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## Chilean Refugees in the UK

The three articles in this special section of the *Journal of Refugee Studies* examine the establishment and efficacy of UK responses to the plight of Chileans fleeing their homeland in the wake of the 1973 coup d'état led by General Augusto Pinochet. Alan Angell outlines international responses to the coup and then charts the response of UK scholars in founding the organization Academics for Chile (AFC), which would partner with the NGO World University Service (WUS) to provide educational and training grants to Chileans. I examine the structure of WUS' support, the nature and reasons for its development focus, and quantitative and qualitative indicators of its success as well as its limitations. Together, these two articles record a moment in the history of UK refugee support, detailing how that support was funded, organized, and delivered effectively within the context of changing UK governmental policy. They thus reflect not on what might be done in policy terms, but what was achieved at a particular point in time in relation to the wider national and international political contexts. My article also offers an analysis of refugees' individual life stories from the perspective of gendered memories of the experience of exile, drawing on oral interviews with former Chilean refugees to offer a qualitative discussion of the scheme which is extended by Jasmine Gideon to the sphere of health. Discussing the concept of 'journeys to health', Gideon's work draws on an independently conducted set of oral interviews to examine how health is entwined in refugees' journeys and how their stories need to be heard in the care setting. The second two articles thus draw on a substantial corpus of interviews to illustrate the importance of a narrative approach in understanding both initial refugee experiences and long-term exile. However, they also bring out the granularity of contrasting life narratives, for instance with regard to strategies for coping and memories of activism.

The articles in this special section collectively point to the importance of balancing historical context with individual experiences in assessing refugee support work. In this same

vein, in order to relate the WUS programme to contemporary refugee work as part of an AHRC-funded network initiative, I held two focus groups with current practitioners, one in the UK and a second in Chile. In this, I was assisted by Alan Phillips, the former Secretary General of WUS and a former Deputy Director of the British Refugee Council. UK participants included representatives from organizations such as the UNHCR and the Refugee Council, as well as smaller entities such as London-based ReConnect or those with a particular focus, for instance Student Action for Refugees (STAR). Chilean participants included local UNHCR representation, and regional and Christian groups involved in providing emergency refugee support in Santiago and the nearby city of Valparaíso. Finally, Phillips and I conducted a round-table discussion with a number of Chileans who had been supported by WUS and who had then moved into refugee support work themselves. Triangulation of the experiences elaborated in these discussions with the lessons of the WUS programme leads me to conclude that that formal refugee provision was and remains entangled with, and at times impeded by, political discourses surrounding migration more broadly, with public perceptions of ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ refugees reportedly shaping more populist discussions in both the UK and Chile. Vocabulary and terminology thus often need to be modified depending upon audience, as also emerged from my analysis of WUS’ strategic focus in the 1970s and ’80s on developmental discourses rather than the language of human rights. In current UK practice, for instance, recourse to humanitarian and welfare issues, or the signalling of refugee vulnerability, may be more effective at garnering political support than a term such as ‘solidarity’. In Chile, major challenges relate to constantly changing legal frameworks and to the fragmentary nature of support provision.

In both the UK and Chilean contexts, the importance of establishing cohesive communities rather than dispersing refugees across various regions emerged as key factors in the process of adaptation, which can be greatly assisted by the provision of education and

training programmes. These two points were especially stressed by former Chilean refugees who had moved into refugee and migrant support fields. The award of scholarships such as those offered by WUS not only facilitated the renewal of life goals, but at a more fundamental level helped to restore dignity and self-esteem to individuals who had faced persecution and torture. Gideon's work shows the importance of community and social cohesion from the perspective of individual resilience, but also the need for culturally informed support and institutional understanding in health provision. The limitations of a biomedical approach to trauma emerge from her study, as does the importance of a vision of refugee health and wellbeing as a trajectory which may last several decades. Few studies of refugee experience have adopted such a long-term perspective, but the example of Chilean refugees to the UK provides just such an opportunity to enhance our understanding of refugee support provision over a period of over forty years.