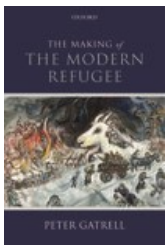

The Making of the Modern Refugee

Peter Gatrell

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CHAPTER

Introduction: The Making of the Modern Refugee

Peter Gatrell

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Abstract

The great wars of the twentieth century caused vast numbers of people to leave their homes, and this reinforces the view that the link between war and population displacement is self-evident. But is it? Why has involuntary displacement been such a prominent feature of the modern era; has it been episodic or a systematic consequence of state formation? What attempts were made to tackle crises in different parts of the world and at different junctures, and did these efforts have common aims and features? Under what circumstances did refugees return to their homes, and with what results? Answering these questions requires a global history of displacement and humanitarian assistance over time. But they also invite us to consider the meanings that refugees attached to their flight, journeys, destinations and prospective 'homecoming'. This invites a history of, and in, displacement.

Keywords: refugees, war and population displacement, state formation, repatriation, global history, refugee journeys, humanitarian relief

Subject: Military History, Oral History, Modern History (1700 to 1945), World History, Social and Cultural History

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> Ours [the twentieth century] has been the century of departure, of migration, of exodus—of disappearance, the century of people helplessly seeing others, who were close to them, disappear over the horizon
>
> (John Berger)

Today's information media are filled with reports of disasters that result in people being forced to flee. Sometimes they die before reaching a place of safety. The recent past provides abundant evidence of huge involuntary population movements in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region, and elsewhere. The dissolution of Yugoslavia and its violent aftermath in the early 1990s provided a salutary reminder that Europe was not immune from refugee crises; even today, by far the largest

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concentration of refugees per head of population anywhere in the world is in Armenia. Many of these conflicts persist. At the end of 2012, close on nine million refugees had been living in refugee camps and other settlements for more than a decade. The ordeal of 2.5 million Palestinians in the Middle East stretches back to 1948. Many of these instances are reasonably well known, at least in outline, but the circumstances of other refugees, such as Bhutanese in Nepal, Rohingya in Bangladesh, and Sahrawi refugees in West Africa rarely figure in the news. Western broadcasters occasionally touch on catastrophe, as when boats overloaded with refugees capsize at sea, but these accounts rarely illuminate the circumstances that compel them to flee. Instead public opinion is fed uninformative scraps about asylum seekers that disregard the fact that most of the world's refugees eke out an existence far from the borders of First World countries.

Something of the same applies to our grasp of more distant events. It is widely recognized that the great wars of the twentieth century, like those in previous eras, caused vast numbers of people to leave their homes. This reinforces the view that the link between war and population displacement is self-evident. But is it? Why has involuntary displacement been such a prominent feature of the modern era? Has it been episodic or systematic? Is there something peculiar about recent upheavals or do they form part of a twentieth-century continuum? What attempts were made to tackle crises in different parts of the world and at different junctures, and did these efforts have common aims and features? Under what circumstances did refugees return to their homes,
p. 2 and with what results? These questions suggest ↳ the need for a global history of displacement and relief programmes over time. They invite us to consider how refugees understood the myriad ramifications of flight and how they engaged with those who were left behind and with whom they might hope at some stage to reconnect. This process extends to exploring the meanings that they attached to the places of their departure, to their journeys, and to their destinations. This invites a history of, and in, displacement.

One aim of *The Making of the Modern Refugee* is to come to a better appreciation of what is distinctive about refugee crises in the new millennium, and what is not. My focus is predominantly on the twentieth century. To be sure, the historical record discloses numerous attempts to expel individuals and entire populations on grounds of political opinion or religious belief. Long before 1900, political disorder and war compelled vanquished or politically obdurate groups and religious minorities to seek refuge elsewhere. In 1492, Spain brought centuries of Moorish rule to an end and enforced Catholic conformity, causing 200,000 Muslims and Jews to flee. German Protestants who were expelled from the Palatinate in the seventeenth century made their way to Kent where they languished in vast tented settlements before proceeding to Pennsylvania. One million Huguenots left France rather than convert to Catholicism following the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. Revolution in Haiti in 1791 caused white plantation owners to flee; some of them ended up in an isolated part of Cuba called Guantánamo Bay. These instances can be multiplied. They point to persecution and discrimination, but they belong to a more remote geopolitical universe and generated nothing like the institutional response that became familiar in the modern era. Twentieth-century displacement was unprecedented by virtue of being linked to the collapse of multi-national empires, the emergence of the modern state with a bounded citizenship, the spread of totalizing ideologies that hounded internal enemies, and the internationalization of responses to refugee crises.[1]

Was the magnitude of population displacement in the late twentieth century of a different order compared to crises earlier in the century? The answer, which may come as something of a surprise, is that the size of the refugee population as recorded in official statistics and including data on internally displaced persons was highest in the middle years of the twentieth century. Given the rapid growth in world population the proportion of refugees was therefore smaller in relative terms in the late twentieth century (see the snapshot in Table 1). It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the most dramatic period of mass population displacement occurred in the 1940s as a result of war and political upheaval around the world.

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Table 1: Twentieth-Century Displaced/Refugee Population (millions, estimated)

	First World War aftermath	Second World War aftermath	Cold War aftermath
Continental Europe	10 [Eastern Europe]	60	⟨7
	2 [Balkans]		
Non-European continents	n/a	90 [China]	6 [South-East Asia and Middle East]
		20 [South Asia]	
		1 [Middle East]	6 [Sub-Saharan Africa]
		4 [other, incl. Hong Kong]	4 [other]
			24 [IDPs]
Global total	⟩12	175	47
Total world population	1,800	2,300	5,300
Percentage displaced	⟨1.0%	7.6%	0.9%

Notes and sources: see chapters 1–6. For the Cold War aftermath (1992–96 average), see UNHCR data 'http://www.unhcr.org/3bfa33154.html' supplemented by 'http://www.internal-displacement.org/'.

What explains these dynamics and this magnitude? In the first phase, wartime mobilization raised the stakes by drawing attention to people whose mere presence was deemed to threaten the security of the state and the
p. 3 war effort. Entire communities in the Ottoman, Habsburg and Russian empires were deported ↳ before and during the First World War on grounds of their perceived disloyalty. These deliberate actions by imperial rulers multiplied the chaos brought about by the mass flight of civilians who sought to escape the wrath of enemy troops (chapter 1). In the Ottoman Empire, the Young Turks turned on Armenian and Kurdish minorities; those who escaped deportation and mass murder became refugees. Subsequently, revolution and civil war in Russia set class against class and offered another foretaste of what was to come, by linking social and political transformation to a further round of population politics.[2]

Targeting imperial subjects had unforeseen and ironic consequences, because patriotic leaders in each group appealed to refugees' sense of belonging to a beleaguered nation that could only be properly secured by detaching itself from the imperial core and being constituted as a sovereign entity. The end of the war led to the replacement of old imperial polities by new nation-states. But this created even more favourable conditions for the persecution of minorities who did not meet the criteria for political membership. Discriminatory practices reached their apogee in Germany where the Nazi state excluded Jews from political citizenship and then proceeded to exterminate them on occupied territory during the Second World War. Fascist terror was not, however, confined to Nazi Germany. Defeat in the Spanish Civil War forced Franco's opponents to flee to France. The cultural record created by Spanish refugees in designated camps or in transit to new destinations, spoke of loss and humiliation, tempered by a determination to transcend their displacement (chapter 2).

Nor was demographic engineering the sole preserve of totalitarian states. The rearrangement of population
p. 4 and territory in Greece and Turkey under the terms ↳ of the Treaty of Lausanne signed in 1923 was conceived as a means to prevent ethnic and social conflict by compelling the Muslim inhabitants of Greece to move to Turkey and insisting that residents of Turkey who professed the Orthodox religion depart for Greece. It created

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a substantial refugee population in both states. The growing acceptance of the argument that the modern state should be ethnically homogeneous had profound consequences: liberal politicians and diplomats embraced the 'unmixing of peoples' (in Lord Curzon's phrase) as a means of separating ethnic groups to reduce the possibility of conflict.[3]

This approach also characterized peace-making after the Second World War. The war uprooted civilians as well as soldiers. Invasion and deportation killed millions and left survivors stranded. In China the Japanese invasion led to a massive crisis of internal population displacement that destabilised the country politically and socially and contributed to the epoch-making communist revolution in 1949 (chapter 6). In Europe the victorious Allies embarked on a series of punitive expulsions as well as organized population transfers in Central Europe, forcing ethnic Germans out of Poland and Czechoslovakia. Given the widespread antipathy towards former enemies, the Allied powers focused not on their plight but on that of the so-called 'Displaced Persons' (DPs) who had been taken to Germany during the war as forced labourers. This was a polyglot group—the irony of Hitler bequeathing Germany a multinational population was not lost on contemporaries—held in camps so that arrangements could be made for their repatriation. The camp provided another opportunity for patriotic elites in historic émigré communities as well as Ukrainian, Polish, Lithuanian and other DPs inside Germany and Austria to engage with their co-nationals. Nationality was again reaffirmed. At the same time, a new crisis came about as people fled communist states in Eastern Europe. In a foretaste of things to come, Western governments pondered whether they might be more accurately described as 'economic migrants' rather than as persecuted individuals (chapter 3).

Turning 'insiders' into 'outsiders' became a familiar practice elsewhere in the twentieth century as colonial empires gave way to independent countries whose claims to legitimacy rested on the affirmation of popular sovereignty. The peace settlement after the First World War replaced Ottoman domination of the Middle East with a series of British and French mandates. British, French and Belgian rule in sub-Saharan Africa supported certain ethnic groups at the expense of others, stoking rivalries that had the potential to erupt into civil war when colonial rule came to an end. The map of the Middle East and the Indian sub-continent was redrawn yet again following the Second World War, culminating in the creation of new states whose history was bound up with large-scale refugee crises (chapters 4 and 5). Emerging nation-states established and defended their
p. 5 borders; governments defined the boundaries of citizenship ↳ and engaged with ethnic minority and migrant populations: 'distinguishing migrants from locals, identifying and resettling refugees and displaced peoples—these endeavours became central to the new states' assertion of authority, and their definitions of citizenship'.[4] The conflict in Sri Lanka, which achieved independence from Britain in 1948, is a case in point. Here the new government discriminated against the predominantly Hindu Tamil minority in favour of the Buddhist Sinhalese majority. The result was a protracted civil war which by the 1980s displaced ten per cent of the total population.

In sub-Saharan Africa and South-East Asia the dissolution of colonial administration caused many white settlers to flee, although these 'returnees' struggled to find a place that they could call home.[5] But the mainsprings of population displacement lay elsewhere. Rival ethnic and social groups advanced claims to power in newly independent states. Revolutionary turmoil frequently accompanied the retreat from empire. As in Russia, radical leaders in China, Vietnam, Cambodia and Ethiopia defined membership of the political community in terms of class. Each of them added population resettlement to their repertoire. Revolution in Cambodia was followed by a prolonged refugee crisis when Vietnamese troops dislodged the genocidal regime of Pol Pot in 1979. Fledgling states targeted real or imagined opponents and enlisted supporters in the process of political transformation. Civil wars fuelled by external intervention created perfect conditions for manufacturing refugees. In Rwanda the refugee crisis had complex origins that can be traced back at least a generation prior to the genocide in 1994 (chapters 7 and 8).[6]

Seeking to understand the origins of population displacement is only one element in *The Making of the Modern Refugee*. We also need to consider how the modern refugee came to be construed as a 'problem' amenable to a

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'solution'. Part of the answer is to be found in ideas of international action. The history of population displacement was closely linked to the creation and operation of an international refugee regime, meaning in the first instance a set of legal rules, norms and agreements between sovereign states about refugees and states' responsibilities towards them. But this regime was never a singular and unchanging entity. Its first incarnation followed the First World War when European states responded to the arrival of Russian and Armenian refugees with measures that were widely seen as ad hoc arrangements.[7]

After the Second World War, the new United Nations (UN) refashioned the refugee regime. This framework
p. 6 remains largely intact. For more than six decades the ↳ main inter-governmental agency that supports refugees has been the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), formed in December 1950. UNHCR is responsible for supervising the application of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which safeguards the rights and welfare of persons 'outside the country of their nationality', provided they could establish a 'well-founded fear of being persecuted on grounds of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion'. This definition represented a departure from the pre-war doctrine whereby protection was offered to specified groups rather than an individual who could demonstrate persecution. It made implicit reference to Nazism but had Soviet totalitarianism even more in its sights (chapter 3). Signatories to the 1951 Convention agreed to the principle of non-refoulement, whereby no refugee could be returned to any country where he or she faced the threat of persecution or torture.[8] Like the pre-war League of Nations, UNHCR had no powers to intervene in the internal affairs of sovereign states who paid its bills and who ultimately decided asylum claims. Many states refused to endorse the Convention—even today only three-quarters of UN states have signed—and it took at least a decade for the UNHCR to gain international acceptance and to assist refugees in situations that its originators never envisaged (chapters 7 and 8).

The Convention left other forced migrants in the cold, including the person who left 'solely because political events were not to his liking', as well as internally displaced persons (IDPs) who did not cross an external frontier. Greater attention is now paid to people displaced by environmental change and natural disasters as well as development projects.[9] An important hallmark of change was the decision by the Organisation of African Unity in 1969 to adopt a Convention on Refugee Problems in Africa, according to which a refugee was any 'person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part of the whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge' (chapter 8). These decisions raised the visibility of internally-displaced persons who accounted for a significant proportion of the global total.[10]

UNHCR is not a fossilized entity: it too has a history.[11] Governments and inter-governmental agencies
p. 7 articulated a series of 'durable solutions' to displacement, ↳ namely repatriation, resettlement or 'local integration'. To simplify a complex story, resettlement became the chief means (along with the deterrent effects of restrictive immigration policies) of resolving the situation of refugees who sought asylum between the wars. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Allies anticipated that DPs would wish to return to their country of origin. As the Cold War intensified, however, policy-makers and officials devoted much of their efforts to resettling refugees from communism. Repatriation became a dirty word. The international response to other crises varied according to geopolitical considerations: the UN entrusted the care of Palestinian refugees to a specialized 'relief and works' agency as a kind of holding operation (chapter 4), but member states showed scant interest in the refugee crisis following the partition of India which they regarded as a largely internal affair (chapter 5). The end of the Cold War took repatriation back to the top of the agenda—although repatriation had already been adopted in Cambodia and to a lesser extent in Vietnam during the 1980s (chapter 7).[12] This stance was accompanied by an emphasis among many wealthy countries on the need to deter mass displacement by focusing on conditions in 'refugee-generating' states.

Thus the twentieth-century refugee, as a person and as a category, was shaped by changing legal doctrine. We should not assume, however, that refugees were always defined according to a single formula. Those displaced

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as a result of the partition of India were excluded from the discussions leading to the 1951 Refugee Convention, because they were 'national refugees'. During the 1950s the British and the French resolved to keep the UNHCR out of refugee crises in Hong Kong and Algeria, on the grounds that they were a purely metropolitan responsibility. There has never been a 'one size fits all' definition of refugees in the Western and non-Western worlds.[13] It is more appropriate to think of multiple and overlapping regimes. Better still, we require a term that allows for different and contested doctrines and policies at a governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental level. These practices are one of the constituent components of what I shall call refugeedom.[14]

The concept of a refugee regime can be probed more closely to take account of organized programmes of humanitarian assistance devised by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These programmes did not begin in the twentieth century, but they became more ubiquitous and intrusive over time. The implications
p. 8 were ↳ enormous. Charitable organizations established, trained and supported teams of relief workers in the 'field' alongside a central administration charged with the task of disseminating publicity and fundraising. These institutions act in ways that are frequently taken for granted by public opinion in donor countries, but their operations need to be explained and contextualized historically. Most NGOs developed close links with governments and international organizations that commissioned programmes of assistance, thereby contributing to their budgets as well as raising their profile.[15]

NGOs trade upon their longevity and 'tradition' of humanitarian relief, but they rarely show anything other than superficial interest in their history. Nor, on the whole, do they seek to grasp the underlying causes of population displacement.[16] Part of my argument is that the humanitarianism they embody was an essential component in fashioning the modern refugee as a passive and 'traumatized' object of intervention as compared to the active, purposeful and much-travelled relief worker, a distinction that was not altered by the so-called shift from relief-based to rights-based humanitarianism. But the distinction is not just between the institutions of relief and the object of their concern. NGOs themselves might differ in approach, for example between faith-based and secular organizations. What was their relationship to intergovernmental bodies, to governments, to one another, and to refugees? What were their chosen instruments of action? What assumptions did staff workers take with them as they moved from one site of displacement to another?[17]

Critics point to a lack of accountability and transparency in the 'humanitarian international', reflecting the asymmetrical relations between donors and recipients.[18] Historical evidence suggests that good intentions derived from outrage at the treatment meted out to refugees. Cultural constructions of humanitarian purposefulness were an understandable response to human desperation and a tactic to stimulate public
p. 9 sympathy and generosity. Relief efforts were at times infused with ↳ a sense of displacement as a gendered calamity, persuading humanitarians of the need to provide for female refugees and orphaned children who had been abducted. Long-term plans also appealed to governments and relief workers, as in the doctrine of 'rehabilitating' refugees in order to prepare them for life as prospective citizens when they resettled. Aid agencies and politicians embraced the idea of 'development' as a means to support refugees and forestall future refugee crises. The antecedents of this idea stretch further back in time than is realized.

For many of the world's refugees the characteristic experience has been incarceration. This is not to discount those who managed to survive as 'self-settled' refugees: at the beginning of the twenty-first century, UNHCR estimated that around four in 10 registered refugees lived in a camp (the figure is higher in sub-Saharan Africa). The refugee camp too has a history, as a modern site of enumeration, categorization and assessment by officials and relief workers. When and for what reasons did this become an acceptable practice, and why did refugee camps emerge in some situations and not in others? What were the implications for the security and well-being of refugees? These questions have been addressed by human geographers, political scientists and social anthropologists, but historians have scarcely touched upon them. The refugee camp is something of a double-edged sword: a device for managing refugees, and a means of mobilizing refugees ideologically and militarily. History puts administrative practice and refugee experience alike into proper perspective.[19]

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A focus on legal formulations, bureaucratic practices and material deprivation nevertheless supplies only a partial picture.[20] Refugees were (and are) regularly forced to live in extreme conditions, without necessarily being deprived of the capacity to exercise a degree of control over their own lives. As Aihwa Ong indicates, 'in official and public domains refugees become subjects of norms, rules, and systems, but they also modify practices and agendas while nimbly deflecting control and interjecting critique'.[21] Yet they are habitually portrayed as if they are without agency, like corks bobbing along on the surface of an unstoppable wave of displacement. In a banal manifestation of the extent to which speechlessness and passivity have become the norm, it is now possible to purchase a plastic 'model refugee family', whose miniatures can be assembled as part of a war-gaming scenario in order to lend it greater 'authenticity'. It consists of a small group of women and children, their headscarves giving them the appearance of 'Balkan refugees', disconsolately surveying an
p. 10 imaginary landscape. They are meant to ↳ convey a helpless inability to contain or comprehend what is happening to them. As we shall see, portraying refugees as bewildered and bereft victims has a long genealogy.

Anonymity too is a central conceit of modern representation. Mass displacement is taken to render refugees indistinguishable. The unnamed individual embodies the condition of refugees everywhere who cannot avoid their amalgamation into a collective category of concern. One major NGO issued a glossy booklet in 1970 to appeal for funds, making the point that 'this booklet bears no title, only a picture of an unnamed refugee. That is not an oversight. It is untitled as a token of respect for the vast number of nameless refugees whose tenuous claim to identity is constantly threatened; lost in the meaningless anonymity of the dismal statistics on human tragedy'.[22] No-one captured this better than the French critic Roland Barthes in his blistering attack on 'exotic' travel films of the 1950s that displayed 'a romantic essence of the fisherman, presented not as a workman dependent by his technique and his gains on a definite society, but rather as the theme of an eternal condition, in which man is far away and exposed to the perils of the sea, and woman weeping and praying at home'. He added that the same applied to refugees, 'a long procession of which is shown at the beginning, coming down a mountain: to identify them is of course unnecessary; they are *eternal essences of refugees*, which it is the nature of the East to produce'. This made it unnecessary to supply historical context. The image, so to say, speaks for itself.[23]

This 'eternal essence' informs much of the photographic record of displacement, which is largely how the twentieth century came to know refugees. A cluster of renowned mid-twentieth century photographers ensured that a visual record survived of civil wars in Spain and China (in the work of Robert Capa), the Partition of India (Margaret Bourke-White) and the Korean War (Bert Hardy). In recent times photographers such as Simon Norfolk and Alixandra Fazzina have added to the archive.[24] Sometimes the image serves as an aesthetic statement, as in the famous photograph taken in Nasir Bagh refugee camp by Steve McCurry of an 'Afghan girl', beautiful and exotic, but unidentified and de-contextualized.[25] Major international organizations and NGOs have employed staff photographers to record conflict as well as life in refugee camps. Only on rare occasions are people identified, and often (as in UNHCR photographs of successive High Commissioners) this is to highlight the stature of important officials, whose serious gaze implies authority and determination, or the compassion shown by humanitarian celebrities. The British fashion photographer Rankin took a series of photographs of
p. 11 Congolese refugees who settled in Mugunga camp, Goma, and created a small ↳ exhibition for Oxfam, 'to put faces to the statistics'. He added, without a trace of irony, 'I'd love to go back'.[26] These images are not straightforward snapshots of reality but rather constitute an 'iconography of predicament', which are framed in such a way as to stimulate compassion and loosen wallets.[27] Their timelessness neither explains displacement nor illuminates refugees' strategies for survival.

I have dwelt at some length on the question of anonymity because it is part of a larger issue, namely the general absence of refugees in historical scholarship. It may be that this invisibility reflects a belief—difficult to sustain in the new millennium—that refugees emerged only fleetingly on the stage of history before being restored to a more settled existence. There is still a tendency to regard refugee crises as temporary and unique, rather than as 'recurring phenomena'.[28] Their supposedly episodic appearance and tangential life renders refugees less

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prominent than other social groups that have left a clear footprint in the documentary record. It might be thought that refugees themselves contributed to this state of affairs by preferring to forget their ordeal, but as we shall see the evidence does not sustain such a blanket explanation. In respect of refugees we therefore need to explain the 'production of neglect'.[29]

Finally, to bring refugees closer to the centre of this story is to explore and go beyond their responses to displacement. The testimony of refugees speaks to a fundamental alteration in their lives. Tesfay, an Eritrean refugee told Caroline Moorehead that 'at home I always felt safe. I was respected, popular, I had friends. Here I knew no one. I dreaded having to tell my story again and again, to lawyers, to the doctor, to the Home Office. The only place I could find to live was the past'.[30] This disconsolate statement underscores the importance of human relationships and connections. They may, as in Tesfay's case, connect to officials who required him to list his credentials. But this hardly exhausts the significance of the networks in which refugees are enmeshed. Refugees have been linked to one another across time and space as well as being connected to host populations and to former friends and neighbours who stayed put. These relationships and networks are multi-faceted. To quote Joan Scott, 'How are those who cross the thresholds received? If they belong to a group different from one already "inside", what are the terms of their incorporation? How do the new arrivals understand their relationship to the place they have entered?'[31] These issues are threaded throughout *The Making of the Modern Refugee*.

p. 12 I argue that refugees have helped to fashion themselves by recourse to history. In other words, the past has been a means to express their predicament and a channel for articulating and validating the possibilities of collective action. Whether engaged in politics, cultural activities or military campaigns, and whether retaliating, seeking restitution, or simply looking for a quiet life, a sense of history was often close to the surface of refugees' self-expression. To take this seriously is to think about the resources that refugees could call upon or create, such as memorial books commemorating the towns and villages that Jewish Holocaust survivors left behind in Central Europe after the Second World War and that Palestinians were forced to abandon in 1948. Financial and other tangible support from groups overseas also points to the presence of the past, because diaspora presupposes a history of migration, including forced displacement.[32]

Politics matters in affording refugees and their descendants the opportunity to engage with past episodes and sites of displacement and 're-placement'. The end of communism in Europe altered the terrain by creating conditions for the public commemoration of Soviet-era deportations, for example among Crimean Tatars, and of other displacements, such as those in the Italian-Yugoslav borderlands (chapter 9). But it is not always easy to establish a clear-cut link between political change and refugees' ability or willingness to confront the past. Those who were forced to flee as young adults following the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974 have now reached middle age. A new generation has grown up knowing this history through the tales told by their parents and grandparents. What of other sites of displacement? How far have the children and grandchildren of Chinese refugees who fled to Hong Kong after 1949 begun to engage with the history of displacement? What role did 'refugee historians' play in tracing and commemorating refugeedom in Rwanda and Burundi during the 1960s–70s and in 1994, and for what audience did they write?

I draw things together by reflecting on the uses to which refugees have put history and how history has given them a voice, even where the consequences may be disquieting. Refugees appropriated and interpreted history as a key resource that helped them to make sense of their displacement. This is invariably a contested process, exposing multiple and divisive viewpoints.[33] Stories can become histories capable of perpetuating conflict and sustaining further episodes of displacement. Here we come full circle: displacement exposed refugees to the apparatus of the state and the power exercised by non-state actors. Refugees might consequently aspire to exercise power on their own behalf, perhaps to turn the tables on those who had persecuted them in the first place. The resolution of refugeedom might culminate in reconciliation with one's erstwhile enemies, but it
p. 13 could also summon retribution and a call to arms. Although one would still be left with the insistent ↳ claims asserted by sovereign states, the most hopeful outcome (dare one say?) is to build cosmopolitan coalitions

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between refugees and non-refugees, promoting political debate, transparent justice, economic growth and social equality.

These considerations explain my decision to organize the material geographically and chronologically. Some episodes and sites necessarily get short shrift. I have said virtually nothing about refugees in countries such as Colombia, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, partly because I did not want my discussion to be dominated by the history of US intervention, but I hope my approach will prove useful to students of protracted refugee situations in Central and Latin America. Notwithstanding this omission, my global history shows how the practices and legacies of population displacement were not limited to one particular time or place but extended far and wide.[34] The consequences are also better understood by stretching the canvas as wide as possible. Refugees frequently demonstrated an awareness of displacement elsewhere, and it would be strange indeed if historians overlooked these connections.

The Making of the Modern Refugee thus proposes a distinctive approach to the subject by bringing the causes and consequences of global population displacement within a single frame. It seeks to explain the circumstances, practices and possibilities of population displacement. It examines structures and networks of power, social experience and human agency in various situations. It asks how the lives that were dismantled by involuntary displacement might at the same time be re-assembled. Whose lives took on a more positive meaning, why and in what circumstances? Beyond this, it explores how a particular means of thinking about refugees was deployed—how refugees came to be recognized by and beyond the realm of law, including by those who never came face to face with refugees. Under what conditions did refugees break free of the designation? In what ways did they seek to transcend or, conversely, to embrace their displacement: might this be not only a condition of being in the world but also a means of self-realization?[35] What does history have to say about refugees, and to refugees? History can help answer questions as to how refugees became an omnipresent part of the twentieth-century world, and how they negotiated the turbulent currents of displacement and the conditions imposed by the refugee regime; how, in short, there were many ways to be a refugee.

Notes

1 Howard Adelman, 'Modernity, Globalisation, Refugees and Displacement', in Alistair Ager (ed.), *Refugees: Perspectives on the Experience of Forced Migration* (Continuum, 1999), 83–110.
The publisher location for all references in this book is London, unless otherwise stated.

2 On population politics, see Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1989); Amir Weiner (ed.), *Landscaping the Human Garden: Twentieth-Century Population Management in a Comparative Framework* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

3 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 2nd edn (New York: Meridian Books, 1958), 267, 294; Aristide R. Zolberg, Astri Suhrke and Sergio Aguayo, *Escape from Violence: Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in the Developing World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), chapter 1; Norman Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001).

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