

L'institut d'histoire accueille

**Dr Benjamin Thomas White**

Lecturer at the University of Glasgow

**Teffi's sealskin coat, and other stories:  
Animals, people and places in forced displacement**

Le mercredi 10 octobre 2018 à 18h

Université de Neuchâtel – alvéole RN.04  
(Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines – Espace Louis-Agassiz 1)



Image (c) Derek Robertson, 'What colour are the wheatears'  
<https://www.creativepastures.com/migrations>

## ABSTRACT

Human forced displacement often, perhaps always, involves animals too. Displaced human populations may take their livestock and working animals with them. Companion animals can be an important source of psychological wellbeing for displaced people, while involuntary proximity to rats or cockroaches can be a bleak marker of diminished circumstances. Such ‘pests’ can figure in representations of displacement (for example, as journalistic shorthand for the squalor of a refugee camp), and indeed in hostile representations of displaced people. Refugees themselves, meanwhile, may say that they are being treated like animals. In displacement, animals can mediate between displaced people and host societies, as a means of integration or as a source of integration. The same goes for the relationship between displaced people and wider natural environments—and increasingly, the same environmental pressures drive human and animal displacements.

In this talk, drawing on my historical research (especially on the refugee camp at Baquba, Iraq, in 1918-20) as well as a current cross-disciplinary project involving humanitarian practitioners and refugees, funded by the Wellcome Trust, I will explore the relationship between animals, people, and places in forced displacement from the first world war to the present.

## BIOGRAPHY



Benjamin Thomas White teaches history at the University of Glasgow, Scotland. A Middle East historian by background, he now teaches the history of refugees in the world since the late nineteenth century, with a particular focus on the history of the refugee camp. He is currently leading a project on ‘Humans and animals in refugee camps’, funded by the Wellcome Trust, to bring together a cross-disciplinary academic/practitioner research network and set out a research agenda for this subject.

His article ‘Humans and animals in a refugee camp: Baquba, Iraq, 1918-20’ was published in *Journal of Refugee Studies* in May 2018 (advance access: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fey024> )