



LERRN

REPORT ON ORAL HISTORY AND REFUGEE PROJECT

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ABOUT THIS REPORT



This oral history and refugee project aimed at identifying archives, educational tools and museology linking oral history and refugee. The project acknowledges that national archives and libraries very often own collections on refugees not necessarily digitalised or mentioned online.

Overall, the project comprises three sections:

- Oral history and refugee archives. The inventory of refugee and oral history archives aimed at describing the landscape of resources linking oral history projects and refugees.
- Oral history and refugee educational tools. This section provided an overview of available learning resources on refugees and oral history.
- Exhibits and museology on refugee children. In this section I looked at exhibits about refugee children and youth, curated by refugee children/youth and featuring their cultural productions.

The current report will analyze the methodology used to build the repository, main findings, challenges and ways forward. A section on other findings will also be added to the report.

To start with, a working definition of refugees is provided. The definition will be used as a personal framework for inclusion/exclusions of sources.

WHO IS A REFUGEE?



This report acknowledges the narrow scope of commonly used definitions of refugees. These definitions, such as the 1951 Refugee Convention, stress race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion as causes for fleeing a home country and consequently inability/unwillingness to return for serious threats to freedom or life.

Contrary to increasing governments' efforts to further narrow the interpretations of the refugee definition, this project embraces the need to expand the ground for asylum access. Political and economic factors are in fact often intertwined in stories of migrations.

For this reason and in order to cover the largest possible spectrum of oral history projects, the inventory included all archives and initiatives on migration containing significant references to the refugee populations. It will not draw boundaries between refugees and economic migrants.

METHODOLOGY

In building up the archive I used a snowball sampling method. I started from exhibits and projects signaled by team members of the oral history and refugee projects. Once the snowball sampling method was exhausted, I used search engines with key words/sentences.

The key words used for the section on oral history and refugees exhibits include: "oral history and refugee exhibitions", "exhibits on migration", "oral history and migration exhibitions", "refugee exhibitions".

For the section on educational tools on oral history and refugee, my initial sources were the side-information on education gathered during preparation of the first section. These sources generated a snowball effect that was later integrated with results from search engines. Key words used for the search included: "refugee-oral history - education", "migrant-educational tools", "education tools on oral history and refugees".

For the last section of the project, an inventory of exhibits and museology related to refugee children and youth, I relied initially on sources pointed out by team members and information on the topic collected while working on the first two sections. The snowball method was used throughout the building of the repository. The data generated through this process were integrated with results from search engines. The main wordings used for the search were: "exhibits on refugee children", "museums refugee children and youth", "refugee children museology".

In a subsequent stage of the project, every section was broken down into subcategories. While subcategories for sections 1 and 3 were suggested by team members, categories in the educational section were identified on the basis of the content of resources found.

In the first two sections, resources were listed in alphabetical order. For the section on museology entries were listed based on a criterion of accessibility: virtual exhibits occupy the top of each list, onsite exhibits follow a chronological order (from the most recent to the oldest).

1. The 1951 Refugee Convention also known as the Geneva Convention of 28 July 1951, is a United Nations multilateral treaty that provides a commonly used definition of refugees and set out responsibilities of nations granting asylum as well as the rights of individuals who are granted asylum. <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html> The 1969 OAU Convention and the 1984 Cartagena Declaration signed respectively in Africa and Latin America, expanded the definition above to grant refugee status to anyone arriving as part of a mass migration fleeing generalized violence, such as civil war.

The entries in all sections mostly reflect a western centric knowledge production system where archives, exhibits and museums are originated from and mainly found in the Global North. The exception to this approach is represented by Palestinian originated projects. Whether exhibits, archives or museums, Palestinian-centred projects are generally community-based and characterized by English/Arabic bilingualism. This allows for a wider access to resources and a more inclusive and informed engagements of local communities with their history.

The research also pointed out to a dearth of information on the African continent, on projects run by Africans or focusing on migrants and refugees in the continent. The sources gathered on this regard, mostly refers to African diaspora abroad, in Europe or North America. The Centre for Popular Memory in Cape Town is the only African-based centre in the continent hosting a collection on forced removals and African migrations.

CHALLENGES

The section on exhibits and museums related to refugee children was the most challenging of the three sections. The narrow focus of the section made it hard at times to find resources to include in the repository and missed out plenty of exhibits on refugees that did not target specifically children.

Additionally, as mentioned in the previous section, it was difficult to retrieve information on refugees in Africa. This constitutes a major lack in light of the fact that:

- Sub-Saharan Africa hosts more than 6.6 million refugees, according to UNHCR, the UN agency for refugees.
- Africa has the second highest number of displaced persons in the world, according to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA).
- The continent hosts about 37 percent of the world's 19.6 million refugees and 39.1 million internally displaced people, according to UNECA.



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OTHER FINDINGS

In the process of collecting information for the archive, I also took notes on other findings not directly related to this repository but which were considered of overall interest for the LERRN project.

THE TABLE BELOW IS A SYNTHESIS OF THESE OTHER FINDINGS.

TITLE/LINKS	DESCRIPTION	REMARKS
<u>Visual History Archive Online</u>	55,000 testimonies of genocides survivals, almost 2 million personal names, about 725,000 photographs and images, 43 languages, interviews conducted in 65 countries and 43 languages.	Comprehensive website. Clicking a specific genocide is possible to access testimonies as well as related articles. Any user can access indexing data on the interviewees, full-length video testimonies, names of the individuals mentioned in the archive. The indexing terms include geographical locations and time periods as well as location names and experience groups.
<u>The Palestinian Revolution</u>	Bilingual Arabic/English online learning resource that explores Palestinian revolutionary practice and thought.	Well-structured project with a clear idea/rationale behind.
<u>The Critical Refugee Studies Collective – Refugee Archive</u>	A virtual forum for the archiving of refugee stories.	Clicking on a location on the map it is possible to know more about various refugee communities around the world as well as activities and artworks in the area. Users can upload poetry, art, film, and music of all genres on these pages.
<u>Specially Unknown</u>	A European union funded project about collecting stories of refugees on their journey to and life in Europe, and exploring what they can add to cultural life, heritage and society in the European cities.	Policy recommendations for local and national bodies.
<u>South Asian Oral History Project</u>	A University of Washington Libraries oral history project about South Asian immigrant experiences in the Pacific Northwest.	Detailed description of each of the four different phases of the project.

TITLE/LINKS	DESCRIPTION	REMARKS
<u>The Palestinian Museum Digital Archive</u>	The project collects archival materials from individuals and institutions, creating a digital reference for each item.	Stories filtered by period and theme
<u>The Refugee Project</u>	The Refugee Project is a learning experience created to increase awareness about the plight of millions of people who have had no choice but to flee their homes.	Outstanding features such as the ability to compare refugee population by country, refugee volumes globally over time or for individual countries, country of destinations by country of origins.
<u>Archive of Immigrant Voices</u>	Collection of stories of migration to the United States.	Possibility of donating oral history collections to the centre.
<u>Architecture for Refugees</u>	"Open source online platform which collects and shares questions, problems, ideas and solutions dealing with the architectural aspects of the current refugee crisis on the European and global scale".	Relevance of community space vis-a-vis refugee crisis.
<u>Virtual Exhibitions on Baltic Refugee Camps in Germany</u>	A University of Washington Libraries oral history project about South Asian immigrant experiences in the Pacific Northwest.	Detailed description of each of the four different phases of the project.
<u>The Unbuilt – Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency</u>	Architectural studio and a residency program based in Beit Sahour, Palestine.	Architectural experimentations on the reuse and transformation of colonial architecture, settlements, military bases, and Palestinian villages in Palestine.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 ADVOCATE



- for and build alliances with civil society organizations and universities in Africa around the core theme of oral history and refugees. With the exception of the University of Cape Town, no other African based organizations/universities were found hosting a repository on oral history and refugees.

2 CONVEY

- a conference on oral history and refugees. This would be an opportunity to link historians and archivists with movements that work at the grassroots and face-to-face levels. Conferences in this sense are likely to prompt organizations working with refugees to reflect on their local demands and link their local demands to other movements in other parts of the globe. Conferences are also an opportunity to connect academics around common core themes, to learn about existing projects and create new ones.



3 CREATE

- a one-stop hub to centralize all information and resources on oral history and refugees.

4 MAKE

- a section on exhibits and museology related to the general refugee population. While the exhibits section focuses on refugee children, a wealth of resources linking exhibits with the general refugee population were left out.

5 ADOPT

- an interdisciplinary approach beyond the field of social sciences and humanities. The focus of LERRN on promoting protection and solutions with and for refugees could be achieved even more successfully by reaching out to existing initiatives on refugees in fields of study not yet considered. Looking at projects about the architectures of refugee camps for instance could help expanding the concept of open cities and inclusion, and building more resilience and sustainable societies.