

Citizenship until further notice?

Refugees and revocation of nationality in the 20th century

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Venue: Villa Lanna, Prague

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Statelessness has been recognized as one of the major maladies of the 20th century. Historians, lawyers, political philosophers and others took a critical aim at the the exclusionary power of the nation state and decried the position of those stripped of their passport and rights. A stateless refugee, without state protection and possibly relying on a “Nansen passport”, become the symbol of exclusion from polity. The revocation of citizenship was no inconsequential step and could equal to decision about life and death.



Yet the processes and decision making behind becoming stateless were mostly studied on a national level, for instance for refugees from Nazi Germany or the denaturalizations by Vichy France. Moreover, the scholarship leaned towards European and – with the troubled exceptions of the Soviet or Romanian denationalization – mostly “Western” nation states with only a limited amount of comparative research exploring the phenomenon globally, in its colonial dimensions, and over a longer temporal span. The workshop will bring together scholars to discuss mass denationalization in the 20th century from a comparative and transnational perspective, combining macro- as well as microhistorical approaches.

In particular, the organizers invite participants to analyze the two-fold relationship between the denationalization and production of refugees: either through the revocation of citizenship by their home country after escaping abroad, or the creation of refugees through denationalization of citizens and thus making them refugees in their own country. The workshop aims to examine the impact that the crystallization

of citizenship as both an identifying category and political instrument had on international and internal migrations—notably through the loss of citizenship – as well as how the migrations of the persecuted redefined the terms and forms of national belonging.

Particular attention will be devoted to situations in which citizenship was redefined and revoked based on group-derived criteria, independent of the real behavior of the person. Ascriptions of “loyalty” seem crucial to understand how racial, social and political discrimination was embedded in a systematic and bureaucratic profiling of who conformed to constructed national identities.

We wish to examine how these exclusionary measures were strengthened by, and intersected with gender inequalities, persecution policies as well as the rise of the welfare state and the nationalization of welfare services. We are interested to learn more about the practical, material and symbolical aspects of revocations of citizenship as re-drawing of the borders of the nation and as attempts to reestablish the perceived connection between territory, population and state.

We encourage participants to examine the loss of citizenship from below and to engage in close reading of denaturalization files and other related documents. Such documents offer a perspective on the agency of individual actors, the language used and argumentation strategies deployed, and a richer picture of the complex interaction between state, individuals and other social actors. Where relevant, participants can share original documents they wish to discuss in an interactive session.

The workshop will be conducted in English. Abstracts of up to 300 words along with a short CV should be directed to Wolfgang Schellenbacher, schellenbacher@mua.cas.cz by June 30, 2019. Applicants will be notified by July 31. Accommodation and travel reimbursement will be provided to active participants.

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