

## CHAPTER 3

# The Long Arm of the Dictator

## *Cross-Border Persecution of Exiled Historians*

---

ANTOON DE BAETS

From my own experience I know that exiles feed on hope.  
— Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, line 1668, 458 BCE

### Introduction

In February 2019, Freedom House published a report to document and discuss the trend of a worldwide retrogression of democracy since 2005. The evidence mustered to prove such a trend included the following:

[A] growing number of governments are reaching beyond their borders to target expatriates, exiles and diasporas. Freedom House found 24 countries around the world – including heavyweights like Russia, China, Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia – that have recently targeted political dissidents abroad with practices such as harassment, extradition requests, kidnapping and even assassination.<sup>1</sup>

Mapping this phenomenon of cross-border persecution in the historical field is the purpose of this chapter.

Historians leaving their countries because they are persecuted or threatened with persecution, and therefore unable or unwilling to return, are refugee historians or exiled historians.<sup>2</sup> The common assumption is that by fleeing these historians improved their overall situation despite the hardships

---

Notes for this section begin on page 71.

of exile, as they found themselves at last beyond the reach of the dictator's long arm. But this was not always the case. Pre-exile persecution could mutate into post-exile persecution. This is an often overlooked dimension when studying the pressures on exile scholarship.

A state can influence versions of its history abroad in many ways. In its simplest form, intervention of state A in state B for purposes of creating favourable versions of its past there can be structured as a typology with a scale from friendly to hostile:

*Typology of Cross-Border, History-Related State Intervention*

- State A's *cooperation* with state B influencing versions of A's history in B.
- State A's *appropriate interference* in state B influencing versions of A's history in B.
- State A's *polemics* with state B influencing versions of A's history in B.
- State A's *inappropriate interference* in state B to influence versions of A's history in B.
- State A's *dominance* over state B imposing versions of A's history in B.<sup>3</sup>

Post-exile persecution is an extreme form of the penultimate type, inappropriate cross-border interference with history. My focus is on state action, not on initiatives by private parties (for example, foundations pressuring history textbook content abroad, leagues suing for defamation abroad, anonymous death threats issued against historians living abroad), unless they are supported by the state. The emphasis, moreover, is on dictatorial states. Certainly, democratic states also attempt to influence versions of their pasts abroad, but as a rule they use the friendlier variants of the typology. Occasionally, historians experience persecution in democracies. The anti-communist McCarthyist campaign in the United States between 1948 and 1955, for example, hit historians specialised in the history of the Soviet Union and China, among others, and led to their dismissal and, for some,<sup>4</sup> to temporary or permanent semi-enforced emigration. However, this was domestic persecution with cross-border ramifications, not cross-border persecution. As populist and nationalist regimes are on the rise in democratic states, it cannot be excluded that we will soon spot the phenomenon of 'democratic cross-border retaliation'.<sup>5</sup> In any case, until now this has been extremely rare. It cannot be otherwise because democracies that persecute are deeply flawed and in danger of losing their democratic status. In limiting myself to dictatorships, I shall not cover all forms of intimidation they deploy abroad but only those that aim to influence the behaviour of exiled historians. I will also discuss how these historians react to these threats. I want to challenge the view that exiles were immune from the dictator's long arm.

## Prevention Strategies

In counteracting and rectifying unwelcome versions of their state's history produced abroad, dictators apply two strategies. The first – prevention in the domestic context – may sound paradoxical, but it is most effective. It means that the circulation within country borders of unwelcome histories produced abroad is obstructed by censorship. Domestic historians can be seen as being involved in the creation of these unwelcome histories in many ways; for example, when they accepted foreign funding, imported books from abroad, talked to foreign journalists, delivered papers at conferences abroad, published on foreign websites, reviewed foreign work, or co-authored and edited international collections – exactly the kind of activities for which historians in democracies are praised. Depending on the case and the regime, these historians can have their passports confiscated and exit visas denied. Further down the road, they may become the subject of spurious legal charges such as ‘enemy of the state’, ‘collaboration with the enemy’, ‘enemy propaganda’, ‘espionage’ or ‘treason’, leading to their dismissal, imprisonment or exile.<sup>6</sup> Increasingly, countries resort to prolonged shutdowns of the internet, or they block access to specific websites.<sup>7</sup> Another domestic measure consists in stopping unwelcome foreign historians from crossing the border through the denial of entry visas. Visa blacklists can be backed up by other devices ranging from permanent bans on research or conference attendance to deportation and the ascription of persona non grata status. This does not exclude measures against critical foreign historians who entered the country legally: surveillance, harassment or worse.

How do attacks against exiled historians fit into these prevention strategies? The default retaliation measure is censorship here as well: works and activities of exiles are declared taboo at home. Less common is copyright infringement. Some exiles see their works published in their home countries without their authorisation, without their name or under another name. This occurred to Spanish historian Ramón Iglesia. His critical edition of the famous sixteenth-century chronicle *True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, which he had prepared for four or five years before the civil war and remained unpublished because of it, appeared in Spain in 1940 without any mention of his name, a treatment that would weigh on his shoulders his whole life.<sup>8</sup> Other historians are spied upon when they temporarily return to the home country, a privilege usually not extended to exiled historians. Shula Marks, an émigré from apartheid South Africa, was permitted to return there to do research. She was subjected to constant scrutiny in the archives, however, especially after the 1976 Soweto uprising, when archivists were warned to watch her research.<sup>9</sup> A colleague of hers commented: ‘One feature of her career was her courage. She travelled to and from South

Africa, braving the inquisitions of a state increasingly managed by its police force and guided by its army chiefs.<sup>10</sup>

The return of exiled historians can be blocked by arranging their civil death (the loss of their civil rights). Revocation measures prove very effective in this regard: exiles then have their right to teach withdrawn or are stripped of their academic titles. More drastically, their citizenship can be repealed, making temporary or definitive return impossible. Alternatively, extradition requests can be lodged in order to convince the host country to send back the exiled historian.

Another strategy, usually taking place under the radar, is intimidating the exiles' families that still live in the home country. Attempts to avoid this blackmail may lead to a permanent breakdown of communication between the exiles and their families. It can also have a chilling effect on their ability to publicly criticise their home countries and, eventually, on their other activities. Alternatively, exiled historians can also be lured back in with promises (either true or false).

## **Persecution Strategies**

Whatever success prevention strategies bring, it stops at the border unless the host countries are willing to cooperate. Lobbying strategies designed to intervene beyond the border are more complicated. Depending on their operation and purpose, they can be appropriate or inappropriate. The most common appropriate strategy consists in lodging public diplomatic protests, often at international forums. Such protests target official historical statements delivered in other countries, or the adoption of memory laws or resolutions about historical atrocity crimes in their parliaments.<sup>11</sup> Alternatively, specific sources, works, films, exhibitions or statues can be singled out as sources of embarrassment.<sup>12</sup> If anything, diplomatic protests are strong indicators of topics that possess a taboo character in the protesting country.

Other, more daring lobbying strategies – often inappropriate but not always – apply soft power under the guise of propaganda or pressure. As part of cross-border propaganda campaigns, states fund and establish chairs, journals, foundations, research centres, educational and cultural institutes and travel to foreign congresses – everything to disseminate their official views under the cloak of independent scholarship. Many of these programmes are run discreetly.<sup>13</sup> Pressure can be diplomatic and financial. Whether this pressure is covert, corrupt and coercive – hence inappropriate – depends on the case. Government ministers can covertly contact colleagues or summon ambassadors to express their dissatisfaction with critical initiatives, especially if they enjoy official support in the targeted state. In the case of open con-

trovsky, the pressure to correct unwelcome versions of a state's past may include withdrawal of investment in the 'offending' state or economic sanctions against the latter's interests in the 'offended' state.

Retaliatory measures such as these can affect exiles in several ways. Sometimes, dictatorial regimes try to export their police and censorship techniques and prevent the publication of historical work. Franco's Spain, for example, tried to convince France to take steps against the left-wing exiled publisher Ruedo Ibérico (Iberian Wheel), based in Paris. Founded by historian José Martínez Guericabeitia in 1961, it was an active publisher until 1982. Franco's secret service carefully watched it and in 1971 discovered the identity of Luís Ramírez, the pseudonymous author of the 1964 book *Franco: Historia de un mesianismo* (Franco: History of a messianism): Basque writer Luciano Rincón Vega. As he still lived in Spain, he was sentenced to four years' imprisonment.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, China watched dissident writers abroad. One of them was Gao Wenqian, before his exile a senior researcher in the Central Committee's Research Center on Party Literature. After the 1989 Tiananmen massacre, Gao began copying documents relating to Zhou Enlai, China's premier until his death in 1976, onto cards while memorising others. He did this for four years. When permitted to go to the United States in 1993, he left his enormous collection of notes with friends, who smuggled it out of the country. Although the Chinese government intimidated Gao and pressured his employer, Harvard University, in order to prevent any publication based on these archives, Gao's *Zhou Enlai's Later Years* was published in Chinese in Hong Kong in 2003 and in English in 2007.<sup>15</sup>

Elimination operations abroad were complicated, but the boldest led to disappearance or assassination. Below I identify eighteen exile history producers murdered for political reasons.<sup>16</sup> History producers should not be confused with historians: it is a broader category. To assume that historians are the only ones who deal with the past is too narrow a view. Everywhere, many different groups are involved in the production or practice of history. I therefore prefer to speak of history producers rather than historians to designate all those involved, professionally or otherwise, in the collection, creation or transmission of history. History producers include, for example, journalists who write works of contemporary history, directors of historical films or historical novelists. This broader pool of recruitment has the disadvantage that I had to decide whom to include and whom to exclude from the pool in more borderline cases than otherwise would probably have been the case. But excluding all those who were not officially historians and yet dealt systematically with the past was not an option. Almost all of the following exiled history producers killed for political reasons were national or international *causes célèbres*.

## Dominican Republic under Rafael Leónidas Trujillo

- *Jesús de Galíndez Suárez* (1915–56), Basque historian, double exile from Spain (1939) and Dominican Republic (1946), abducted in New York with American help, transported to the Dominican Republic and assassinated on Trujillo's orders, body never found.

## Germany, Nazi

- *Theodor Lessing* (1872–1933), German philosopher of history, critic of Nazism, exiled 1933, assassinated by Sudeten German Nazi sympathisers in Czechoslovakia, six months after leaving.
- *Rudolf Hilferding* (1877–1941), Austrian–German–Jewish historian, leading Weimar politician and political theorist, exiled 1933, arrested by the Gestapo as a socialist and anti-fascist, died in prison in Paris after torture, either suicide or murdered on orders of Adolf Hitler.
- *Simon Dubnow* (1860–1941), Russian–Jewish historian, exiled from Russia (1922) and Germany (1933), killed by the Nazis in the ghetto of Riga, Latvia.
- *Grigol Peradze* (1899–1942), Georgian priest, theologian, historian, exiled 1922 after the Soviet occupation of Georgia, arrested by the Gestapo in Germany in 1942, died in Auschwitz.
- *Isaac Osipovich Levin* (1876–1944), Russian–Jewish historian, publicist, exiled from Russia (year unknown) and Germany (1931 or 1932), arrested in early 1943, held in a camp near Paris but deported to a Nazi concentration camp where he died.

## Iran under the Shah and under the Ayatollahs

- *Ali Shariati* (1933–77), Iranian historian and opposition politician, called 'the Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution', exiled 1977, either heart attack or murdered by secret police SAVAK in London, three weeks after leaving.
- *Kourosch Aryamanesh* (aka *Reza Mazluman*) (1934–96), Iranian historian and political opponent, exiled 1982, shot dead near Paris.

## Italy, Fascist

- *Piero Gobetti* (1901–26), Italian journalist, historian, radical liberal, assaulted by fascist thugs and beaten up in 1925, exiled 1926, died of a cardiac depression (a likely consequence of the assault) thirteen days after leaving.
- *Carlo Rosselli* (1899–1937), Italian historian, brother of Nello Rosselli, anti-fascist, exiled 1929, murdered in France by cagouards (French fascists), probably authorised by Benito Mussolini.
- *Nello Rosselli* (1900–1937), Italian historian, brother of Carlo Rosselli, anti-fascist, exiled 1929, murdered in France by cagouards (French fascists), probably authorised by Benito Mussolini.

## Japan, Imperialist

- *Sin Chae-ho* (1880–1936), Korean historian, anarchist, nationalist, exiled 1910, arrested by Japanese Military Police in Taiwan in 1928 for smuggling for anarchists, sentenced to ten years' imprisonment in China, died in solitary confinement in Port Arthur/Dalian.

## Lebanon, Palestinian diaspora in

- *Abdul-Wahhab Kayyali* (1939–81), Palestinian historian, publisher, politician, exiled as a child 1949, shot dead by unidentified gunmen (possibly by Israeli intelligence agency Mossad, a Lebanese militia or a rival Palestinian faction) in Beirut.

## Romania under and after Nicolae Ceaușescu

- *Vlad Georgescu* (1937–88), Romanian historian, exiled 1979, died of brain tumour, possibly after having been irradiated by the state security agency Securitate in Munich after broadcasting fragments from the memoirs of a Securitate general.
- *Ioan Culianu* (1950–91), Romanian historian of religion and magic, exiled 1972, shot dead in the Divinity School, Chicago, probably by a former Securitate agent or a Romanian neo-fascist.

## Sri Lanka during the armed conflict (1983–2009)

- *Sabaratnam Sabalingham* (1952–94), Tamil writer and guerrilla, exiled 1981, documented the history of rival Tamil militant movements (including their assassinations); when it was to be published, he was shot dead in Paris by two Tamil Tigers on orders of Tamil Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran.

## Taiwan under Chiang Ching-kuo

- *Henry Liu* (1932–84), Taiwanese historian, journalist, exiled 1967, shot dead in Daly, California, by two Bamboo Union members on orders of Taiwan's Military Intelligence Bureau for critical work about Taiwan, including a biography of Chiang (son of Chiang Kai-shek).

## USSR, Stalinist

- *Leon Trotsky* (pseudonym of Lev Bronstein) (1879–1940), Russian-Jewish writer, People's Commissar, historian of the recent period, exiled 1929, survived two murder attempts, stabbed in the head with an ice pick by a Stalinist agent in Mexico.<sup>17</sup>

The cases are part of a worldwide database of 428 history producers who were killed for political reasons throughout the centuries. Killed as far apart as 1926 and 1996, the eighteen were targeted by eleven regimes. The Nazi German regime took five lives, the Italian Fascist regime three, Communist Romania two and the Shah and Ayatollah regimes in Iran two as well. The regime with the highest incidence of history producers killed for political reasons, the Stalinist Soviet Union, is represented here by only one case because almost all the victims were killed inside the vast borders of this country.<sup>18</sup> The overview reveals that, given the regime variety, dictatorships of all kinds have tried, often more than once, to eliminate exiled historians.

Twelve history producers were assassinated for their political activities or ethnic origins, not for their historical work. But the murders of the remaining six – Trotsky, Galíndez, Liu, Georgescu, Culianu and Sabalingham – were connected, in whole or in part, to their historical scholarship. In all probability, the secret police had a hand in five of these six murders.<sup>19</sup> In sum, about one third of the victims had sharply criticised the recent history of their countries – the incumbent regimes and their immediate predecessors – and this had constituted a potent motive to kill them.

Elsewhere, I have performed two tests on the population of 428 killed history producers that can be compared with this finding of one third. The first test regarded a sample of 132 history producers, all killed after 1945,

and showed that the deaths of almost one out of four murders (30 of 132 cases or 23%) had some substantial relationship to their historical output.<sup>20</sup> The second test was performed on all the archivists in the population of 418, nineteen in total. Four were killed for reasons partly related to their archival work: 25% of the sixteen cases (out of nineteen) for which enough specifics were known to identify or reject an archival component in the motive for the killing.<sup>21</sup> Both tests showed a pattern: roughly one fourth of the history producers killed for political reasons were so for reasons related to their historical scholarship. The list of political murders among exiles, however, reveals a stronger proportion, namely one third. This ‘anomaly’ can simply reflect the fact that the samples in the three tests are too small for meaningful generalisation. Another possibility is that the higher incidence of exiled history producers killed for reasons related to their historical work reflects reality. The finding would then suggest that history is weaponised *and* neutralised with higher frequency in exile contexts than in domestic contexts.

### Survival Strategies

Exiled historians followed two strategies to counter attacks from outside: survival and destruction strategies. Obviously, the prime survival strategy consisted in continuing exile life as well as possible, if not walking, then stumbling. Additional survival strategies were aimed at maximising the margins of working life in the host countries. Many exiles engaged in low-profile activities such as smuggling sources and works from abroad back home (or vice versa) or staying discreetly in contact with those left behind via networks of messengers.<sup>22</sup> Some activities were undertaken with the explicit purpose of supplementing and refreshing the sources of knowledge as historical writing in the home country was utterly corrupt. A significant minority of exiled historians established publication outlets and historical institutions, including study centres and universities-in-exile.<sup>23</sup> Although some of this work took place anonymously or pseudonymously, much of it was public and sometimes highly visible. The same could be said about displays of moral, symbolic or material solidarity with those living under repression at home, such as signing petitions, resigning from academy memberships and returning honours.<sup>24</sup> These solidarity actions were meant to outbrave the dictator or boost the morale of those left behind. Some exiles took radical steps to become active in human rights work and politics, including by writing commentaries on the situation in the home country. In this regard, it is striking that several historians served as members of governments-in-exile.<sup>25</sup> Exiled historians who were active in the public arena and therefore possibly watched by the dictator’s henchmen or by colleagues and students very

likely developed special routines of caution. As we saw, this could not prevent some of them from being intimidated, harassed or murdered.

## Destruction Strategies

The destruction strategies of exiled historians could follow three paths: abandoning the profession, destroying personal papers follow committing suicide. Not surprisingly, some exiles decided to abandon historical scholarship altogether. Taking a sample of 544 refugee historians (out of a database of 764), I calculated that 33.3% (181 persons) experienced fundamental career change during exile: 14% (76 persons) left the profession and 19.3% (105 persons) joined it during exile.<sup>26</sup> At first sight, gains trump losses. Also, many of those who dropped out of the profession found new employment elsewhere, which may have signified personal progress. And yet I call this a destruction strategy because the figures hide an asymmetry: there were relatively more experienced historians among the leavers and relatively more beginners among the newcomers. In addition, many of those who did not switch careers became unemployed or worked in worse conditions than before exile.

I found five examples of exiled historians who destroyed their personal papers.<sup>27</sup> Reasons for such a step are speculative but include safety, especially if the destruction took place before exile; fear that the contents of the papers would be abused or misunderstood; inward-directed rage; and a growing disappointment that historical research was futile, especially if the destruction occurred as part of a last will. As most historians are professional source collectors *par excellence*, I suspect that the decision to destroy biographical and working records, if taken voluntarily, is often an indicator of an unhappy life.

A step further than the destruction of one's personal papers is the destruction of one's own life. Here is an overview of nine cases of suicides characterised by an exile-related aspect:

### Suicide on impending refoulement during the Second World War

- *Carl Einstein* (1885–1940), German-Jewish art historian and anarchist, exiled 1928, committed suicide by jumping from a bridge in a river when stuck in France and fearing arrival of Nazis.
- *Walter Benjamin* (1892–1940), German philosopher of history and cultural critic, suicide plans since 1931, exiled 1933, committed suicide with a morphine overdose when, fleeing deportation from France to Germany, he was arrested in Spain while crossing the border.
- *Aenne Liebreich* (1899–1940), German art historian of the Middle Ages, exiled 1933, committed suicide when the Nazis invaded Paris.
- *Rudolf Hilferding* (1877–1941), Austrian-German-Jewish historian, leading Weimar politician and political theorist, exiled 1933, arrested by the Gestapo as a socialist and anti-fascist, died in prison in Paris after torture, either by murder on orders of Adolf Hitler or by suicide.

- *Hedwig Hintze* (née *Guggenheimer*) (1884–1942), German-Jewish historian of the French Revolution, exiled 1939, died either by suicide or from heart failure as a refugee in the Netherlands after failed attempt to go to USA, then Switzerland, fearing deportation to Auschwitz.

#### Suicide after exile

- *Edgar Zilsel* (1891–1944), Austrian-Jewish philosopher of science and historian, exiled 1938, suicide in Oakland, California, with an overdose of sleeping pills.
- *Ramón Iglesia y Parga* (1905–48), Spanish historian of the conquest of Mexico, exiled 1939, first in Mexico, later in the USA, threw himself from his apartment window in Madison, Wisconsin.
- *Theodor Ernst Mommsen* (1905–58), German historian of the German and Italian Middle Ages, émigré or exiled 1936, worked, inter alia, at Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, committed suicide with an overdose of sleeping pills, his papers were destroyed after his death.
- *Jorge Cedrón* (1942–80), Argentinian director of historical films (*Por los senderos del Libertador*; *Operación Masacre*; *Resistir*), his name circulated on death lists, exiled 1977, died by suicide – stabbed himself several times in the heart while on a toilet in a police station in Paris, where he was reporting the abduction of his father-in-law.<sup>28</sup>

The nine cases were selected from the overlap in two databases mentioned above: the database of 428 killed history producers, which also includes cases of suicide as a result of severe political pressure, and the database of 764 exiled historians.<sup>29</sup> It is likely that the suicides in the face of refoulement (forced repatriation) were acts of impulsive despair directly connected to the failed exile attempt and the prospect of further persecution after refoulement.<sup>30</sup> In contrast, the suicides after settlement in exile were probably premeditated. Diaries, last letters, last words and suicide notes, if they exist, could shed light on the specifics of each case.

For individual history producers, additional predictors sometimes exist; not exactly for suicide as such but for a special sensitivity to painful existential experiences. Ramón Iglesia, for one, was deeply influenced by his participation in the Republican army during the Spanish Civil War and his exile in Mexico: both experiences led him to reconsider his earlier views of his subject of research, the 1521 conquest of Mexico. He also suffered the humiliation of having his work published in Spain without any mention of his name (about eight years before his suicide). But he also had a history of psychiatry. For the Germany émigré Theodore Ernst Mommsen, other factors than moving abroad help explain his suicide: intermittent psychological crises and depression, a broken relationship, the death of a friend, illness, even acute awareness of the boundaries of his – and anyone's – imperfect knowledge of the Middle Ages, and, importantly, the weight of having to live up to a famous family (he was a grandson of historian and 1902 Nobel laureate in literature Theodor Mommsen and a nephew of Max Weber).<sup>31</sup>

Comparisons between exile suicide and domestic suicide remain to be explored. There is evidence that at least forty history producers committed suicide after persecution in their home country (for example, in prison).<sup>32</sup> A list of eleven historians who committed suicide during the Cultural Revolution in China would be the most promising to serve as a control group.<sup>33</sup>

With only anecdotal evidence found in interviews and testimonies, important questions remain unanswered: Which part of the suicide decision of exiled historians is triggered by the exile experience as such? Hypothetically, would exiled historians who committed suicide have done so anyway? Perhaps even sooner? Is suicide more frequent in isolated exiles, not surrounded by a supportive diaspora? Are suicide rates of exiled historians different from those of other ‘intellectual’ exiles? Of other exiles in general? Is suicide more frequent earlier or later in exile? Do late-life effects, such as a resurgence of trauma, play a significant role?<sup>34</sup>

Eyewitnesses, and psychologists after them, have estimated suicide rates in politically extreme circumstances such as those in camps in Nazi Germany, in camps of the Soviet Gulag, during the Armenian genocide, during the Partition of British India and during the Cultural Revolution in China. It has led to contradictory theories. Recent research, including this one, invariably finds high suicide rates in politically extreme circumstances, but surviving eyewitnesses of the calibre of Primo Levi and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn adhered to low-rate theories. How is this possible? The solution to this puzzle is probably that these eyewitnesses committed a reporting error: when they maintained that suicide was relatively rare in concentration and labour camps, they probably did not mean ‘rare’ in any absolute sense but ‘rare’ compared to the unusually high suicide expectations in extreme circumstances.<sup>35</sup>

If we define exile as a politically extreme context – albeit less harsh than a concentration camp, an ethnic cleansing or a genocide – the rates of exile suicides are very probably well above global average rates, given a stronger tendency to underreport suicides in politically extreme contexts. However, the rates of exile suicides are not necessarily higher than the rates of domestic suicides in dictatorships because living under a dictatorship constitutes a politically extreme context as much as exile.<sup>36</sup>

The literature on suicide in politically extreme circumstances suggests several reasons for suicide that are applicable to an exile context with relative ease. The sheer list of reasons for suicide illustrates the complexity of the phenomenon:

- *Past-related trauma*: stress of persecution and expulsion; rupture in family life, relationships, career, income level; pre-persecution nostalgia.
- *Present-related depression*: concentration problems; health problems; permanent homesickness; prolonged uncertainty about legal status;

extreme dependency on others; social isolation and loneliness; feeling of generalised failure; poor assimilation in the host country; xenophobia in the host country; imprisonment as enemy in the host country; fear of spies among exiles; fear of secret police of the home country; fear of refolement or deportation.

- *Future-related meaninglessness*: inward-directed anger and blame; survivor guilt; inability to help those who stayed behind; perceived lack of recognition; perceived lack of solidarity; perceived meaninglessness of survival strategies; fear of falling into oblivion in the home country; fear of permanently blocked return; fear of returning after many years.
- *Suicide-related views*: earlier suicide attempts; thoughts and images of suicide; perception of suicide as an act of free will.

This overview reveals that reasons directly related to the fear for the dictator's long arm (expressed in such reasons as fear of spies among exiles; fear of secret police of the home country; fear of refolement or deportation; fear of permanently blocked return), although very real, constitute but one series in a range of potentially explanatory factors for suicide in exile.

## On Balance

The impact of exile on the knowledge production of refugee historians has an often-overlooked dimension: persecution by the dictatorship that drove them away. A first, perhaps surprising, finding revealed rather effective *prevention strategies*: dictators had an impressive array of measures at their disposal to prevent unwelcome versions of history produced abroad from spreading domestically: the censorship of works of exiled historians, the infringement of their copyright, the revocation of their right to teach and of their titles and citizenship, and the intimidation of any family members they left behind.

*Persecution strategies*, directly interfering with the lives of exiles abroad, were harder to prove. One state unmasked the pseudonymous author of a history published abroad and imprisoned him, another tried actively to prevent a publication abroad, a third ordered to spy on an émigré historian who returned home for archival work. Meddling could also end in murder. Eighteen cases of exiled history producers killed for political reasons were examined. Six of them were murdered partly or entirely because their acid historical criticism formed an unbearable indictment of the dictator and his predecessors.

The exiled historians steered away from such threats by applying diverging coping strategies. Most used multiple *survival strategies*: they continued their lives as well as possible, engaged in low-profile activities (such as smuggling

sources or maintaining contact with home via discreet networks), took public initiatives such as establishing publication outlets and historical institutions, showed discrete or vocal solidarity with those living under repression in their home countries or participated in political and human rights activities.

*Destruction strategies* deserved particular attention in our context. One third of a sample of 544 refugee historians experienced a fundamental career change during exile. Of these career switchers, 14% left the historical profession and 19% joined it during exile. This would be a positive result for the profession if there was not a hidden asymmetry: the leavers were relatively more experienced and the newcomers relatively less. On the whole, a career switch meant loss of potential, and this was destructive for the profession. Other strategies were destructive not only for the profession but also for the individuals involved. They included the removal of personal papers (illustrated with five cases) and suicide (illustrated with nine cases). We are seduced into thinking that what was lost by snatching away the historians from their domestic intellectual biotopes was won in wisdom gained from the exile experience trickling into new insights, but this is a fallacy.

The domestic strategies of dictators were more effective than their strategies abroad. Most measures deployed abroad were typically cases of overstretch. The exception was the killing strategy: it made a real difference when vocal critics like a Trotsky or a Galíndez were eliminated. But even here there was a double backlash: the posthumous fame of those killed created ardent followers determined to continue in their footsteps; and in uncovering their brutal faces, dictatorships lost their last bit of respectability. Arguably, some of the dictators' other lobbying activities abroad were more successful, but their interventions into the history versions produced by exiles were rarely of any long-term consequence.

From the perspective of exiles, the main question is whether the exiles' coping strategies were directly attributable to the dictator's far-reaching influence. For a very tangible minority of exiles, this was the case, and it was awkward. If the dictator feared the power of their words, it could end in cold-blooded murder; if they feared the dictator, it could end in suicide. This was most clearly seen in cases of impending refolement.

The majority of exiled historians was not directly hit by the dictatorial regime. They attained more or less stable lives, even if their professional lives were fragile, though this was often after years of upheaval. Their fate would almost certainly have been worse if they had stayed home. But even for this majority that survived and coped with the situation as well as it could, the dictator was the subject of daily conversation and endless speculation. And if most were not targeted directly, the *fear* that they were a target without knowing it – or that they could be targeted one day – took its toll among many. In this sense, most exiles were mildly but permanently terrorised by

this vague threat, and it affected their work. In short, post-exile persecution played a big role for few and a small but real one for all. In terms of survival as well as scholarship, the refugee experience was, on the whole, bleak until the very end.

## Notes

1. Freedom House, *Democracy in Retreat*, 6. All links to websites were last checked on 1 May 2022. I am grateful to all participants in the workshop ‘Dynamics of Emigration, Epistemic Repercussions’, held at the University of Bochum in 2019, for their comments, in particular Henning Trüper.

2. I follow the definition of the United Nations, *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, Article 1A(2). The convention includes arrangements made since 1926: see Article 1A(1).

3. Examples of type 3: the controversy between Japan, South Korea and China about the history of the Pacific War; the controversy between Turkey and Armenia plus several Western countries about the recognition of the Armenian massacres as genocide. Comment on type 4: This type can be called *export of censorship*. Sometimes it spills over into *international censorship*, directed at international book series, international conferences or international history organisations. Comment on type 5: ‘Dominance’ includes colonisation, occupation and imperialism. Superpowers in particular invested much energy in imposing acceptable versions of their history abroad. For example, the USSR tried to equalise historical writing in the countries within its zones of influence after 1944; the Allied Powers imposed a set of history-related measures after occupying the Axis powers in Europe and the Far East in 1945.

4. Including Owen Lattimore, Stuart Schram, Moses Finley, Natalie Zemon Davis and W.E.B. DuBois.

5. For example, in Poland a controversial 2018 memory law to criminalise ‘defamation of the Polish Nation’ was dubbed ‘Lex Gross’ after Jan Tomasz Gross. A Polish-Jewish émigré historian working at Princeton University, Gross claimed that many Poles had been complicit in Nazi war crimes. This claim was officially described as ‘historically untrue, harmful and insulting to Poland’ in 2015. In 2016, Gross was interrogated for five hours in Katowice and almost stripped of an award. The American Historical Association, among others, expressed concern about this intimidation.

6. For a global overview of spurious accusations and charges directed at historians, see De Baets, *Crimes against History*, 82–84.

7. The conflict between Estonia and Russia about a Soviet monument in Tallinn even spilled over into what could have been, in 2007, the first cyberattack ever.

8. Ortega y Medina, ‘Historia’, 242–49; Matute, ‘Ramón Iglesia’, 70; Bernabéu Albert, ‘La pasión de Ramón Iglesia Parga’, 764; Thomas, *Biographical Dictionary*, 213–14.

9. Shula Marks, e-mail, 2 February 2001.

10. Birmingham, ‘Shula’, 401.

11. Memory laws: As did Israel in response to the adoption by Poland of its 2018 memory law. Resolutions: As did Turkey in response to the adoption by the French National Assembly of a proposal criminalising the denial of genocides, including the Armenian genocide.

12. See, for example, De Baets, ‘Censuur van buitenlandse geschiedenis’.

13. Two examples are especially noteworthy in this respect: the Turkish government’s lobby to promote its denialist views of the 1915 genocide of Armenians in European countries, Israel, the United States and the United Nations, especially since the mid-1970s; and the interference of Hindu nationalist associations with United States history textbooks to adapt them to their views, especially since 2002.

14. Juaristi, 'Fallece el escritor Luciano Rincón'.
15. Gao, 'The June Fourth that I Saw', 10–18; De Baets, *Crimes against History*, 130.
16. Excluded were political murders of history producers who were either internally displaced, exiled history students or expatriate historians. Among the history students were Brazilian Jorge Alberto Basso (?–1976), killed in Argentina, and Kamal Bamadhaj (1970–91), a New Zealander of Malaysian origin, killed in Indonesia. Among the expatriate historians were American Malcolm Kerr (1931–84) and French Michel Seurat (1947–86), both killed in Lebanon; the American Albert Glock (1925–92), killed in the Israeli-Occupied Territories, and possibly Canadian Steve Gordon (?–1992), killed in Colombia.
17. Source: author's own database. For database interpretation, see De Baets, *Crimes against History*, 9–40, 155–64.
18. De Baets, *Crimes against History*, 16–19.
19. The Sri Lankan case was the result of rivalry among Tamil groups.
20. De Baets, *Crimes against History*, 16–17.
21. De Baets, *Crimes against History*, 37.
22. De Baets, *Crimes against History*, 140.
23. De Baets, *Crimes against History*, 139; De Baets, 'Plutarch's Thesis', 33–36; De Baets, 'Exile and Acculturation', 344–48.
24. De Baets, *Crimes against History*, 140.
25. De Baets, 'Exile and Acculturation', 332–34.
26. De Baets, 'Plutarch's Thesis', 36–37; De Baets, 'Exile and Acculturation', 335–37.
27. For the cases (Elias Bickerman, Aron Freimann, Theodor Ernst Mommsen, Otto Neugebauer and Helene Wieruszowski), see Epstein, *A Past Renewed*, 38, 75, 224, 226, 345. The fact that all of them fled Nazi Germany probably merely reflects the fact that the exile wave from Nazi Germany is the best studied.
28. Source: author's own database. Suicide *attempts* were excluded.
29. See De Baets, 'Exile and Acculturation', 322–27, for an overview of the database.
30. See also Lester, *Suicide and the Holocaust*, chapters 4–6. I am grateful to David Lester for sending me his book.
31. Gilbert, *Lehrjahre*, 111–20.
32. They are listed in the provisional memorial for history producers in De Baets, *Crimes against History*, 155–64 (although their cause of death is not mentioned there).
33. These eleven Chinese historians are Zeng Zhaoyu (?–1964 or 1966), an anonymous historian (?–[1966]), Chen Mengjia (1911–66), Deng Tuo (1911/12–66), Li Pingxin (1907–66), Ma Bo-an (?–[1966]), Tian Jiaying (?–1966), Wang Deyi ([1937]–67), Li Jigu (?–1968), Jian Bozan (1898–1968) and Liu Shousong (1912–[69]). See also the remarks on China in De Baets, *Crimes against History*, 17, 26 and Lester, 'Suicide and the Cultural Revolution', 99–104. Domestic suicides in politically extreme circumstances in the Stalinist USSR included Usevalod Ignatovski (1881–1931), Mikola Skrypnyk (1872–1933), Sergei Teploukhov (1888–1934), Geidar Guseinov (1908–50) and, possibly, Paul Rykov (1884–1942).
34. Surprisingly, suicides on impending refolement were 53 years on average, while suicides after settlement in exile 47 years. Also, I did not find examples of suicide among exiled historians after they returned home.
35. For a discussion of suicide rates, see Lester, *Suicide and the Holocaust*, preface and chapter 12. For a summary of suicide theories in politically extreme circumstances, see Lester and Kryszynska, 'Suicide in the Soviet Gulag Camps', 175–76. For a thesis on the reporting mistakes of eyewitnesses, see Lester, 'The Suicide Rate in the Concentration Camps Was Extraordinarily High', 201. See also Lester, 'Suicide and the Cultural Revolution'; Lester, 'Bias in the Reporting of Suicide and Genocide'; Van der Veer, 'The Risk of Suicide among Refugees Seeking Asylum', in Van der Veer, *Counselling and Therapy with Refugees*, 189–98; López-Muñoz and Cuerda-Galindo, 'Suicide in Inmates in Nazi and Soviet Concentration Camps', 1–6.

36. For global figures: World Health Organization, *Suicide in the World*, 15 ('Changes in suicide rates over time'). For underreporting: Suicides are sometimes covered up as accidents; the database of killed history producers reveals, however, that murders are sometimes covered up as suicides.

## Bibliography

- Bernabéu Albert, Salvador. 'La pasión de Ramón Iglesia Parga (1905–1948)'. *Revista de Indias* 65(235) (2005), 755–72.
- Birmingham, David. 'Shula: A Personal Tribute'. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27(3) (2001), 399–404.
- Cantor, Norman. *Inventing the Middle Ages: The Lives, Works and Ideas of the Great Medievalists of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Morrow, 1991.
- De Baets, Antoon. 'Exile and Acculturation: Refugee Historians since the Second World War'. *International History Review* 28(2) (2006), 316–49.
- . 'Plutarch's Thesis: The Contribution of Refugee Historians to Historical Writing (1945–2015)'. *Storia della Storiografia* 69(1) (2016), 27–38.
- . 'Censuur van buitenlandse geschiedenis in Nederland (1945–2018)'. [Censorship of the history of other countries in the Netherlands (1945–2018)] *Historici.nl* (2018).
- . *Crimes against History*. London: Routledge, 2019.
- Epstein, Catherine. *A Past Renewed: A Catalog of German-Speaking Refugee Historians in the United States after 1933*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Freedom House. *Democracy in Retreat: Freedom in the World 2019*. Washington: Freedom House, 2019.
- Gao, Wenqian. 'The June Fourth that I Saw'. *Human Rights in China (China Rights Forum)* 2 (2009), 10–18.
- Gilbert, Felix. *Lehrjahre im alten Europa*. Berlin: Siedler, 1989.
- Juaristi, Jon. 'Fallece el escritor Luciano Rincón'. *El País*, 5 September 1993.
- Lester, David. 'The Suicide Rate in the Concentration Camps Was Extraordinarily High: A Comment on Bronisch and Lester'. *Archives of Suicide Research* 8(2) (2004), 199–201.
- . *Suicide and the Holocaust*. Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2005.
- . 'Suicide and the Cultural Revolution'. *Archives of Suicide Research* 9(1) (2005), 99–104.
- . 'Bias in the Reporting of Suicide and Genocide'. *Suicide Studies* 1(2) (2020), 25–29.
- Lester, David, and Karolina Kryszynska. 'Suicide in the Soviet Gulag Camps'. *Archives of Suicide Research* 12(2) (2008), 170–79.
- López-Muñoz, Francisco, and Esther Cuerda-Galindo. 'Suicide in Inmates in Nazi and Soviet Concentration Camps: Historical Overview and Critique'. *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 7(8) (2016), 1–6.
- Matute, Álvaro. 'Ramón Iglesia: Del historiador como héroe trágico'. *Revista de la Universidad de México* 501–502 (2000), 67–70.
- Ortega y Medina, Juan Antonio. 'Historia', in Fondo de Cultura Económica (ed.), *El exilio español en México 1939–1982* (México: Salvat, 1982), 242–49, 273–94.
- Thomas, Jack. *Biographical Dictionary of Latin American Historians and Historiography*. Westport CT and London: Greenwood, 1984.
- United Nations. *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*. Geneva: UNHCR, 1951.
- Veer, Guus van der. *Counselling and Therapy with Refugees: Psychological Problems of Victims of War, Torture and Repression*. Chichester: Wiley & Sons, 1992.
- World Health Organization. *Suicide in the World*. Geneva: WHO, 2019 (UN Doc. WHO/MSD/MER/19.3).