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ARTICLE

What is refugee history, now?[†]

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Abstract

Refugee history at present lacks a conceptual framework, notwithstanding the proliferation of recent contributions that contribute to enlarging the field. Our article seeks to advance refugee history by drawing upon extensive research into historical case studies and proposing the framework of refugeedom. Refugeedom takes proper account of the states and other actors that defined the ‘refugee’ as a category and sought to manage refugees as figures of concern, but it also insists upon the need to consider refugees as an active and assertive historical presence in situations of crisis and constraint. It offers a promising approach for analysing episodes and sites of mass population displacement from the perspectives of governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. Crucially, refugeedom incorporates the experiences of refugees and how they narrated displacement. Finally, the article outlines a direction for global history by drawing attention to past episodes of displacement in ways that capture not only its global scale, but also the multiple relationships and practices of refugeedom.

Keywords: refugeedom; refugee history; migration; displacement; historiography

Introduction

Refugee history has emerged as an important field of scholarship without anyone writing a manifesto or charting a course that scholars might follow. It has developed in piecemeal fashion, fuelled by an interest in the experiences of individuals and communities caught up in wars and other disasters and affected by upheavals such as border changes, decolonization and the formation of new states. It gained further traction as the phrase ‘refugee crisis’ began to appear regularly in the Western news media after 2014.¹ It seemed to draw inspiration from the challenge to methodological nationalism and from the transnational turn, familiar to readers of the *Journal of Global History*.² Consciously or otherwise, this scholarship has been inspired by debates in the later twentieth century relating to labour history, women’s history, gender history and the history of slavery.³ Above all, it emerged not only because of an interest in victimized and silenced groups, but also because refugees’ presence and their marginality promised to illuminate key

[†]The authors would like to dedicate this article to the memory of Gil Loescher (1945–2020) and in honour of his scholarship in and service to the field of refugee studies and refugee history. We would also like to thank the three anonymous reviewers, Heidi Tworek for her editorial expertise and comments, and the AHRC for funding the project of which this is one outcome.

¹To be sure, the phrase ‘global refugee crisis’ had already made an appearance two decades earlier. Gil Loescher, *Beyond Charity: International Cooperation and the Global Refugee Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

²Richard Drayton and David Motadel, ‘Discussion: The Futures of Global History,’ *Journal of Global History* 13, no. 1 (2018): 1–21.

³The landmark work by Joan Wallach Scott and her emphasis on writing not just contextualized but relational histories has been a powerful injunction to practitioners of refugee history. Joan Wallach Scott, ‘Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,’ *American Historical Review* 91, no. 3 (1986): 1053–75.

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aspects of twentieth-century history including global histories of people on the move and the diasporas they created.⁴

By asking ‘What is refugee history, now?’, we seek in this article to take stock of this emerging field and to suggest further promising lines of enquiry.⁵ We propose a refugee-focused approach that explores how such individuals and communities experienced and negotiated displacement and how they engaged in the past with the category of refugee. In what follows, we take account of different political and institutional contexts and constraints and examine a range of dynamic encounters with multiple actors.

We begin by suggesting that refugees, as individuals and groups, historically crafted their own spheres of being that can be obscured by an adherence to the categorical order imposed by modern states and the refugee regime. Refugees sometimes had (or sought to have) minimal interaction with these institutions. A broader framework is therefore needed. We employ the concept of ‘refugeedom’ to advance refugee history at different levels of investigation, including the global. The term originated in Russia during the First World War against the backdrop of unprecedented mass and multi-ethnic displacement of civilians. In the febrile politics of late tsarist Russia, it designated refugees as a new social category of concern. At the same time, displacement encouraged non-Russian patriotic intelligentsias to articulate and launch programmes of relief that instilled a sense of national identity that challenged imperial governance and subsequently carried over into post-war sovereign successor states. Refugeedom thus pointed to social and political upheaval. It also provided refugees with the opportunity to articulate their experiences of conflict, relief and resettlement.⁶

On these original foundations, we use the term ‘refugeedom’ to enlarge the historical field of vision beyond the presumptions around the refugee regime, whether in its incarnation at the international, national, regional or local level.⁷ Refugee history is more than various studies of institutions that managed refugees, let alone studies that serve to embellish the history of the nation state. Those studies, however, illuminating on their own terms, can excise displaced persons from the centre of the histories they tell and efface the social, economic, cultural and political worlds that refugees helped to create. Refugeedom makes it possible to grasp how refugees engaged with their categorization, whether by identifying with an official and externally imposed designation on the one hand or diverging or refusing it on the other. It is a means of acknowledging the power of the state, whether as the prime mover of displacement or as gatekeeper, but it does not presuppose that only the state-refugee nexus is primary and foundational. Refugeedom also invites a focus on the global: in particular, global events and

⁴Panikos Panayi and Pippa Virdee, eds., *Refugees and the End of Empire: Imperial Collapse and Forced Migration in the Twentieth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Jessica Reinisch and Elizabeth White, eds., *The Disentanglement of Populations: Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Postwar Europe, 1944–49* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Anna Holian and G. Daniel Cohen, ‘Introduction: The Refugee in the Post-War World,’ *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, no. 3 (2012): 313–25; Matthew Frank and Jessica Reinisch, eds., *Refugees in Twentieth-Century Europe: the Forty Years’ Crisis* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017); Simone Lässig and Jan C. Jansen, eds., *Refugee Crises, 1945–2000: Political and Societal Responses in International Comparison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). A bracing attempt to map the field is Jeremy Adelman, ‘What is global history now?’, accessed 31 March, 2021, <https://aeon.co/essays/is-global-history-still-possible-or-has-it-had-its-moment>, although the author does not mention refugees.

⁵Compare Thomas Duve, ‘What is Global Legal History?’, *Comparative Legal History* 8, no. 2 (2020): 73–115.

⁶Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Peter Gatrell, ‘Refugees – What’s Wrong with History?’, *Journal of Refugee Studies* 30, no. 2 (2017): 170–89. See also Anindita Ghoshal, Katarzyna Nowak and Alex Dowdall, ‘Reckoning with Refugeedom: Refugee Voices in Modern History,’ *Social History* 46, no. 1 (2021): 70–95.

⁷The term is separate from ‘refugeeness,’ as used, for instance, by Alice Szczepanikova, ‘Performing Refugeeness in the Czech Republic,’ *Gender, Place and Culture* 17, no. 4 (2010): 461–77, and Stephen Dobson, *Culture of Exile and the Experience of Refugeeness* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004).

processes that generated mass population displacement but also global and diasporic connections that take due account of non-state-centred experiences and practices.⁸

Methodologically, our preferred starting point for writing refugeedom into refugee history is to make the displaced more visible as purposeful agents by locating them on their own terms rather than those imposed by governments, prevailing state or institutional legal and administrative categories, or humanitarians. The following sections deploy refugeedom as a framework to think *with* refugees about refugee history. Bearing in mind that a full historiographic overview is not possible, the first section focuses on the influence of policy-driven refugee studies on the existing historiography. We then consider how refugees were positioned in relation to the state, including the part they played in co-constituting the state. Underscoring refugee agencies in these processes, historians can better understand the worlds that refugees made in displacement. Refugees also understood their own displacement through interactions with non-state interfaces and spaces, and the penultimate section supports critical methodological approaches to address realities that are difficult to capture within a state-centric framework. The final section adopts the methodological premise that source, voice and authorship are integral to framing refugees beyond statist or policy-driven perspectives and argues that this must be set alongside questions of the availability of sources and the politics of the archive and memory. We conclude with some summary remarks about refugee history and global history.

History, policy and the refugee regime

The proliferation of scholarship and a handful of overarching surveys make it impossible to speak any longer of ‘a general amnesia’, in the words of Philip Marfleet, regarding the active position of refugees in modern history. Yet, it remains difficult to identify a conceptual framework for refugee history.⁹ Whether it is a subfield of history or a subfield of interdisciplinary refugee studies, a growing number of scholars would probably identify themselves as practitioners of refugee history. Several research projects, online resources and other promising initiatives are also labelled as such.¹⁰

Our starting point addresses the need to conceptualize refugee history as something more than a succession of case studies and to go beyond disconnected histories of institutional intervention.

⁸Some accounts purport to adopt a global perspective but are problematic in ways that should become apparent in what follows. See, for example, the multi-authored volume, *The State of the World's Refugees: Fifty Years of Humanitarian Action*, ed. Mark Cutts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁹Philip Marfleet, ‘Displacements of Memory,’ *Refuge* 32, no. 1 (2016): 7–17 (p. 8). See also Michael R. Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Tony Kushner and Katharine Knox, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide: Global, National and Local Perspectives during the Twentieth Century* (London: Frank Cass, 1999); Gérard Noiriel, *Réfugiés et sans-papiers: la République face au droit d'asile, XIXe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 2006); Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Michel Agier and Anne-Virgine Madeira, eds, *Définir les réfugiés* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2017); Philipp Ther, *The Outsiders: Refugees in Europe since 1492* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); Greg Burgess, *Refugees and the Promise of Asylum in Postwar France, 1945–1995* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); Jochen Oltmer, *Die Epoche der Gewaltmigration: Flucht und Vertreibung im 20. und frühen 21. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019); Karen Akoka, *L'asile et l'exil - Une histoire de la distinction réfugiés/migrants* (Paris: La Découverte, 2020); Becky Taylor, *Refugees in Twentieth Century Britain: a History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

¹⁰For example, the AHRC-funded project “Reckoning with Refugeedom: refugee voices in modern history” (University of Manchester, 2018–21), <https://reckoningwithrefugeedom.wordpress.com/>; the ERC-funded project, “Unlikely Refugee: Refugees and citizens in East-Central Europe in the 20th century” (Masaryk Institute and Archives, Prague, 2019), <https://www.unlikely-refuge.eu/>; the AHRC-funded “Tracing the Belgian Refugees (University of Leeds), <https://belgianrefugees.leeds.ac.uk/>; the 1947 Partition Archive of testimonies, <https://www.1947partitionarchive.org/>; ‘Towards a decentred history of the Middle East: transborder spaces, circulations, frontier effects and state formation, 1920–1946’ (University of Neuchâtel); and the ‘Migrant Knowledge’ research group funded by the German Historical Institute, <https://migrantknowledge.org/>. Ongoing initiatives include <http://refugeehistory.org/> and <https://www.history.ac.uk/partnership-seminars/doing-refugee-history>.

Current scholarship offers little by way of representing refugees' experiences and existences on their own terms even as refugee history has addressed the realities of mass displacement on a global scale.¹¹ We are interested in the question of how refugee history can map contingencies and ambiguities of refugee lives and their interactions with each other, with host states, with their own national spaces and with global refugee regimes. This does not mean portraying displacement in essentialized fashion, as if the figure of 'the refugee' is self-evident.¹² Addressing how to write histories of refugeedom, our overview begins to engage with Paul Kramer's call as to the ways historians can think *with* rather than *of* refugees.¹³

As has often been remarked, policy imperatives and prescriptions have long shaped the broader field of refugee studies.¹⁴ In a vintage article that outlined parameters for the study of displaced persons, political scientist Barry Stein sought to identify 'the recurring patterned nature of refugee problems'. He argued that those problems were neither temporary nor unique. Stein suggested that social scientists, as well as refugee aid agencies, should examine the situation of 'refugees everywhere from a broad historical perspective that views them as recurring phenomena with identifiable and often identical patterns of behaviour and sets of causalities'. However, refugees in his analysis responded largely passively to the circumstances they faced; hence, Stein emphasized the need for external 'guidance' towards refugees.¹⁵

Other more historically-informed research was closely connected with debates on refugee policy.¹⁶ This produced voluminous accounts of institutions that intervened on behalf of refugees while keeping refugees firmly in the background.¹⁷ Perhaps because of this early scholarly angle, historians of migration, including Oscar Handlin, were sometimes consulted by policymakers who dealt with refugee issues.¹⁸ With the rise of refugee studies in the 1980s as a field of research, this connection between government policy and academia did little to encourage historians.¹⁹

¹¹Philip Marfleet, 'Refugees and History: Why We Must Address the Past,' *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (2007): 136–48; Dan Stone, 'Refugees Then and Now: Memory, History and Politics in the Long Twentieth Century: An Introduction,' *Patterns of Prejudice* 52, nos. 2–3 (2018): 101–06; Klaus Neumann, 'Uses and Abuses of Refugee History,' in *Refugee Journeys: Histories of Resettlement, Representation and Resistance*, eds. J. Silverstein and R. Stevens (Canberra: Australia National University Press, 2021); Ruth Balint, *Destination Elsewhere: Displaced Persons and Their Quest to Leave Postwar Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021); Becky Taylor, Karen Akoka, Marcel Berlinghoff and Shira Havkin, 'Boat People' *Resettlement to Western Europe and Israel: From the South China Sea to European Shores* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

¹²Liisa H. Malkki, 'Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization,' *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 3 (1996): 377–404.

¹³Paul A. Kramer, 'Unsettled Subjects: Inventing the Refugee in North American History,' *Journal of American Ethnic History* 39, no. 3 (2020): 5–16.

¹⁴Richard Black, 'Fifty Years of Refugee Studies: From Theory to Policy,' *International Migration Review* 35, no. 1 (2001): 57–78; Oliver Bakewell, 'Research Beyond the Categories: The Importance of Policy Irrelevant Research into Forced Migration,' *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21, no. 4 (2008): 432–53.

¹⁵Barry N. Stein, 'The Refugee Experience: Defining the Parameters of a Field of Study,' *International Migration Review* 15, nos. 1–2 (1981): 320–30.

¹⁶Sir John Hope Simpson, *The Refugee Problem: Report of a Survey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939). Shortly after the war, the newly created UNHCR sponsored Jacques Vernant, *The Refugee in the Post-War World* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1953). Both books provide an invaluable compendium of official policy, the role of voluntary agencies, and the economic and legal status of refugees in different countries.

¹⁷George Woodbridge, *UNRRA: The History of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration*, 3 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950); Louise W. Holborn, *The International Refugee Organization: A Specialized Agency of the United Nations, Its History and Work, 1946–1952* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956); idem, *Refugees: A Problem of Our Time. The Work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1951–1972*, 2 vols. (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1975); and *The State of the World's Refugees*.

¹⁸Handlin's landmark book, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People* (Boston: Little Brown, 1951), found its way to the UN Division of Refugees and DPs with a covering note expressing the hope that it would help convince governments to relax their immigration law and 'assume a more hospitable attitude toward newcomers': Elliot Cohen to Trygve Lie, 15 January 1947, S-0472-0073-26-00002, UN Archives, New York.

¹⁹Roger Zetter, 'Refugees and Refugee Studies – A Valedictory Editorial,' *Journal of Refugee Studies* 13, no. 4 (2000): 350–55. An exception is the account provided by Marrus, *The Unwanted*, although its focus is exclusively European.

Methodologically, the literature in refugee studies has opened up a rich vein for historians to exploit by problematizing formal legal and administrative definitions and approaches, while recognizing that dominant legal categories and manifestations of the refugee regime are products of the nation state order.²⁰ Yet, even recent interdisciplinary scholarship has discussed historical case studies or the development of legal categorizations in terms of what ‘may prove to be of use in a present-day context’.²¹ Historians are occasionally wont to apply the same ‘lessons learned’ approach to phenomenon: a recent study of relief and resettlement projects for displaced Russian and Soviet Jews explicitly invites contemporary policymakers to consider agricultural development initiatives as a means to ‘empower’ refugees. This history is offered as an illustration of the ‘practical mobilisation of history to build a better, somewhat more just world’.²² It demonstrates a mining of data to showcase neither refugees’ roles as historical actors nor their lived realities, but rather the particular elements of their situations which can be pointedly instrumentalized as ‘lessons’.²³

Some pushback to this policy-driven focus came from exiled political leaders and activists, some of them historians. As part of an effort to keep specific communities of refugees and others in the public eye, Palestinian exiles and refugees, for instance, kept up a steady stream of publications in which refugees occupy centre stage. The substantial literature relating to the 1948 *nakba* (catastrophe) is significant in relation to an ongoing political struggle. Whether these accounts shaped the field of refugee history more broadly is less clear.²⁴

This is not to discount the landmark publications of scholars from other disciplines whose work has been important to later generations of historians. Sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, human geographers, international lawyers and others – pioneers such as Eugene Kulischer, Louise Holborn and Joseph Schechtman, joined later by Elizabeth Colson, Barbara Harrell-Bond, Aristide Zolberg, Howard Adelman, Liisa H. Malkki and Jennifer Hyndman – made fundamental contributions to the study of mass population displacement. In doing so, they often incorporated a historical perspective.²⁵

²⁰Nevzat Soguk, *States and Strangers: Refugees and Displacements of Statecraft* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Emma Haddad, *The Refugee in International Society: Between Sovereigns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Andrew Shacknove, ‘Who is a Refugee?’ *Ethics* 95, no. 2 (1985): 274–84; Roger Zetter, ‘Refugees and Refugee Studies: A Label and an Agenda’, *Journal of Refugee Studies* 1, no. 1 (1988): 1–6; Daniel Kersting and Marcus Leuth, eds., *Der Begriff des Flüchtlings: Rechtliche, moralische und politische Kontroversen* (Berlin: J.B. Metzler, 2020); Rebecca Hamlin, *Crossing: How We Label and React to People on the Move* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021).

²¹Nathaniel H. Goetz, ‘Towards Self-sufficiency and Integration: An Historical Evaluation of Assistance Programmes for Rwandese Refugees in Burundi, 1962–1965,’ *New Issues in Refugee Research*, no. 87 (Geneva: UNHCR, 2003); Albert Kraler et al., ‘Learning from the Past: Protracted Displacement in the Post-World War II period,’ *Trafic Working Paper*, no. 2 (2020).

²²Jonathan Dekel-Chen, ‘Call and Response: Putting Agricultural History to Work: Global Action Today from a Communal Past,’ *Agricultural History* 9, no. 4 (2020): 513–44.

²³Tony Kushner has urged historians to challenge these instrumentalizations: Kushner, ‘Writing Refugee History - Or Not,’ in Frank and Reinisch, eds., *Refugees in Europe*, 51–65.

²⁴Edward Said with Jean Mohr, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (London: Faber, 1986); idem, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (Cambridge: Granta, 1999); Ahmad H. Sa’di and Lila Abu-Lughod, eds., *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

²⁵Eugene M. Kulischer, *Europe on the Move: War and Population Changes, 1917–1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948); Joseph B. Schechtman, *The Refugee in the World: Displacement and Integration* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Co., 1963); Louise W. Holborn, ‘Refugees: World Problems,’ *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 361–73; Elizabeth Colson, *The Social Consequences of Resettlement* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971); Barbara Harrell-Bond, *Imposing Aid: Emergency Assistance to Refugees* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Howard Adelman, ‘Palestinian Refugees, Economic Integration and Durable Solutions,’ in *Refugees in the Age of Total War*, ed. A. Bramwell, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 195–211; 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); Liisa H. Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995); Jennifer Hyndman, *Managing Displacement: Refugees and the Politics of Humanitarianism* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2000). The ethnography is now itself part of the historical record.

Emerging out of earlier policy-driven research on refugees, historians have written the prehistory of legal and institutional provision and studies of the interwar refugee regime and the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. We are now much better informed about the operations of the League of Nations specifically on behalf of Russian and Armenian refugees, which reveal a more complex picture than is suggested by older histories of its failings concerning Jewish refugees in the mid-late 1930s. As is now clear, the Office of the High Commissioner had limited capacity, but it launched innovations such as the Nansen Passport that relied upon a degree of international cooperation to enable the movement of refugees in search of employment. The League also provided a forum for international lawyers to discuss the nature of the ‘refugee problem’, a term that became embedded into later scholarship.²⁶ At the same time, a focus on the refugee regime produces an incomplete picture, since millions of people never came within its purview. The experiences of Greeks and Turks who were the subject of the involuntary population transfer in 1923 are a case in point.²⁷

When the Second World War ended, the Allies drew up plans for the management of an estimated forty million European civilians. They drew a distinction between ‘refugees’ and ‘Displaced Persons’. Whereas the former came to be described as ‘civilians not outside the national boundaries of their country’, the latter was defined as ‘outside the national boundaries of their country by reason of the war’ and expected to return to their countries of origin with the assistance of Allied authorities. A significant minority refused for political reasons to repatriate.²⁸

In the context of the global Cold War, the International Refugee Organization (IRO) and subsequently UNHCR became the main instruments for supporting European refugees in situ and in assisting others to resettle in third countries, provided refugees could demonstrate their eligibility under the terms of the Convention by providing evidence of a ‘well-founded fear of persecution’.²⁹

Post-war efforts to resettle demonstrate how institutions framed a Eurocentric and Atlanticist project on a global scale. The resettlement of DPs testified to global power relations. The IRO matched the needs of international organizations that wanted to close the DP operation and of Western countries that needed a cheap labour force and suffered labour shortage in particular sectors. The global dimension of resettlement comes to the fore in histories focused on the experience of refugees moved between Europe, North and South America, Australia and New Zealand. Indeed, the IRO embraced ideas of global development: it enlisted numerous non-governmental organizations to match DPs with employment opportunities in parts of the world in need of labour across various sectors, including sites with ongoing projects of post-war reconstruction. The historical experiences of refugees in resettlement schemes such as these shifted local and

²⁶Claudena M. Skran, *Refugees in Inter-War Europe: The Emergence of a Regime* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Dzovinar Kévonian, *Réfugiés et diplomatie humanitaire: les acteurs européens et la scène proche-orientale pendant l'entre-deux-guerres* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2004); Keith David Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015); Lettevall, Rebecka (2012), ‘Neutrality and Humanitarianism: Fridtjof Nansen and the Nansen Passports,’ in *Neutrality in Twentieth-Century Europe: Intersections of Science, Culture, and Politics after the First World War*, eds. R. Lettevall, G. Somsen and S. Widmalm, (London: Routledge, 316–36); Tristan Harley, ‘Refugee Participation Revisited: The Contributions of Refugees to Early International Refugee Law and Policy,’ *Refugee Survey Quarterly* (2020), <https://doi-org.manchester.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/rsq/hdaa040>.

²⁷Renée Hirschon, *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe: The Social Life of Asia Minor Refugees in Piraeus* (New York: Berghahn, 1989; 1998); *idem, ed., Crossing the Aegean: An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey* (New York: Berghahn, 2003).

²⁸Malcolm J. Proudfoot, *European Refugees: A Study of Forced Population Movements* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1957), 32, 115–16; Anna Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism: Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011).

²⁹G. Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Post-War Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); For an institutional perspective, see Irial Glynn, ‘The Genesis and Development of Article 1 of the 1951 Refugee Convention,’ *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, no. 1 (2012): 134–48. There is no space to deal with the extensive literature on immigration policy.

regional demographics in host states, which in turn affected the ways in which refugees experienced shifting categorizations of DP, immigrant, and eventually, citizen.³⁰

Yet, while the IRO had success in resettling particular refugees after the Second World War, the global or universal perspectives adopted by the UN and the UNHCR fell short of accommodating global realities for millions of refugees. These realities included statelessness and loss of nationality as a result of colonial rule or displacement caused by reasons not covered under the 1951 Convention.³¹ Palestinian refugees are an obvious example: their displacement resulted in the creation of a dedicated agency, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, to provide assistance in countries of 'temporary' asylum.³² Other organizations stepped in to fill gaps in protection and assistance, as when the Organisation of African Unity instituted a regional regime in 1969 to administer persons displaced because of decolonization conflicts across the continent.³³ In other cases, such as Hong Kong, international assistance did little to support refugees.³⁴ The resulting gaps in the state or international protection and assistance towards non-European refugees after 1951 offer lines of inquiry that would highlight the initiatives refugees took on their own account.

An area studies perspective can be helpful in drawing attention to regional or local refugee regimes and practices, as in work on East Asia and South Asia that draws attention to 'transnational and translocal processes that exist alongside the international practices shaping the management of forced migration'.³⁵ Likewise, critical work on the post-1945 category of 'national refugees' discloses how countless refugees fell outside the framework of the international refugee regime, either because they were assumed to find a route to citizenship or because they were deemed not to have crossed an international frontier even if as in the case of Italian refugees, they had been forced out of Italy's former colonial possessions.³⁶

In order to reorient scholarship on twentieth-century refugees towards practices that better inform global history, an obvious line of inquiry is how to move refugee history beyond deterministic borders of the state to allow greater focus on the global. For instance, current research on states that were not signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees promises to generate new insights.³⁷ Studying the history of colonized

³⁰Jayne Persian, 'Displaced Persons and the Politics of International Categorization,' *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 58, no. 4 (2012): 481–96; Suzanne Rutland, 'Subtle Exclusions: Postwar Jewish Emigration to Australia and the Impact of the IRO Scheme,' *Journal of Holocaust Education* 10, no. 1 (2001): 50–66; Sebastian Huhn, 'Negotiating Resettlement in Venezuela after World War II: An Exploration,' *Historical Social Research* 45, no. 4 (2020): 203–25.

³¹Glen Peterson, 'Sovereignty, International Law, and the Uneven Development of the International Refugee Regime,' *Modern Asian Studies* 49, no. 2 (2015): 439–68; Mira L. Siegelberg, *Statelessness: A Modern History* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2020).

³²For an overview, see Maya Rosenfeld, 'From Emergency Relief Assistance to Human Development and Back: UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees 1950–2009,' *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, nos. 2–3 (2010), 286–317.

³³Emmanuel Opoku Awuku, 'Refugee Movements in Africa and the OAU Convention on Refugees,' *Journal of African Law* 39, no. 1 (1995): 79–86.

³⁴Glen Peterson, 'To Be or Not to Be a Refugee: The International Politics of the Hong Kong Refugee Crisis, 1949–55,' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36, no. 2 (2008): 171–95; Jussi M. Hanhimäki, 'UNHCR and the Global Cold War,' *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (2008): 3–7.

³⁵Elaine Lynn-Ee Ho and Cabeiri deBergh Robinson, 'Introduction: Forced Migration in/of Asia – Interfaces and Multiplicities,' *Journal of Refugee Studies* 31, no. 3 (2018): 262–73 (p. 264); Laura Madokoro, Elaine Lynn-Ee-Ho and Glen Peterson, 'Questioning the Dynamics and Language of Forced Migration in Asia: The Experiences of Ethnic Chinese Refugees,' *Modern Asian Studies* 49, no. 2 (2015): 430–38; Sara E. Davies, 'Saving Refugees or Saving Borders? Southeast Asian States and the Indochinese Refugee Crisis, 1975–79,' *Global Change, Peace and Security* 18, no. 1 (2006): 3–24; Cabeiri deBergh Robinson, 'Too Much Nationality: Kashmiri Refugees, the South Asian Refugee Regime, and a Refugee State, 1947–1974,' *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, no. 3 (2012): 344–65.

³⁶Pamela Ballinger, *The World Refugees Made: Decolonization and the Foundation of Postwar Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020).

³⁷Maja Janmyr, 'No Country of Asylum: 'Legitimizing' Lebanon's Rejection of the 1951 Refugee Convention,' *International Journal of Refugee Law* 29, no. 3 (2017), 438–65. The 1967 Protocol turned the Convention into a 'universal' instrument by removing the original temporal and geographic limitations.

territories in Asia, Africa and the Middle East does more than enrich the non-western historical narrative: it yields important understandings of how attempts to manage refugees developed within and beyond the Eurocentric framework of protection and assistance.³⁸

This is not to say that a sharp dividing line can be drawn between developments in Europe and in colonial settings. To take one example, the flight of refugees from Ethiopia following the brutal Italian conquest in 1935 prompted a realization on the part of British officials in Kenya that they had – however reluctantly – a responsibility towards soldiers and civilians alike: the colonial governor recalled the plight of Assyrian refugees he encountered in Iraq a decade previously, many of whom had been left high and dry. Liberal opinion in Britain supported efforts to protect refugees who suffered at the hands of fascist rule, whether in Italy, Spain or Germany.³⁹ The transnational can be framed by considering other case studies in relation to the Global South without siphoning them off and confining the study of non-European refugees to geographical sub-areas. A global history approach makes possible a deeper historical grasp of the movement of refugees – a ‘pluralizing history’ as well as a pluralizing geography.⁴⁰

Where do these different components of the historiography leave refugees? By this we mean refugees ‘in history’ – their experiences, above all, and how they interpreted those experiences, in other words, refugees who not only ‘made history’ but who also sought to locate themselves in history, whether it be the history of the ‘nation’ or of other entities. The remainder of the article offers new approaches and perspectives that provide a framework in which refugeedom might enable a conversation between refugee history and global history.

Refugeedom and the state

It is well-understood that the formation of new states after the two world wars was a ‘refugee-generating process’, as Aristide Zolberg famously put it.⁴¹ An emerging historiography also points to the reverse relationship: how refugees help to constitute the state: the nation state, the proto-state, the fledgling state. This directs attention to the co-constitution of refugees and the state, including the dynamics of population displacement and programmes of national (re)construction. These dynamics can likewise be understood within the framework of refugeedom in that the term invites a focus on multiple and interrelated actors.⁴²

The following section historically contextualizes the definitions and categorizations used by states, international institutions and regional and local administrations to document refugee populations, with a critical eye on refugees’ agency in articulating their status on their own terms. It traces how a historical focus on refugeedom can reframe the role of refugees in constituting other aspects of the modern state. Exploring these objectives contributes new angles in refugee history. First, it can help explain global processes: for instance, the circulation of categorizations of displaced persons disrupted global norms in relation to early immigration controls as well as in conflicts over border sovereignty in the decolonized Global South. The global impact of refugee movements constituted other elements of state formation, leading to hardened ideological stances

³⁸On Eurocentrism, colonialism, and the refugee regime, see B.S. Chimni, ‘The Geopolitics of Refugee Studies: A View from the South,’ *Journal of Refugee Studies* 11, no. 4 (1998): 350–74; Lucy Mayblin, *Asylum after Empire: Colonial Legacies in the Politics of Asylum Seeking* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017); Ulrike Krause, ‘Colonial roots of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its effects on the global refugee regime,’ *Journal of International Relations and Development* (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-020-00205-9>.

³⁹Brett L. Shadle, ‘Reluctant Humanitarians: British Policy Toward Refugees in Kenya During the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935–1940,’ *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 47, no. 1 (2019): 167–86.

⁴⁰Georgia Cole, ‘Pluralising geographies of refuge,’ *Progress in Human Geography* 45, no.1 (2021): 92.

⁴¹Aristide R. Zolberg, ‘The Formation of New States as a Refugee-generating Process,’ *Annals of the American Association of Political and Social Science* 467 (1983): 282–96.

⁴²A recent study of the post-1918 successor states of Eastern Europe is illuminating on this score. Klaus Richter, *Fragmentation in East Central Europe: Poland and the Baltics, 1915–1929* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

on the part of both refugees and governments: this includes not only the case of the United States of America and Britain turning boats of Jewish refugees away during the Second World War, but the response to this by China and Japan.⁴³ The second contribution to refugee history is to launch a discussion on the worlds that refugees created. That is to say, the global circulation and global impact of refugees shaped new pasts, presents and futures as well as new imaginaries, politics, spaces and trajectories.

In relation to definition and categorization of displaced persons, we can draw a distinction between international legal definitions, government distinctions and vernacular usage. Those groups and individuals caught up in situations of mass displacement engaged with the definitions and categorization foisted upon them. Palestinian refugees embraced the label in so far as it drew attention to their exiled status and affirmed their determination to resist local integration or resettlement.⁴⁴ In the Indian subcontinent, on the other hand, Partition-era refugees rejected the label of 'refugee' and insisted that their entitlement to be regarded as full citizens.⁴⁵ By contrast, Latvian DPs who reached the UK after the Second World War under the European Volunteer Workers scheme was deemed by officials and employers to be economic migrants, whereas they perceived themselves as refugees from communism forced from their national homeland.⁴⁶ In the midst of global displacement, these kinds of regional and national self-representation carried considerable political significance.

The stakes were high in other cases too. For example, Vietnamese refugees had to contend with debates as to whether they were 'genuine' refugees or economic migrants, and thus whether they were entitled to be resettled or should be repatriated to Vietnam. Meanwhile, they remained for months or even years in camps in South East Asia, pending decisions as to their eligibility.⁴⁷ Official legal and administrative distinctions also had the potential to inflect vernacular representations and descriptions. In her path-breaking study of the experiences of refugees from China in the wake of the formation of the Chinese People's Republic in 1949, Laura Madokoro examines the multiple ascriptions that circulated at the time, including the pejorative term 'rice refugees' that officials in the British colony of Hong Kong deployed so as to avoid inflaming relations with the PRC, and which gained broader currency amongst the resident population and some humanitarian aid organizations.⁴⁸

Refugees meanwhile contested official designations and prescriptions. Emma Meyer addresses the evacuation in 1942 of tens of thousands of people of Indian descent from Japanese-occupied Burma to the South Indian district of Visakhapatnam – people who were not able to return at the war's end. She examines the administrative apparatus alongside the multiple demands made by the evacuees on the colonial authorities to insist on their dignity and rights.⁴⁹ A Global South perspective also illuminates issues of categorization in the wake of decolonization. For example, states in Asia and Africa confronted the challenge of how to categorize refugees: the government of

⁴³Aristide R. Zolberg, 'The Roots of American Refugee Policy,' *Social Research* 55, no. 4 (1988): 649–78; Gao Bei, *Shanghai Sanctuary: Chinese and Japanese Policy toward European Jewish Refugees during World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Atina Grossman, 'Remapping Relief and Rescue: Flight, Displacement, and International Aid for Jewish Refugees during World War II,' *New German Critique* 39, no. 3 (2012): 61–79; Jill Rosenthal, 'From "Migrants" to "Refugees": Identity, Aid, and Decolonization in Ngara District, Tanzania,' *Journal of African History* 56, no. 2 (2015): 261–79.

⁴⁴Elena Fiddian-Qasimiyeh, 'On the Threshold of Statelessness: Palestinian Narratives of Loss and Erasure,' *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39, no. 2 (2016): 301–21; Ilana Feldman, 'The Challenge of Categories: UNRWA and the Definition of a "Palestine Refugee",' *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, no. 3 (2012): 387–406.

⁴⁵N. Mahbubar Rahman and Willem van Schendel, 'I Am Not a Refugee': Rethinking Partition History,' *Modern Asian Studies* 37, no. 3 (2003): 551–84.

⁴⁶Linda McDowell, *Hard Labour: The Hidden Voices of Latvian Migrant 'Volunteer' Workers* (London: UCL Press, 2005).

⁴⁷Jana K. Lipman, *In Camps: Vietnamese Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Repatriates* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020).

⁴⁸Laura Madokoro, *Elusive Refuge: Chinese Migrants in the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

⁴⁹Emma Meyer, 'Resettling Burma's Displaced: Labor, Rehabilitation, and Citizenship in Visakhapatnam, India, 1937–1979' (PhD diss., Emory University, 2021).

Nigeria insisted that children whom UNHCR helped to relocate in Gabon during the Nigerian Civil War should be regarded as ‘Biafran evacuees’, whereas the government of Biafra insisted that they were ‘Biafran refugees’, an echo of rival versions of child displacement during the Greek Civil War a generation earlier.⁵⁰ The politics of categorization operated across time and space, and their interrogation requires a global perspective.

Political imperatives involving refugees emerged in spheres other than categorization. A distinctive approach incorporating refugees’ experiences shaping state-building projects emerges in the work of Laura Robson and Benjamin Thomas White. Each has examined the relationship between population displacement and the constitution of state authority in the interwar Arab Middle East, following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of the League of Nations. Robson draws attention to how British and French colonial authorities, with the approval of the League, settled Assyrian refugees in remote – and sometimes described as ‘empty’ – border regions in northern Iraq as part of the attempt to establish state authority. The British came to regard Assyrian refugees as a useful resource in seeking to neutralize Iraqi resistance. White shows that French officials settled Armenians in a ‘buffer zone’ in Syria for similar reasons, to consolidate colonial rule. While French action prompted Syrian leaders to mobilize in defence of the Syrian nation, the French mandatory regarded Armenian refugees as a threat but also an inspiring example of Syrian hospitality, ‘a way of asserting the nation’s moral character while also defining its boundaries’.⁵¹ Refugees’ experiences and their own interaction with buffer and border zones in sites of displacement thus played a significant mobilizing role in state formation.⁵²

Several scholars have analysed how the governments of the new states of India and Pakistan devised measures to ‘rehabilitate’ refugees, to create new administrative bodies to address property issues and ultimately to mould refugees into new citizens.⁵³ Refugeedom highlights the assertive role of refugees in these processes. Vazira Zamindar broke new ground by examining the dimension of the border as the embodiment of state authority and how it might be negotiated by citizens on either side. Her work pays attention to the creation of permits and passports to determine the right of abode.⁵⁴ These documents can at the same time be regarded as the material manifestation of the subtle way in which refugees contributed to shaping modern states’ immigration controls, entry and settlement conditions, not only in South Asia but across the globe, a process that can be traced back to the provision of Nansen passports a generation earlier.

Official documents can be decisive, but they do not tell the whole story. Our ongoing research finds many instances in which refugees criticized the actions of the League of Nations, the IRO and UNHCR for neglecting human rights. But refugees were also willing to let their imagination rip, inviting states and intergovernmental organizations to contemplate a world in which refugees could exercise autonomy, as when a Hungarian refugee seaman wrote to UNHCR in 1953 to

⁵⁰Bonny Ibhawoh, ‘Refugees, Evacuees, and Repatriates: Biafran Children, UNHCR, and the Politics of International Humanitarianism in the Nigerian Civil War,’ *African Studies Review* 63, no. 1 (2020): 568–92; Loring M. Danforth and Riki van Boeschoten, *Children of the Greek Civil War: Refugees and the Politics of Memory* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011).

⁵¹Laura Robson, *States of Separation: Transfer, Partition, and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017); Benjamin Thomas White, ‘Refugees and the definition of Syria, 1920–1939,’ *Past and Present* 235 (2017): 141–78 (p. 174); Victoria Abrahamyan, ‘Citizen Strangers: Identity Labelling and Discourse in French Mandatory Syria, 1920–1932,’ *Journal of Migration History* 6, no. 1 (2020): 40–61. See also Vigneswaran, Darshan, and Joel Quirk, eds., *Mobility Makes States: Migration and Power in Africa*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

⁵²Peter Gatrell, ‘War, Population Displacement and State Formation in the Russian Borderlands, 1914–1924,’ in *Homelands: War, Population and Statehood in the Former Russian Empire, 1918–1924*, eds. N. P. Baron and P. Gatrell (London: Anthem Books, 2004), 10–34.

⁵³Ravinder Kaur, ‘Distinctive Citizenship: Refugees, Subjects and Post-colonial State in India’s Partition,’ *Cultural and Social History* 6, no. 4 (2009): 429–46; Uditi Sen, *Citizen Refugee: Forging the Indian Nation after Partition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁵⁴Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, and Histories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

say, 'I have many practical ideas for solving this question of the Refugees', including one for a dedicated state or 'reservation' to be established by refugees themselves.⁵⁵ As Aihwa Ong writes in relation to Cambodian refugees who sought admission to the USA: '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'.⁵⁶ The following section considers aspects of such agency as exemplified in the historiography.

Refugeedom and refugee history: Beyond the state

This section addresses several ways to move histories of refugees outside the formal purview of the state. While we cannot explore all avenues in detail, the section begins with a discussion of the social history of living in the refugee camp. Refugeedom is then used to explore refugee history in relation to diasporas, refugees' interactions with non-state actors and their negotiation of environments and landscapes.

As a globally widespread institution, the refugee camp historically has served various purposes: a place of safety and protection (usually described by officialdom as 'temporary'), management and surveillance and a site of administrative convenience.⁵⁷ In this regard, several historians have attended to the pioneering work of sociologist Erving Goffman, who transformed the field with his study of the rules of the 'total institution' and what they implied for the behaviour of those confined within.⁵⁸ At the same time as being a site of confinement and scrutiny, the refugee camp was a site of multiple experiences and practices, including cultural production and political mobilization, even if refugee voices are often difficult to hear because the documentary record reflects external imperatives. Key historical contributions have nevertheless drawn upon but also transcended institutional record-keeping in ways that illuminate refugee perspectives.⁵⁹

An emerging body of work on camps in the recent past supports our contention that refugee history must be enlarged by considering how refugees not just inhabited but helped to shape the social world of the refugee camp. To take one example amongst many, the Philippines Refugee Processing Center on Bataan constituted 'a veritable international village' comprising social workers, psychologists and others, including refugees who were employed as interpreters. It was also, crucially, a hierarchical social world, in which class and gender distinctions and political divisions undermined any straightforward assumptions of a singular 'refugee experience'.⁶⁰ Non-human interactions structured experiences for refugees as well, as Benjamin Thomas White shows in his study on animals in Baquba camp, Iraq after the First World War. This, too, is a rewarding line of enquiry.⁶¹

⁵⁵UNHCR Records and Archives, Geneva, Sub-fonds 1 Individual Case Files, Fonds 17, Records Relating to Protection, IC11515.

⁵⁶Aihwa Ong, *Buddha is Hiding: Refugees, Citizenship, the New America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p. xvii.

⁵⁷Kirsten McConnachie, 'Camps of Containment: A Genealogy of the Refugee Camp,' *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism and Development* 7, no. 3 (2016): 397–412.

⁵⁸Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961).

⁵⁹Derek Holmgren, 'Managing Displaced Populations: the Friedland Transit Camp, Refugees, and Resettlement in Cold War Germany,' *Central European History* 53, no. 2 (2020): 335–52; Adam R. Seipp, *Strangers in the Wild Place: Refugees, Americans, and a German Town, 1945–1952* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013); Christian A. Williams, *National Liberation in Postcolonial Southern Africa: A Historical Ethnography of Swapo's Exile Camps* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Ilana Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief: Humanitarian Predicaments and Palestinian Refugee Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018); Jordanna Bailkin, *Unsettled: Refugee Camps and the Making of Multicultural Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Joanna T. Tague, *Displaced Mozambicans in Postcolonial Tanzania: Refugee Power, Mobility, Education, and Rural Development* (London: Routledge, 2018).

⁶⁰Lipman, *In Camps*, 99.

⁶¹Benjamin Thomas White, 'Humans and Animals in a Refugee Camp: Baquba, Iraq, 1918–20,' *Journal of Refugee Studies* 32, no. 2 (2018): 217–18. In this connection, see the discussion below on the materiality of refugees memory books.

An externalist, top-down perspective overlooks the evidence of a variety of cultural, social, economic and political activity on the part of refugees. One compelling illustration of the refugee camp as a liminal space is the way in which, through an ironic turn of events, European DPs repurposed the famous Italian film studio, Cinecittà, as a refugee camp. Conditions were cramped and disease was rife. There were stories of crime and of children running amok – an indication of the anxieties that officials here and elsewhere felt about their prospects and the implications for ‘rehabilitation’ more broadly. However, DPs filled this ‘vacuum’ with life, contrary to narratives disseminated by contemporary aid workers about widespread ‘apathy’.⁶² National historiographies, when interested in the lives of refugees, often showcased cultural activities from dance groups through schooling to religious rites as an expression of vivid national life in exile.⁶³

To be sure, not all refugees were placed in refugee camps. In this connection, we should acknowledge the significance of refugee diasporas that were scattered in self-settled communities. In the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution more than a million Russian exiles constituted a significant albeit politically and socially heterogeneous diaspora.⁶⁴ The post-war Armenian diaspora also maintained an active presence in Syria, France, the United States of America and elsewhere. Like the later counterparts – the global Palestinian, Jewish, Kurdish, Tamil, Polish and other diasporas – their affiliations and networks played a crucial role in questions of ‘identity’, including how refugees understood and characterized the history of their own displacement. Refugee diasporas exchanged knowledge about the opportunities to access aid and support from local, national or international agencies, and about how best to navigate the refugee regime. Their networks allowed refugees to circulate political ideas and texts and to share knowledge of opportunities and social and cultural practices across multiple sites.⁶⁵ Refugee diasporas helped shift the sites of political action. For example, Mezna Qato pinpoints the oppositional political voice of Palestinian refugees in Jordan as they responded to the imposed school curriculum.⁶⁶

Going further and linked to how refugees experience space, social networks and institutions, we can ask what not only the diaspora meant but what returning meant to refugees who embarked on repatriation journeys. These experiences, too, belong to global histories of displacement. In addition to providing descriptive examples of global and transnational travels, practices and networks, ‘homecoming’ and ideas of home/homeland are integral aspects of the historical dimensions and constitution of refugeedom.⁶⁷ David Newbury, in his study of the complexities of coming home for Rwandan refugees, and Florian Bieber in his work on Yugoslav refugees in Egypt, supports the view that the role of states constructing homelands for repatriated or returning refugees has been critical to understanding ‘return’.⁶⁸ More critically, the historical dimensions of refugees’ imagined

⁶²Noa Steimatsky, ‘The Cinecittà Refugee Camp (1944–1950),’ *October* 128 (2009): 23–50. Compare Henry B.M. Murphy, *Flight and Resettlement* (Paris: UNESCO, 1955).

⁶³Anna Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism: Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011).

⁶⁴Laurie Manchester, ‘How Statelessness Can Force Refugees to Redefine their Ethnicity: What Can Be Learned from Russian Émigrés Dispersed to Six Continents in the Inter-war Period?,’ *Immigrants & Minorities* 34, no. 1 (2016): 70–91.

⁶⁵The literature is too extensive to cite here. In relation to the circulation of migrant knowledge, see https://www.imis.uni-osnabrueck.de/en/research/4_production_of_knowledge/research_group_the_production_of_knowledge_on_migration.html.

⁶⁶Mezna Qato, ‘A Primer for a New Terrain: Palestinian Schooling in Jordan, 1950,’ *Journal of Palestine Studies* 48, no. 1 (2018): 16–32. See also Marion Fresia and Andreas von Känel, ‘Beyond State of Exception? Reflections on the Camp through the Prism of Refugee Schools,’ *Journal of Refugee Studies* 29, no. 2 (2015): 251.

⁶⁷Lynellyn D. Long and Ellen Oxfield, ‘Introduction,’ in *Coming Home? Refugees, Migrants, and Those Who Stayed Behind*, eds. Long and Oxfield (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 3.

⁶⁸David Newbury, ‘Returning Refugees: Four Historical Patterns of ‘Coming Home’ to Rwanda,’ *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47, no. 2 (2005): 252–85; Florian Bieber, ‘Building Yugoslavia in the Sand: Dalmatian Refugees in Egypt, 1944–1946,’ *Slavic Review* 79, no. 2 (2020): 298–322.

returns as told in their own words offer powerful insight into homecomings and the romanticization of home, along with issues of identity, memory and social roles.⁶⁹

Whether as return, settlement or onward migration, the movement of refugees has had important environmental and economic consequences. Studying environmental history alongside refugee history and the concept of refugeedom exposes a broader spectrum of refugee experiences and their representation, but also indicates how environments shaped displacement, emergency relief and longer-term development.⁷⁰ The presence of refugees historically had a transformative impact on the landscape and the built environment, the economy and the labour market.⁷¹

Metaphors of environmental catastrophe – the characterization of refugees as a ‘flood’ or ‘wave’, an ‘avalanche’ and a ‘plague of locusts’ – helped governments to prepare ground for mass displacement by characterizing and demonizing an entire group as an ‘infestation’ in need of removal. This is exemplified by the actions of the Young Turk leadership to forcibly exile the Armenian minority during the First World War. Yet, displaced Armenians who survived the Turkish onslaught in 1915 eventually settled the frontier environment in ways their persecutors did not anticipate.⁷²

Environmental history can be brought to bear on refugee history in more direct ways. For example, governments and intergovernmental organizations regarded refugees as an environmental resource, as with projects to settle them in ‘empty’ or ‘underdeveloped’ parts of the world.⁷³ Refugees took advantage of such plans, often exercising their own initiatives without direct state involvement. But there are also instances in which refugees resisted the arrangements made on their behalf. The planned resettlement of Hindu refugees in new colonies following the Partition of India is a clear example that points to refugeedom as a field of contestation rather than the unbilled exercise of state power.⁷⁴

The place of refugees in the built and natural environment intersects with the discussion of the materiality of refugee camps and other sites of settlement. There is plenty of evidence of refugees’ improvisation in distressing circumstances, as when Hungarian refugees after the First World War peace settlement were obliged to make use of railway carriages as ‘temporary’ accommodation.⁷⁵ Refugees elsewhere were no less resourceful and inventive. For example, Nasser Abourahme’s ethnography of cement in the Dheishe refugee camp in Bethlehem tracks the life cycle of what might appear to be a mundane material, but which proved an essential resource for refugees.⁷⁶

⁶⁹Laura C. Hammond, *This Place Will Become Home: Refugee Repatriation to Ethiopia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Roselinde Den Boer, ‘Liminal Space in Protracted Exile: The Meaning of Place in Congolese Refugees’ Narratives of Home and Belonging in Kampala,’ *Journal of Refugee Studies* 28, no. 4 (2015): 486–504.

⁷⁰Micah S. Muscolino, ‘Violence Against People and the Land: The Environment and Refugee Migration from China’s Henan Province, 1938–1945,’ *Environment and History* 17, no. 2 (2011): 291–311.

⁷¹We do not engage here with the consequences of climate change although contemporary studies of refugees and climate change offer salient points for thinking about the history of refugees in relation to natural resources.

⁷²Sam Dolbee, ‘The Desert at the End of Empire: An Environmental History of the Armenian Genocide,’ *Past & Present* 247, no. 1 (2020): 197–233; Ronald Grigor Suny, *They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else: A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015). On metaphors, see Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking*, 200.

⁷³Chris Gratien, ‘The Ottoman Quagmire: Malaria, Swamps, and Settlement in the Late Ottoman Mediterranean,’ *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 49, no. 4 (2017): 583–604. Davide Rodogno, ‘International Relief Operations in Palestine in the Aftermath of the First World War: The Discrepancy between International Humanitarian Organisations’ Visions, Ambitions, and Actions,’ *Journal of Migration History* 6, no. 1 (2020): 16–39.

⁷⁴Sen, *Citizen Refugee*; Gyanesh Kudaisya, ‘The Demographic Upheaval of Partition: Refugees and Agricultural Resettlement in India, 1947–67,’ *Journal of South Asian Studies* 18, supplement issue (1995): 73–94.

⁷⁵Friederika Kind-Kovács, *Budapest’s Children: Humanitarian Relief in the Aftermath of the Great War* (forthcoming).

⁷⁶Nasser Abourahme, ‘Assembling and Spilling-over: Towards an ‘Ethnography of Cement’ in a Palestinian Refugee Camp,’ *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 39, no. 2 (2015): 200–17; Ashika L. Singh, et al., ‘Displacement & Domesticity since 1945: Refugees, Migrants and Expats Making Homes, following the EAHN’s Sixth Thematic Conference (Brussels, 27–28 March 2019),’ *Architectural Histories* 8, no. 1 (2020): 1–9.

Refugees are and have been economic actors and agents in different local, regional and global contexts.⁷⁷ The economic components of refugee history are varied, and they include not only state imperatives but also the broad dynamics of the international business cycle. Katy Long points out that in the 1920s and early 1930s Western governments were disposed to accept refugees based on economic criteria, in effect treating them as migrants when they were needed to replenish the labour force. No clear international distinction was made between political refugees and impoverished migrants, but the Great Depression reversed that policy, and the distinction remained entrenched in ways that fall beyond the scope of this article.⁷⁸

Less well covered in refugee history is the circulation of working capital, and namely the global networks that allowed this type of circulation. Amongst other key findings, Circassian refugees in the new city of Amman facilitated the expansion of Ottoman networks of capital.⁷⁹ Thousands of Palestinian refugees in the Gulf integrated into the labour market in oil-rich states such as Kuwait and sent remittances home to family members in the camps or in Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza.⁸⁰ More work is needed on the historic role of refugees in the global circulation of remittances within diaspora and refugee camp communities, taking the discussion beyond issues around black market transactions.⁸¹ Meanwhile, there is an emerging economic history of population displacement that connects with key themes around refugees as a business opportunity for non-refugees. A new study of the Australian context provides a compelling illustration of the multiple manifestations of business, namely the faded business of mineral resource extraction on the Pacific island of Nauru and the intense new business involved in extracting value from confining and containing refugees on Nauru as part of the Australian government's 'refugee processing' procedures.⁸²

Refugeedom provides a platform to study these multiple interactions between refugees and other actors and spaces. Methodologically, it reformulates refugees' actions within but also beyond the bounds of the state, and draws attention to the local, national and global forces and constraints that shaped refugee experiences.

Archives, voice and authorship

In our reconceptualization of refugee history, questions inevitably arise about the source, voice and narrative agency. These issues are directly linked to our argument about refugeedom. To begin, we reflect here on practices of collection and preservation of source material in the archive, museum and other repositories, and on the dispersal, disappearance, plunder or destruction of archives. We also take account of issues around access and confidentiality. These issues have been debated extensively, but not in relation to refugee history.⁸³

⁷⁷Claudena Skran and Evan Easton-Calabria, 'Old Concepts Making New History: Refugee Self-reliance, Livelihoods, and the 'Refugee Entrepreneur'', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 33, no. 1 (2020): 1–21.

⁷⁸Katy Long, 'When Refugees Stopped being Migrants: Movement, Labour and Humanitarian Protection,' *Migration Studies* 1, no. 1 (2013): 4–26.

⁷⁹Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky, 'Circassian Refugees and the Making of Amman, 1878–1914,' *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 49, no. 4 (2017): 605–23.

⁸⁰George S. Naufal, 'Labor Migration and Remittances in the GCC,' *Labor History* 52, no. 3 (2011): 307–22.

⁸¹Anna Lindley, *The Early Morning Phone Call: Somali Refugee Remittances* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010). On the black market in DP camps in post-war Germany, see Mark Wyman *DPs: Europe's Displaced Persons, 1945–1951* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 116–7.

⁸²Julia C. Morris, *From Phosphate to Refugees: The Offshore Refugee Boom in the Republic of Nauru* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, forthcoming).

⁸³On archival dispersal, see the blog post by Nick Underwood, April 2019, accessed 4 November, 2020, <https://migrantknowledge.org/2019/04/18/following-the-archives-migrating-documents-and-their-changing-meanings/>. On plunder, see Rona Sela, 'The Genealogy of Colonial Plunder and Erasure – Israel's Control over Palestinian Archives,' *Social Semiotics* 28, no. 2 (2018): 201–29; Nur Masalha, *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory* (London: Zed Books 2012), 135–47. On destruction, see David Anderson, 'Guilty Secrets: Deceit, Denial, and the Discovery of Kenya's 'Migrated Archive'', *History Workshop Journal* 80, no. 1 (2015): 142–60. Space precludes

The material traces of refugees themselves survive in a haphazard fashion, if at all. Inevitably, this supports a top-down perspective in which refugees are the object rather than the subject of their own history. The Arolsen Archives, originally the holdings of the International Tracing Service, are a model of good practice, in terms of access and digitization, but the commitment of time and personnel is considerable. Other institutions, including major agencies such as UNHCR, not to mention prominent NGOs, such as Christian Aid, Save the Children and CARE, as well as the American Friends Service Committee and the World Council of Churches, have limited resources and other priorities.⁸⁴ But such records as are available are immensely informative, not least about the global scope of aid work and the peripatetic activities of staffers who moved from one site to another.⁸⁵

The oral history of refugees is extensive and rich and provides a way of telling refugee history in ways that might complicate or de-familiarize established narratives.⁸⁶ Oral history archives, preserving often both the original video and audio recordings as well as transcriptions, can buck the trend of top-down collection of refugee stories. However, as archivist Paul Dudman writes regarding the University of East London's Refugee Council Archive, the challenges include deciding whose voices are represented, and issues of trust in the process of collecting testimonies.⁸⁷ A separate issue relates to silence in archived oral testimony: individual refugees might repress memories of displacement.

Refugees spoke to different audiences, and it is necessary to search for their voices through local and regional archives as well as major institutional repositories where global initiatives to 'manage' refugees or provide 'durable solutions' may be found in abundance. Bearing in mind that sources relating to refugee relief work sometimes turn up in unexpected places, the process of archiving refugeedom and accessing relevant source material requires a global approach that invites historians to link archives in India to those in Geneva, or in Jerusalem to those in London, and in Warsaw to those in New York.⁸⁸

Once through the doors of the archive, historians of refugeedom can examine the records concerning the relationship between refugees and those who wielded authority over them. This can be something as fundamental as the language in which the records were written. UNHCR, for example, handled thousands of petitions in the 1950s and 1960s, and often had to get them translated from Russian, Hungarian, Albanian, Arabic and even Esperanto into the languages of international diplomacy, namely English and French. Translations designed to make refugee testimony

us from considering here the role of museums in preserving and displaying refugee history, on which see Chiara O'Reilly and Nina Parish, 'Suitcases, Keys and Handkerchiefs: How are Objects Being Used to Collect and Tell Migrant Stories in Australian Museums?' *Museums & Social Issues* 12, no. 2 (2017): 99–114.

⁸⁴Accessed 16 November, 2020, <https://arolsen-archives.org/en/>. See also Henning Borggräfe, Christian Höschler, and Isabel Panek, eds., *Tracing and Documenting Nazi Victims Past and Present* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020).

⁸⁵Two good starting points for historians are Peter Redfield, 'The Unbearable Lightness of Expats: Double Binds of Humanitarian Mobility,' *Cultural Anthropology* 27, no. 2 (2012): 358–82; and Bertrand Taithe, 'The Cradle of the New Humanitarian System? International Work and European Volunteers at the Cambodian Border Camps, 1979–1993,' *Contemporary European History* 25, no. 2 (2016): 335–58.

⁸⁶Dawn Chatty, *Displacement and Dispossession in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Gadi BenEzer, *The Ethiopian Jewish Exodus: Narratives of the Migration Journey to Israel 1977–1985* (London: Routledge, 2002); Urvasi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1998); Nicki Kindersley, 'Southern Sudanese Narratives of Displacement, and the Aambiguity of 'Voice',' *History in Africa* 42 (2015): 203–37.

⁸⁷Paul Dudman, 'Oral History and Collective Memory: Documenting Refugee Voices and the Challenges of Archival Representation,' Working paper (2019); Lindsay French, 'Refugee Narratives, Oral History and Ethnography, Stories and Silence,' *The Oral History Review* 46, no. 2 (2019): 267–76.

⁸⁸Jean Allman, 'Phantoms of the Archive: Kwame Nkrumah, a Nazi Pilot named Hanna, and the Contingencies of Postcolonial History Writing,' *American Historical Review* 118, no. 1 (2013): 104–29; Jordanna Bailkin, 'Where Did the Empire Go? Archives and Decolonization in Britain,' *American Historical Review* 120, no. 2 (2015), 884–99.

intelligible for relief workers or for eligibility officers pose questions of mediation and disclose prevailing power relations that put refugees at an immediate disadvantage.⁸⁹

Many landmark publications in refugee history have succeeded in recovering the voices of refugees in different sites of displacement who recounted their experiences, sought protection and demanded their rights. However, there is much more to be done to understand how refugees interpreted their situation and confronted those who exercised power over them.⁹⁰ Studies of refugee petitions point one way forward. Anne Irfan has examined the purpose, form, content and tone of Palestinian refugee petitions, and highlighted the performative character of the petition.⁹¹ Beyond petitioning, there is scope also to consider other texts that refugees have created, whether memoirs or works of fiction, songs or poems, guidebooks, photographs and other cultural products.⁹²

Tracing and exploring the changing policies and practices on behalf of and by refugees in relation to gender while at the same time accounting for women's experiences has been fragmentary at best.⁹³ While the images of refugee women and children feature in scholarship and fundraising materials alike, it has been the male refugee whose voice has usually been taken as the default in representing refugees' 'experience'. Notable exceptions exist, including work by Rosemary Sayigh on female refugees in Lebanon's Palestinian camps.⁹⁴ In many instances, however, male refugees assumed positions of relative power in their communities; media and academic publications foregrounded these male voices and narratives, that is, if they considered refugee voices at all. In short, refugee women were often 'put in their place' not only by the authorities but also by their male counterparts, and this is reflected in the archive.⁹⁵

The intersection of class, gender, race, sexual orientation and other identity markers influenced the experience of refugees and shaped the politics of voice. Few if any refugees would have disclosed being gay to the authorities, lest those determining their eligibility or provide for their protection would refuse to engage with them on grounds of their sexuality.⁹⁶ Queering refugee history to explore the experiences and voices of LGBT refugees is a real challenge but to avoid confronting it is to fall into the trap, as Antonio Zappulla puts it, of forgetting them twice over.⁹⁷

This brings us to our final set of reflections, about refugees' capacity to write their own history, the conditions under which they do so and the purpose these writings serve. An

⁸⁹Peter Gatrell, 'Raw Material: UNHCR's Individual Case Files as a Historical Source, 1951–1975,' *History Workshop Journal* 92, forthcoming.

⁹⁰Gatrell, et al., 'Reckoning with Refugeeedom'; Anthea Vogl, 'The Genres and Politics of Refugee Testimony' *Law & Literature*, 30, no. 1 (2018): 81–104.

⁹¹Anne Irfan, 'Petitioning for Palestine: Refugee Appeals to International Authorities,' *Contemporary Levant* 5, no. 2 (2020): 79–96. See also Nathan A. Kurz, 'Jewish Memory and the Human Right to Petition, 1933–53,' in *The Institution of International Order: from the League of Nations to the United Nations*, eds. S. Jackson and A. O'Malley (London: Routledge, 2018), 90–110.

⁹²For valuable discussion of the photographic record created and retained by European Displaced Persons, see Tamara West, 'Remembering Displacement: Photography and the Interactive Spaces of Memory,' *Memory Studies* 7, no. 2 (2014): 176–90; Lynda Mannik, *Photography, Memory, and Refugee Identity: The Voyage of the SS Walnut, 1948* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013).

⁹³Katherine Jolluck, *Exile and Identity: Polish Women in the Soviet Union During World War II* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002); Atina Grossmann, 'Victims, Villains, and Survivors: Gendered Perceptions and Self-Perceptions of Jewish Displaced Persons in Occupied Postwar Germany,' *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11, nos. 1–2 (2002): 291–318; Tara Zahra, 'The Psychological Marshall Plan': Displacement, Gender, and Human Rights after World War II,' *Central European History* 44, no. 1 (2011): 37–62.

⁹⁴Rosemary Sayigh, 'Palestinian Camp Women as Tellers of History,' *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27, no. 2 (1998): 42–58.

⁹⁵Katarzyna Nowak, 'A Gloomy Carnival of Freedom. Sex, Gender, and Emotions among Polish Displaced Person in the Aftermath of World War II,' *Aspasia* 13, no. 1 (2019): 113–34.

⁹⁶Ellen Scheinberg, 'Canada's Deportation of "Mentally and Morally Defective" Female Immigrants after the Second World War,' in *Migration and Mental Health: Past and Present*, ed. M. Harper (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 171–98.

⁹⁷Antonio Zappulla, 'Forgotten Twice: The Untold Story of LGBT Refugees,' World Economic Forum, 19 January 2018, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/01/forgotten-twice-lgbt-refugees/>. See also Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú, *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

extensive social science scholarship is concerned with refugees' narratives of displacement, encampment, journeys, resettlement and repatriation, as well as a multiplicity of commemorative installations and practices.⁹⁸ Historians who were themselves refugees have contributed to these resources. Mario J. Azevedo's study of Mozambicans who fled Portuguese colonial rule opens with his intention as a former refugee to 'save for future generations a recent history that might soon be forgotten forever'.⁹⁹

There is a critical political component here, associated especially with diasporic initiatives. It was apparent in the efforts of émigré organizations in the 1920s to get Russian children to write accounts of exile, as part of a project to preserve 'our national property, our youth as a whole'.¹⁰⁰ Other projects were even more systematic. A pertinent example of a politicized history is the Hutu 'refugee historians' who fled Burundi and were cocooned in Tanzania's refugee camps created a 'mythico-history' that was widely disseminated and purported to validate their claims to the land while depicting Tutsis as imposters.¹⁰¹ Similarly, Sahrawi elites created and circulated a narrative of a cohesive group identity that effaced any history of prior 'tribal' affiliations.¹⁰² Tibetan refugees perceived themselves as guardians of a distinctive civilization that needed to be safeguarded in the face of the Chinese occupation of their homeland.¹⁰³ In the aftermath of Partition, the Bengali newspaper *Jugantar* published a series of essays on 'The abandoned village' (*Chhere asha gram*). Reissued as a complete collection in 1975, the essays spoke of the inexplicable events of 1947 and the loss of ancestral 'home' and Bengali 'motherland', portrayed as something 'sacred and beautiful'. The authors composed a history that is informed by nostalgia for a place that is now 'empty' and devoid of a Bengali presence.¹⁰⁴

Memory or 'memorial' books have played an important part in refugees' narration of their own displacement. Memorial books encapsulate a sense of loss but also have the potential to assert a sense of self.¹⁰⁵ They reconstruct a history of the abandoned settlement, enumerate its former inhabitants and their dwellings, and establish a connection between the displaced and their original homes. Ancestral connections were also significant for Han Chinese refugees who recreated elaborate clan genealogies in Thailand after they fled there from Yunnan in 1949.¹⁰⁶ Websites that draw attention to Armenian sites in the Ottoman Empire as well as Jewish memorial books testifying to life in Eastern Europe before the Holocaust are a didactic means to educate future generations. The best known examples are Palestinian village books and online compilations of 'destroyed villages' has an overtly political purpose, being informed by the realization that previous generations' careful investment in the land and their arduous toil had been dissipated.¹⁰⁷

⁹⁸Gadi BenEzer and Roger Zetter, 'Searching for Directions: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges in Researching Refugee Journeys,' *Journal of Refugee Studies* 28, no. 3 (2015): 297–318.

⁹⁹Mario J. Azevedo, *Tragedy and Triumph: Mozambique Refugees in Southern Africa, 1971–2001* (London: Heinemann, 2002), x.

¹⁰⁰Elizabeth White, 'Relief, Reconstruction and the Rights of the Child: The Case of Russian Displaced Children in Constantinople, 1920–22,' in *Displaced Children in Russia and Eastern Europe, 1915–1953: Ideologies, Identities, Experiences*, ed. N. Baron (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 70–96.

¹⁰¹Marc Sommers, *Fear in Bongoland: Burundi Refugees in Urban Tanzania* (New York: Berghahn, 2001), 42–9; Malkki, *Purity and Exile*, 52–60, 242–44.

¹⁰²Thomas Lacroix and Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 'Refugee and Diaspora Memories: The Politics of Remembering and Forgetting,' *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 34, no. 6 (2013): 684–96.

¹⁰³Emily Ting Yeh, 'Exile Meets Homeland: Politics, Performance and Authenticity in the Tibetan Diaspora,' *Environment and Planning: Society and Space* 25, no. 4 (2007): 648–67.

¹⁰⁴Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), 115–37.

¹⁰⁵David Parkin, 'Mementoes as Transitional Objects in Human Displacement,' *Journal of Material Culture* 4, no. 3 (1999): 303–20.

¹⁰⁶Wen-Chin Chang, 'Home Away from Home: Migrant Yunnanese Chinese in Northern Thailand,' *International Journal of Asian Studies* 3, no. 1 (2006): 49–76.

¹⁰⁷Rochelle Davis, *Palestinian Village Histories: Geographies of the Displaced* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); Susan Slyomovics, *Object of Memory: Arab and Jew Narrate the Palestinian Village* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998).

Michel Agier describes an encounter with Hutu refugees in north-west Zambia who compiled a small book that detailed their ordeal and odyssey in the 1990s, framed as a kind of biblical epic of Hutu displacement.¹⁰⁸ These and similar efforts produce not mere gazetteers, but texts that associate the place with sensory perceptions – the smell of sea breeze, the taste of lemons or the sight of a familiar shop – and with aspirations of restitution. These texts, like the keys to abandoned properties, establish a claim to land that has been forfeited but might yet be restored. They are part of the archive of refugeedom, part of the project to reclaim ‘erased lives’ in diaspora.¹⁰⁹

This is a very productive strand of enquiry. Still, we must look for history in other places too – the material objects that refugees carried with them and the significance invested in personal objects, such as religious artefacts, embroidered items, jewellery, photos and the objects that acquired significance during the journey, such as the walking stick and the map. There is much still to be done to illuminate the materiality of refugeedom.

Refugees might write their history as a chronicle of personal suffering and loss, or as the expression of their capacity to overcome adversity and to ‘make a contribution’, for example, to the host society or to the diaspora. Equally, they might choose to keep quiet or to make a calculated decision to forget.¹¹⁰ In this connection, it is important to take account of the gendered dimensions: the extent to which discourses and practices were reserved for men, including when they spoke of female ‘victims’. UNHCR’s confidential case files covering the third quarter of the twentieth century demonstrate how the process of demonstrating eligibility and recognition offered a kind of invitation to compose a condensed life history, sometimes connecting personal circumstances to broader national narratives. However, the male voice predominates.¹¹¹

Conclusion

We are conscious of the risks involved in turning refugee history into a kind of scholarly stand-alone silo. In a provocative article on African social history, the late Terence Ranger wrote of the need to ‘reinsert refugees and returnees into the general stream of the study of history and society rather than remove them into some special problematic category’. He argued there is ‘nothing more important than research on refugees and repatriation *except* to ensure that such research did not compound the plight of refugees and repatriates by cutting them off from . . . social history . . . in general’.¹¹² In this article, we have considered what issues are raised by their configuration historically as a ‘problematic category’. However, thinking about ‘the general stream’ requires a degree of caution on the part of historians, lest they adopt too readily a state-centred perspective.

This is where the concept of refugeedom together with a global history approach can yield dividends. As we have seen, the history of refugees is usually embedded within the history of the nation state. Adopting a global historical perspective provides the opportunity to enlarge the field of vision, by taking account of multiple actors without losing sight of specific historical contexts.¹¹³ Such a perspective draws attention to global ambitions, such as those of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. Refugeedom provides a foundation for taking

¹⁰⁸Michel Agier, *Managing the Undesirables: Refugee Camps and Humanitarian Government* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 172.

¹⁰⁹Hariz Halilovich, ‘Reclaiming Erased Lives: Archives, Records and Memories in Post-war Bosnia and the Bosnian Diaspora,’ *Archival Science* 14, no. 3 (2014): 231–47; Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee*, 291.

¹¹⁰Paul Connerton, ‘Seven Types of Forgetting,’ *Memory Studies* 1, no. 1 (2008): 59–71.

¹¹¹Gatrell, ‘Raw Material’.

¹¹²Terence Ranger, ‘Studying Repatriation as Part of African Social History,’ in *When Refugees Go Home: African Experiences*, eds. T. Allen and H. Morsink (London: UNRISD/James Currey, 1994), 279–94. Ranger was speaking of rural African society.

¹¹³Jansen and Lässig, *Refugee Crises*, 9–10.

account of refugees' experiences, interactions and narratives without privileging certain definitions as to who counts as a refugee.

Refugee history and global history can be integrated into mutually productive and constitutive ways. Part of this engagement, as we have seen, rests upon the scale and scope of mass population displacement in the modern world, and by attempts to fashion and implement globally ambitious schemes to manage the 'refugee problem'. This emerges most overtly during the aftermath of two world wars, the global manifestations of the Cold War and the era of decolonization, all of them associated with mass displacement and with debates around assistance and 'solutions'.

There are other synergies between global history and refugee history. Studying the formation of refugee diasporas and the resultant diasporic politics together illuminate global and transnational movements of knowledge, ideologies, educational and economic initiatives, as well as practices and actions adopted by refugees themselves – as in the refugee camp – to counter their marginalization. The global circulation of knowledge by and about refugees, within and beyond dedicated sites of displacement, is an invitation to historians to confront but not be bewitched by dominant narratives associated with the modern state, the international refugee regime or legal categorizations that privileged top-down narratives. Historians must find room to consider refugee voices and recollections of refugee agencies that reached beyond the nation state. Refugeedom provides just that kind of opportunity.

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Peter Gatrell recently retired from the University of Manchester. His publications include *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War 1* (1999); *Free World? The Campaign to Save the World's Refugees, 1956–1963* (2011); and *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (2013). His latest book, *The Unsettling of Europe: the Great Migration, 1945 to the Present*, published by Penguin Books and Basic Books in 2019, was awarded the Nanovic Institute's Laura Shannon Prize and Italy's 'Premio Cherasco'. He is a Fellow of the British Academy and led the AHRC-funded research project, 'Reckoning with refugeedom: refugee voices in modern history, 1919–1975'.