

Annual Report 2015-2016

Report compiled by Rumana Hashem with assistance from Paul Dudman and Brittany Lauren-Wheeler.

Executive summary

- The foundation of the Working Group was made possible by a Seed Fund from the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM) in October 2015.
- With a focus on networking and knowledge exchange on history of forced migration and refugees, we are committed to also address the growing critique of the divide between experts and migrants and refugees themselves.
- As part of the annual activities of the group, we have successfully held an annual meeting and a panel on “Documentation, Preservation and Researching the History of Forced Migration and Refugees: Ethical and methodological developments”, at the 6th annual conference of IASFM, *Rethinking Forced Migration and Displacement: Theory, Policy, and Praxis*.
- Starting with four members, the group has now nine active Working Group members, 59 online forum members, 625 followers and 850 tweets on twitter, and 56 Facebook subscribers.
- As a next step and new way of engagement, we are introducing an online hub to share resources and for knowledge exchange on the long past history of contemporary events, and that aspect of 'archival work' and what it may bring to the conversation of forced migration and refugee study.

Introduction

Awarded with a Seed Fund from the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM), the working group for [Archiving and Documentation of the History of Forced Migration and Refugees](#) (ADHFMR) was formed in October 2015. Our aim was to create a network and knowledge exchange in order to bring together researcher, academics, librarians, archivists, activists, advocates (i.e. NGOs, charities and community groups) who are either interested in the history of forced migration and related fields, or are interested in the care and preservation of the archival and library collections that help to preserve the often hidden voices of the migration journey. The knowledge exchange would also serve as a focal point for members of IASFM interested and/or working within the fields of forced migration archives e.g. documentation, preservation and researching the history of forced migration and refugees.

In the first year, we have focused on primarily to build on networks and consultations with experts and emerging scholars in the field, including academics, practitioners and students. The two founding co-coordinators (Paul Dudman and Rumana Hashem) of the Working Group (WG) have worked closely with five other [members](#) of the group who have shown great interest in the

formation and running of the group. A [Jiscmail](#) forum has been established to share resources, news and ideas about research ethics, archiving and methodological advancement in the field of forced migration and refugee research. As the WG is keen to connect with community activists and public who do not necessarily engage in discussion on an academic list-serve but whose knowledge is important to be shared, we have used social media as a way of engagement. The [Facebook](#), [twitter](#) and [blog](#) on IASFM are some ways in which we attempted to connect with wider readers and communities who would not have shown interest in the work we do otherwise.

The WG has currently 625 followers on twitter, 26 members on jiscmail discussion list, and 56 followers on Facebook. There has been a growing interest in the working group's work and we have received 12 new expressions of interest, including nine new participants who attended the first annual meeting at Poznan in July 2016 and who have found us online, in joining the WG. These members include established scholars and early career researchers, practitioners and refugee activists from Australia, Bangladesh, Columbia, England, India, Egypt, Israel, Sierra Leon, Scotland, and USA. With a focus on networking on history of forced migration and refugees, we are committed to also address the growing critique of the divide between experts and migrants and refugees themselves. We would like to take steps to ensure that the documentation of testimonies associated with the migration journey are actively preserved, and made accessible to individuals, groups and communities – nationally and internally, within and outside academia.

The Panel

In response to the theme of the IASFM 2016 *Rethinking Forced Migration and Displacement: Theory, Policy, and Praxis*, the WG has delivered a rich panel, entitled, "Documentation, Preservation and Researching the History of Forced Migration and Refugee History: Ethical and methodological developments". The panel was constituted with five members of the WG, and four papers most of which overlapped in many ways. Our panel reflected the diverse character of our WG, and the international nature of the migrant and refugee experience. The papers of the panel included: 1) The 'self', ethics & 'voice' in migration research: a reflective critique of 'insider' ethnography (by Amadu Wurie Khan of the International Commission on Survivor Centered Disaster Recovery; 2) Ethical issues in collecting oral histories of the 1947 partition (by Shailja Sharma from DePaul University at Chicago); 3) Historical Components of Archival Ethics and Methodologies (by Brittany Lauren Wheeler from Emerging Scholars and Practitioners on Migration Issues); 4) Refugee voices and living narratives: Reflections, challenges and Opportunities for (Re-) Constructing, Documenting, and Preserving Refugee and Migrant Testimonies within the Archive (by Paul Dudman of Archives at University of East London).¹

Chaired by Rumana Hashem, a co-author of the panel, four panellists addressed ethical and methodological considerations for documentation and preservation of refugee voices and history of forced migration. The discussion was linked to the conference theme 9, "Researching forced migration: engagements, methodologies and ethics". The papers addressed ethical and methodological developments in relation to collating, researching, archiving and documenting testimonies of refugees and migrants for the purposes of constructing and documentation of social

¹ Details on papers and the theme of the panel are available on the WG blog <https://adhfm.wordpress.com/blog/>

and political history of forced migration.² The panellists have specifically addressed the below, among other issues, as relevant to the conference theme:

- How do/can we document oral history of refugees and migrants without breaching confidentiality and sensibility of data?
- How important is engagement with local refugee and migrants communities for documentation of history of forced migration?
- Is there a way that researchers could compound the liminal social status, marginalisation and disempowerment of asylum seekers/refugees during the research process?
- Which ways could community archives, museums, oral histories and digitalised archives of (refugee and migrants) promote the preservation of history of forced migration?
- What is the significance of diverse narrative and archival methodology in understanding and researching history of forced migration?
- Can we help to build better archives concerning forced migration events, refugees, and also post-refugee lives - *During what time frame is material "pertinent" to forced migration events and refugee lives, and when might this pertinence end? When is it appropriate for those directly involved as opposed to those not directly involved in migration events to collect, organize, and comment upon archival material? What temporally-informed methodologies might we consider as we continue to build or re-fashion archives?*
- What are the best practices for collating and archiving refugee and migrants' testimonies, and how do we deal with major challenges in doing research in the field of forced migration?
- What are the high standards of collection care and long-term preservation of 'refugee archives', and how this could be maintained?

On the whole, the panellists have disputed transformative ethics and methodological issues, including who can and should do refugee research, who can be researched, whose voices should be heard and preserved in archives in the field of forced migration and refugee studies, and the ways that we can adequately document and preserve history of forced migration and refugees. The panel has addressed the growing critique of the divide between the knowledge of experts and migrants/refugees. The panel has concluded with a rationale for the creation of the IASFM Working Group for Archiving and Documenting the History of Refugees and Forced Migration. The panel emphasised that there is a need to work on how knowledge in the field of forced migration is created/ produced and maintained.

Annual Meeting of the Working Group 2016

On the second day of the conference, the 14th July 2016, we met for a review of our first year's work and to share ideas for our next steps. The annual meeting was attended by 15 participants, including all existing members and eight new participants who have expressed a wish to become a member of the WG. Chaired by the co-coordinators of the group, participants discussed reasons and interests in the group while the co-ordinators have talked through the real *raison d'etre* of the group, the mission to be aimed for and the ideal vision of those that proposed the working group. In their introduction, the coordinators have flagged up for liaising with academic and non-academic collaborators and stakeholders, organising events, and maintaining project publicity and visibility,

² This report compiles notes from only few of us who joined the panel, and we recognise that this is a partial report. There were many more threads and interconnected issues that were addressed by participants in the meeting which could have been added to this report. Although the event was recorded and the coordinators have taken detailed notes at the conference, regretfully, our notes and panel video were lost with our computer as a result of extra-security checks being undertaken for the non-EU migrant-coordinator, Rumana Hashem, at the immigration in Poznan, Poland. We are, therefore, interested in hearing from colleagues and participants who may have better notes on the discussion.

including by managing the project website and social media. These were shared by other members who came across several ways to implement the group aims.

Discussion on how the group can be more active/productive:

Various ideas on how to move on and make the group more productive were the topics of the discussion.³ Some focused topics are as follows:

- 1) **ADHFMR information hub:** A notable area of discussion at the working group annual meeting was the importance of an online Information Hub. Participants in the meeting were truly interested in the long past history of contemporary events, and that aspect of 'archival work' and what it may bring to the conversation of forced migration. The WG members acknowledged that one of our reasons for starting this journey with IASFM was the perceived lack of a central online resource which could facilitate access for researchers, academics and practitioners to current and detailed information on archival resources pertaining to the many facets of the refugee and migration experience.

Paul Dudman, a co-coordinator of the WG, explained that based on our own experience with the Refugee Council Archive at the University of East London, we are aware of the fragmented nature of archival provision in this area and given the international nature of migration. This is something that the Working Group could take a practical lead in developing. For example, how often do you hear of Archive projects been undertaken in this field?

The discussion on the subject ended with an appreciation that the WG would like to continue this discussion and have further feedback from new members in terms of what people would like such an Information Hub to include. Information might include details of national and international archive collections; archival information on how to create, establish and maintain such collections; oral history and narrative testimony resources; etc. However, before proceeding, we need to hear from our new members and online members' experiences, successful or otherwise, of trying to locate, access and use archival collections in this field as this will help us to develop an insight into what is lacking from a research perspective, and help drive forward how we develop the Information Hub.

- 2) **Blogging and adding resources:** It was also acknowledged by members that blogging by members and non-members is a useful way of creating new, innovative and interactive source of knowledge. Anita Fabos and Rumana Hashem have emphasised on this as much as the need for a hub. The remainder of the group agreed that the blog of the WG needs to be made active with a call for contributions and commissioning articles which would be short pieces but dynamic in nature. This is a job that needs to be shared with and by the existing members who are committed to contribute and commission articles.

³ Due to clashing events taking place at the conference which some members were to attend, the length of the meeting was short – kept to 40 minutes only. The meeting ended with a hope to continue the discussion online after the summer vacation ends.

- 3) **Possible publication as a form of resource building:** three members including Dr Amadu Wire-Khan⁴ and the coordinators proposed that a publication in a form of a special issue for a journal or an edited volume on the panel discussions and papers presented could be a next step to build on resources on the methodological and ethical issues in refugee and forced-migration research and documentation. The proposal is to extend the ...Due to lack of time, the discussion was limited and the meeting ended with a hope for further discussion which will be held online.

- 4) **Call for new members and thinking of new roles:** As there is a growing interest in and an increasing demand for the group's work was apparent in the participation of new members, the meeting ended with a call for new members. Both coordinators have invited all participants to subscribe to the group as either active member or online members of the WG. There was also a brief call for thinking of new roles, which failed to gain attention of most members who were to attend the annual general meeting of IASFM. The coordinator have, however, emphasised on active participation of the WG members including sharing roles such as developing the hub, writing and contributing to the blog, facilitating twitter and moderating Facebook page etc.

Towards a dynamic network and creative knowledge exchange: The next step

As a next step of the working group, we are developing a resource hub which will be made available via the WG website. As well as UEL Refugee Archives, we have built partnership with ESPMI who was originally founded by IASFM and currently working actively on refugee and migrants issues with both practitioners and academics. We also would like to collaborate with similar networks including Oral History Group and Asylum Migrant Networks, and more. The two coordinators together with other members of the WG are committed to connect with new members as much as existing members to discuss this further and to identify an innovative way of knowledge exchange in the field.

With a focus on networking on history of forced migration and refugees, we are committed to also address the growing critique of the divide between experts and migrants and refugees themselves. This is possible if members of the WG keep committed to working together on resource building and innovative ways of engagement. It goes without saying that the work of WG is incomplete and the group needs to be more productive in terms of both networking and producing new and shared knowledge on the subject. It was acknowledged in the annual meeting that the mission of the WG can only be achieved if compiled with more proactive hands of members.

The major challenge for us now is human resource and member's time to be invested in the current context of austerity and professional workload. Our Working Group is always looking for activists

⁴ Amadu Wire-Khan, the only refugee member of the WG, was unable to physically make it to the meeting. He has left a note of apology and his views to the group coordinators. Due to lack of funding for accommodation, Amadu joined the conference on the first day only, and needed to return to Scotland before the annual meeting of the WG.

and researchers to get involved to build a strong and productive network.⁵ We would like to take steps to ensure that the documentation of testimonies associated with the migration journey are actively preserved, and made accessible to individuals, groups and communities – nationally and internally, within and outside academia.

⁵Please contact the Convenors: p.v.dudman@uel.ac.uk, r.hashem@uel.ac.uk for further details. Join us on [Facebook](#) or follow us on twitter [@ADHFM_WG](#). To become an online member and to add inputs to the discussion forum of the network, please subscribe to Working Group Discussion List: ADHFM@Jiscmail.com.