935. Thenceforth, the organisation maintained an office on the AAC’s premises.
The few surviving reports of the NdW draw a clear picture of the difficulties to find openings because of the growing number of displaced scholars and the increasing immigration restrictions. The first report in May 1934 explained that, despite a «willingness to help», the obstacles had «multiplied almost continously». Unlike the AAC, the NdW placed less emphasis on the scholars as carriers of skills, seeing them as people in need. However, as it was concerned with highly specialised people, placements could only work when the individual profiles matched the openings.

The absence of a national public proved to have some benefits for the NdW: as an organisation of exiles, it was not concerned with a specific domestic audience. The NdW used this institutional and territorial detachment as a resource, seeking to act as intermediary between different organisations and groups. Consequently, it concentrated its efforts on providing information on displaced scholars to other assistance organisations and to universities around the world. Similar to the AAC, the NdW set up a register containing dossiers on individual scholars with a full CV, a list of publications and letters of recommendations. In combination with the AAC’s equivalent, this register formed the basis for further networking activities. Taken together, these activities meant that the organisations were well-informed about the names, qualifications, disciplinary backgrounds, academic careers, and competences of the refugee scholars.

To gain legitimacy and involve itself in a broader institutional context, the NdW entered into a close relationship with the High Commission for Refugees Coming from Germany, which the League of Nations had established at the end of 1933. It became part of the Experts Committee on Academic and Kindred Refugees from Germany. This committee was created by the High Commissioner James G. McDonald and comprised private voluntary organisations dealing with the refugee crisis. The NdW ascribed particular importance to its integration into the League machinery. In its annual report for the years 1934–1935, it presented itself as part of an umbrella organisation («Gesamtorganisation») towards which it was responsible. With the High Commissioner in the background, the NdW used this...
institutional environment to enhance its transnational scope of action. Its secretary Fritz Demuth approached vice-chancellors and ministries of education abroad. Following the group placement at the university in Istanbul, he contacted universities in regions where the system of higher education was still in the process of being built up. With the consent and at least some financial support of the High Commissioner, Demuth intensified his negotiations with universities outside the reach of the AAC or the American relief organisation. In March 1935, for example, the NdW reported that it had been asked to present eight professorial candidates to the Peruvian government and ten to the government of Ecuador. Nine scholars had been placed at the University of Sao Paolo and in the case of Chile, it contributed to plans for a new university.  

A comparison of the AAC and the NdW highlights the extent to which both campaigns relied on a distinct professional self-perception and emphasised the academic benefits of the assistance measures. At the same time, however, the cases show that the mobilisation of transnational solidarity depended on a pre-existing institutional framework that could endow the relief work with credibility. While the AAC profited from access to a well-established and powerful institutional network within Britain, the NdW could not fall back upon such an institutional basis and continued to suffer from financial and institutional uncertainty. Yet, the NdW compensated that with a strategy the AAC could not pursue due to its commitment towards national science and learning: it crossed national boundaries with its information and placement strategies and thus complemented the work of other agencies.

5. Conclusion

With the beginning of the Second World War, it became obvious that transnational support structures relied on a national infrastructure shaped by state control over grant eligibility, residence and work permits and higher education. While the AAC was able to continue its work due to its cooperation with governmental institutions, the case of the NdW was different. One the one side, both organisations mobilised support by targeting the scientific community, vice-chancellors and domestic authorities. In doing so, they stressed the transfer of people and the circulation of knowledge across national borders as crucial ingredients in the formation of the modern university. But on the other side, the social patterns which underpinned the scope of action of the historical actors differed significantly. This had consequences for the geographical distribution of scholars: the AAC was most successful in placing scholars in Britain, the Commonwealth, in the mandated territories and in the USA, whereas the NdW was most active in regions outside the hemisphere of Western universities. As Michael Geyer has put it, «knowledge regimes» do not

65 Ibid.
have «the same effect» everywhere but create various spatial regimes of science and knowledge.67

What do we learn from this case study? From a general point of view, it challenges narratives of the 1930s as a period that broke down any transnational connections and argues for the formative impact of transnational networks on the regulating of border-crossing flows of people and information. As regards the history of humanitarian activism, the case of the AAC and the NdW support recent findings which require us not to overemphasise the humanitarian as an analytical category but to take political motives and contexts into close consideration. As Didier Fassin has pointed out, moral grounds provide a powerful instrument for developing transnational, national or local policies.68

Shedding light on the AAC and the NdW from this point of view, the humanitarian impetus is relativised in two major ways. First, the avoidance of humanitarian language hints at an essentially hybrid character of the campaign. From the beginnings, the humanitarian cause was represented as an academic matter which called for a solution along professional standards. Accordingly, the refugees were primarily perceived as scholars whose exceptional training required exceptional treatment – as mirrored in the workings of both organisations. Second, the AAC and the NdW serve as good examples for the changes which had taken place in the international sphere with the strengthening of immigration laws and the increasing importance of passports and travel documents since the Great War. The nation served not only as platform and powerful trope to activate compassion: in practical terms, it was indispensable to mobilise resources. Therefore, the campaign in support of the refugee scholars remained intertwined with a well-established national infrastructure, combining practical assistance with the promotion of self-interests. If we are to understand the premises with which historical actors sought to handle displacement in this period, we need to scrutinise the social, institutional and economic limits of transnational solidarity.

Solidarity and the Academic Community: Refugee Scholars and their Support Networks in the 1930s

Recent scholarship on humanitarianism has drawn attention to the intertwined nature of humanitarianism and politics and questioned narratives that present charity and humanitarianism as purportedly universal values. Additionally, research on refugees has pointed to the role of refugee issues in disputes over the meaning of citizenship, national belonging and exclusion. Yet these discussions have not been applied to the history of the scholars who were forced into exile by the National Socialists from 1933 onwards. The article focuses on two organisations for academic refugees, the British Academic Assistance Council and the Notgemeinschaft deutscher Wissenschaftler im Ausland, which facilitated emigration and placed scientists at host institutions abroad. It argues that the aid efforts of these organisations were to a considerable extent shaped by professional considerations and remained dependent on well-established national infrastructures and concerns.

Solidarität unter Akademikern: Wissenschaftliche Flüchtlingshilfe in den 1930er Jahren

Neuere Forschungen zur Geschichte des Humanitarismus heben die enge Verknüpfung zwischen humanitären Idealen und politischen Motiven hervor und betonen die Bedeutung der Kategorie des Flüchtlings für Diskussionen über nationale Zugehörigkeit und die Durchsetzung staatsbürgerschaftlicher Prinzipien. Allerdings sind diese Ansätze bisher nur selten auf die Geschichte akademischer Flüchtlinge aus dem nationalsozialistischen Deutschland angewandt worden. Im Zentrum dieses Aufsatzes stehen mit dem britischen Academic Assistance Council und der Notgemeinschaft deutscher Wissenschaftler im Ausland zwei Hilfsorganisationen, die verfolgten Wissenschaftlern die Emigration aus Deutschland ermöglichen. Die humanitären Hilfsmassnahmen dieser Organisationen, so das Argument, folgten einem professionellen Selbstverständnis, das die Hilfsmassnahmen in universitäre Handlungslogiken auf nationaler Ebene einband.

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