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REFUGEES AND HISTORY: WHY WE MUST ADDRESS THE PAST

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This article examines a pressing problem for those concerned with research on forced migration – the absence of refugees from most historical work, and the low profile of history in Refugee Studies. Using examples from Europe and South Asia, it considers why refugees have been “silenced” by history and how we can develop positive, inclusive approaches to the past.

Keywords: refugees, forced migration, history, past, exclusion, sanctuary, refuge, asylum, Partition, testimony.

“History is the fruit of power,” observes Trouillot (1995: xix) – an account of the past which celebrates the few, excluding the many. Famously, it is written by the victors: Thompson (1968: 13) comments that, “the successful... are remembered”, while “The blind alleys, the lost causes and the losers themselves are forgotten”. Among those often treated as losers and repeatedly forgotten are forced migrants – people whose absence from most historical writing is so marked that it constitutes a systematic exclusion.¹ For Refugee Studies, this presents a major difficulty – how are we to develop understandings of the past when we receive so little help from history? In addition, we have a related problem: researchers in the field of forced migration rarely undertake historical analyses. Indeed we are so reluctant to embrace these approaches that it seems we are averse to history. This article considers these difficulties and some of the means by which we can address them.²

Refugee Studies is a new field which has required time to explore disciplinary boundaries and to develop distinct perspectives. Since it emerged in the early 1980s, it has nevertheless drawn on insights from a remarkably wide range of disciplines – initially from Sociology, Anthropology, Politics, International Relations, Development Studies and Law, and more recently from Psychology, Psychosocial Studies, Cultural Studies, Gender Studies, Critical Legal Studies and Environmental Science. History has always been notable by its absence. When, in 2000, the editor of the *Journal of Refugee Studies* reviewed the disciplinary basis of hundreds of articles submitted since the first issue in 1988 he found that materials addressing historical issues accounted for just 4 per cent of the total (Zetter 2000: 352). In effect, contributors to the journal had declined to engage with history. Today, there is a dual problem of disinterest among historians in refugee matters and an aversion among specialists in forced migration vis-à-vis history. This is not

just a matter of inclination; in one of the very few analyses to tackle these issues the historian Tony Kushner (2006: 40) suggests that in each area there is a definite resistance, an “antipathy”:

[Evidence] taken together... suggests on the one hand actual resistance rather than simple apathy from the history profession to refugee studies and, on the other, from non-historians, the inability to see history and refugees as linked or relevant.

There is a problem for both groups – but a much bigger difficulty for researchers on forced migration. History is a venerable discipline with a host of agendas; Refugee Studies is a new multi-disciplinary area in which the focus of concern is a specific pattern of human movement. There is mounting evidence to suggest that this has a systemic character – that mass displacement is part of today’s “global” order and that more and more people are affected worldwide.³ These changes should be understood as part of historic developments. We need to know how today’s movements are related to those of the past: how institutional actors responded to people displaced in earlier migration crises, how discourses of the refugee have emerged and how they have shaped policies for refuge and asylum.

The circumstances of most refugees are determined by politicians and state officials, who rarely show interest in migrations of the past – indeed, denial of refugee histories is part of the process of denying refugee realities today. This is apparent in most crises of mass displacement. In 2006, some 2 million people left Iraq as part of movements that also produced some 2 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).⁴ The scale and pace of these events shocked governments and international agencies – in 2003 the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had predicted that *returns* of displaced people to Iraq were likely to increase rapidly.⁵ One explanation for the surprise and lack of preparedness lay in collective failure to consider the impacts of war on a country long afflicted by forced population movements – a record which might have provided powerful evidence for the likelihood of further upheavals (Marfleet 2007). Researchers in the refugee field must also take some responsibility, for work on histories of mass displacement in Iraq (or in comparable states) has yet to be undertaken.

New and renewed refugee crises such those in Iraq, Darfur, Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka and Somalia each speak of the past. They are the outcome of complex colonial legacies, global developments, external interventions, local tensions and conflicts. None can be understood without history, yet we invariably approach them on an ahistorical basis: an outcome in part of the particular pattern of development of our field of study.

Refugee Studies emerged from the concern of academics and researchers to tackle issues raised by rapid and continuing increases in the numbers of forced migrants. The main issues at hand were the immediate problems faced by refugees: crises of welfare, legal status, patterns of movement and of reception and integration. These were also priorities for relief and development organisations and governmental agencies, with which some researchers were associated, so that what Black (2001: 67) calls “refugee policy studies” had a strong influence

in the academic field. Recently, policy agendas have focused more and more upon management of migration: upon regulation, containment and exclusion. Broader issues, including those requiring historical analysis, have rarely been a consideration. They should, however, be integral to our work: helping to pose questions about specific crises of displacement; about regional and global patterns of movement; and, not least, about the lives of earlier generations of refugees and their relations with the wider society.

But engagement with history is not straightforward. Why have historians ignored most refugee movements and “silenced” those involved? Can refugees be re/instated on the historical record? If so, what are the methodological challenges and what are the potential outcomes?

SANCTUARY

Two ideas with widely differing implications appear in references to refugees and the past. One asserts that refugees “are as old as history”; the other that they have existed as a definite category of persons only since the Geneva Convention of 1951 defined a first formal legal status. Both observations are meaningful; both can also be misleading.

Ideas about sanctuary, asylum and refuge have an ancient lineage and are found in written records and oral traditions worldwide. The obligation to protect certain displaced people, fugitives and those abandoned by communities of origin has often been seen as a social priority and has been closely associated with the well-being of the wider society. The institution of sanctuary has been a marker of general social cohesion: the community that protects Others protects its own. For millennia, traditions of refuge were embedded in religious belief and practice. In the pre-modern era,⁶ places of protection were typically sites of cosmological significance – locations sanctified by deities or by those empowered by them – which were inviolable. Here, conflicts were to be suspended, the use of violence was unacceptable and breaches of the regime of protection, in effect challenges to the authority of the gods, could be punished severely.⁷ Such sites were often closely defined by physical phenomena, so that certain islands, mountains, valleys and caves with religious significance were off-limits to wars, punitive actions, feuds and vendettas. Where religious practice was organised around special constructions – temples, shrines, churches, monasteries and mosques – these became the main places of refuge.

Sanctuary/refuge had significance for all the great religious traditions. In the case of Islam, the Prophetic experience – with its implications for the development of a universalistic faith – was itself associated with forced migration and refuge.⁸ Ideas about *hijra* (“emigration”/ “flight”) and *muhajir* (“emigrant”/ “exile”/ “refugee”) have been defining concepts for generations of Muslims: so too the notion of *ibn sabil* – “the wayfarer” to whom respect is due and protection must be offered.⁹ Specific ideas about sanctuary can also be found in early records of the religions of South Asia and in the Judaeo-Christian scripts. In the latter, certain

cities are identified as places of refuge guaranteed by God: see, for example, Psalms 16, 27, 36, 51, 52 and Isaiah 8.

In Ancient Greece, refuge appears as *asylon* (“asylum” – usually secured within religious sites); in Rome, it is associated with the *sanctuarium* (an inviolable area of the temple); and in early medieval Europe, with the *sanctum* (place of the sacraments) of the Christian church. Until the early modern period there seems to have been a widespread commitment to protection of outsiders and fugitives under the authority of religious institutions. There is insufficient evidence to suggest that this was a universal practice, but it was general across many societies and has had a continuous presence, albeit in a host of specific forms and practices.

REFUGEES AND THE MODERN STATE

There has been no systematic effort to record or analyse these phenomena. This is an outcome, in part, of the problem of comparative work across a vast range of traditions some of which have no written record. It is also associated, however, with a problem that has long afflicted modern scholarship – the dominance of national frames of reference and a general reluctance to consider the circumstances of outsiders and Others. Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2000) identify the constraining influence of “methodological nationalism” on modern social thought. This presents peoples and nations (or nation-states) as synonymous; society in general is sedentary and those who cross borders (territorial and cultural) are anomalous or even dysfunctional. Here historians have played a key role, celebrating nation-states and those within their borders. They have seldom recognised cross-border movements or the complex socio-cultural relations and institutional forms with which they have been associated. Amin (quoted in Pandey, 2001: 4) notes the pressure on modern historians to produce records of the “uncluttered national past”.¹⁰ Migrants seldom appear, unless in specific capacities defined by national agendas. People engaged in sudden or unexpected migratory movements have in general been excluded and, notwithstanding their ancient lineage, traditions of protection have been ignored.

The focus upon nation-states and relations within and among them also accounts in part for the very widespread view that refugees did not appear as a meaningful category of persons until the mid-20th century. Then, certain states agreed on formulae which for the first time identified specific migrants as people who might enter systems of state law with the aim of securing protection. The Geneva Convention inserted “the refugee” into international law in the context of asylum guaranteed by national governments. It placed forced migrants formally on the state agenda; at the same time it excluded most of those seeking protection, including *all* those – the mass of the world’s displaced people – located outside Europe.¹¹ It also placed an unprecedented historic barrier upon access to protection – those eligible for asylum must have been affected by events before 1 January 1951. In effect, refugees had been brought into being in a specific time and place: the state system had identified them – and only them – as authentic candidates for protection. Most displaced people worldwide, who had long been marginal

figures, were now officially “invisible” – to state authorities, policy makers and academics alike.

RÉFUGIÉS

Refugees had in fact appeared centuries earlier as distinct, named groups. From the late 15th century political authorities in the emerging nation-states of Europe devoted enormous energies to population management. Unlike the monarchies and religious authorities of an earlier era, they focused on defining and allocating *national* identity on the basis of various (and sometimes changing) cultural markers, including language and religious/sectarian affiliation. Their concern with physical frontiers was complemented by interest in socio-cultural borders: who was placed within the new nations and who outside them. National identities were ascribed and allocated as part of a process in which outsiders – Strangers and Others – played a key role, so that people *rejected* by the new nations were in fact integral to them. Some were physically excluded, some remained as “internal” enemies; both were functional to the emerging system of national societies.

These developments were associated with huge population movements – from the exodus of Jews and Muslims of Spain and Portugal in the late 15th/early 16th centuries, to the flight of Calvinists of France and Germany throughout the 17th century and into the early 18th century. Both the expulsion and reception/rejection of such communities were significant for emerging nation-states. Political authorities concerned with principles of national authenticity brought great pressure on communities of Others, especially religious non-conformists, to accept the new norms. To enforce alignment with the appropriate cultural markers, these minorities were treated as alien to the wider society. Those who would not undergo religious conversion or adopt specific practices approved by the authorities were expelled; in effect they were displaced *pour encourager les autres*, the mass of people whom state authorities sought to unify on a national basis. In the case of France, large numbers of Calvinists fled, some securing protection in what they called *le refuge* (sanctuary) obtained first in Switzerland and later in other neighbouring states. These Huguenots were the first to be identified as *réfugiés* – people rejected in their countries of origin and accommodated in other emerging nation-states (see Cottret 1991: 7).¹² Their security was often guaranteed by the latter’s rulers, who viewed them as both an economic resource and an ideological asset; in an echo of earlier approaches, their presence was viewed as testimony to the values of the receiving society and as a marker of the latter’s social cohesion. As religious traditions of sanctuary were eroded, the state itself had become the source of refuge. It was no longer possible to invoke divine authority for protection: now the new rulers and their officials determined who were candidates for asylum.

It is clear that refugees were present at the birth of the modern state and that some played a key role in the new ideologies of nation. In one of the very rare analyses of these developments, Soguk (1999: 244) comments that forced migrants were integral to statecraft – “the art of imagining and socially producing

the state's territorial order". They were paradoxical figures: marginal to most social discourse (and to official histories) but who, at key moments, had enormous ideological significance. In France, the Huguenots provided a focal point for efforts to develop ideas of patriotic attachment to the state. Those who became *réfugiés* fulfilled a similar purpose abroad. In England and Ireland (an English colony ruled by a Protestant elite), they were greeted as co-religionists whose rights would be guaranteed by a nation committed to liberty. In the 1680s, leading English and Irish politicians, religious figures and state officials conducted "a wide ranging ideological campaign" on their behalf and raised unprecedented sums of money for a special relief fund (Cottret 1991:23). Such a welcome was not guaranteed however. A few years later, Calvinists from Germany – the Palatines – also requested asylum in England. They were summarily rejected and eventually deported after a high-profile campaign in which, unlike the Huguenots, they were characterised as alien and unworthy of protection.¹³ The Huguenots were subsequently allocated a place within the mainstream of British history; the Palatines were promptly forgotten.

HISTORY IN DENIAL

In both sending and receiving states refugees now played important roles in construction of the discourse of nation: they were "vitaly productive of the normative centrality of the citizen/nation/state hierarchy" (Soguk 1999: 244). These developments need much research and analysis by historians of the early modern period. The implications are clear, however: all the emerging nation-states of Europe were associated with ideas about citizen (or subject) and alien, and many had direct engagements with forced migrants, among whom some were accepted as refugees. As the process of state formation spread across the continent, each and every region was affected by ideas about nation and national identity, and each saw population movements associated with emergence of new states and with inter-state conflicts. At the same time, as colonising powers brought vast areas under their control, states based upon the European model were implanted worldwide.¹⁴ Initially they were merely impositions but, as resistance to Europe developed, the state itself became a means of expressing aspirations for freedom and self-determination. The nation-state became a universal polity within which, suggests Nairn (1975), nationalism developed a contradictory character: "Janus-faced", it looked back to the era of European rule and forward to the prospect of change.

The American revolutionaries of 1776 initiated two centuries of struggle against colonialism. From the slave revolts of Saint-Domingue in the 1790s to the post-Soviet realignments in the Caucasus in the 1990s, huge energies were devoted to pursuing independence and shaping new national societies. Boundaries were drawn and redrawn, often reworking colonial models with their inclusions and exclusions based upon religion, regional affiliation, ethnic identity and "tribe". Millions of people were displaced by conflict and/or by treaties and settlements that established new territorial borders and cultural boundaries. Everywhere, these

processes produced forced migrants – people we now recognise as refugees or as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Few were seen as eligible for protection and little attention was paid to their experiences as matters of intrinsic interest. As in Europe, the refugee was everywhere and nowhere. On rare occasions refugees were allocated special roles in the national narrative.¹⁵ As a rule, however, they were absent; history did not observe the refugee.

AMNESIA

This omission amounts to a general amnesia in relation to forced migrants. It is so marked, comment Kushner and Knox (1999: 4), that modern and contemporary historians “have hardly noticed” the presence of refugees. The low profile of forced migrants is associated with the marginal status of most outsider communities and their unequal relationship vis-à-vis institutional bodies, including armies, militias, police forces, judiciaries, political parties, mass media, and national and international agencies. Those compelled to flee repression, wars, civil conflict, and economic and environmental crises, are highly vulnerable, having lost resources of a material, socio-cultural and psychological character. Political authorities may champion certain migrants by presenting them as victims deserving of refuge and support, especially in receiving states embracing those displaced by rivals or enemy forces. In some cases, the virtues of candidates for asylum may be exaggerated or even invented;¹⁶ more often, however, displaced people are viewed by state authorities as undesirable and are dismissed or ignored. At times of economic and political instability, the national/nationalist agenda is of increased importance and those in authority attempt to generalise hostility to Others, internal and external. Refugees are easily portrayed as inferior, malign or threatening. Lacking resources of public communication (and sometimes an educated cadre and/or relevant language skills), most are unable to contest these characterisations in ways that can be observed by the wider society. Kushner (2006: 1) comments that “Refugees themselves, often, by necessity and circumstances, marginal figures, rarely can shape the dominant images others hold of them – especially as their representations are shaped more by myth than reality”.

Those in authority in the modern state have often viewed refugees as people who can be summoned and dismissed at will. Many communities of forced migrants have been moved in and out of legality: welcomed or even solicited as refugees and later deemed illicit migrants. In the late 1990s, European governments who participated in military action against Serbia accepted many refugees from Kosovo, asserting the latter’s right to protection and arguing that provision of asylum demonstrated their own good faith and commitment to human rights. When immediate military aims had been achieved, they initiated campaigns of repatriation, despite the unwillingness of many migrants to return to areas in which, they believed, they would be in danger. For governments and for much of the European media, the “poor Kosovar refugee” had been abruptly transformed into an “illegal, scrounging migrant”: part of a familiar process that Van Selm (2000: 206) calls “paradoxical labelling”. There are many precedents. In 1914, the

British government reluctantly sanctioned admission of some 250,000 Belgians displaced by German military offensives during the early phases of the First World War. Most were soon repatriated as part of sustained efforts to maintain public hostility vis-à-vis all aliens – including victims of enemy powers.¹⁷ The Belgians had participated in the largest refugee movement in British history but have remained a mere footnote on the historic record.¹⁸

PARTITION

This approach is not confined to Europe. All the states of modern South Asia emerged from conflicts associated with the end of colonial rule. After the Second World War, the British Raj collapsed in the face of rival movements for national self-determination. Huge population movements took place, especially in regions in which new territorial borders were established, notably Punjab and Bengal. In 1947, some 12 million people became refugees in India and Pakistan; the following year some 500,000 were expelled into India from the independent state of Burma.¹⁹ Pandey (2001: 41) observes that Partition involved “one of the greatest mass migrations in history” – but that for years historians ignored its human dimensions. For those who researched and wrote mainstream histories, the refugee experience was irrelevant.

As in a host of other regions in which “decolonisation” was under way, the gestation and birth of new states *produced* refugees. What distinguished events in India was the speed and scale of displacement, and the intensity of conflict with which it was associated. Scores of millions of people were affected by communal confrontations, mass killings, abduction, rape, looting and arson. Some were compelled to flee by direct application of violence; others responded to the “demonstration effect” of events elsewhere by abandoning their homes. Many travelled long distances to destinations in which they hoped for at least temporary security but in which they encountered enormous difficulties: where the majority spoke unfamiliar languages, embraced other customs and cuisines and sometimes (despite expectations) other religious traditions. Communities were shattered, kin networks dispersed, all manner of resources lost, as people innocent of the dominant political issues in play were forced to make sudden choices about religious, communal and national identities. Partition, observes Kaul (2001: 2), was a moment of “destructive legacies and nightmarish memories”.

Professional historians have addressed the formal politics of Partition in great detail. The role of the colonial authorities, of local movements and parties, and of individual actors – Gandhi, Jinnah, Nehru, Mountbatten – have been carefully researched. For many years, however, other issues received little attention. Butalia (1998: 6-7) comments that, “the ‘history’ of Partition seemed to lie only in the political developments that had led up to it”. She continues: “what had happened to the millions of people who had to live through this time, what we might call the ‘human dimensions’ of this history – somehow seemed to have a ‘lesser’ status” (ibid). Kaul (2001: 4) concurs:

We [Indian writers] have been better at accounting for the political and social events, and the official policies and procedures that precipitated Partition than we have been at examining the violence and displacement that constituted its human dimension (Kaul 2001: 4).

For many years the sole account of displacements associated with Partition was a fictional work, *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh.²⁰ Published in 1956, this set out the realities of violence and mass flight in, from and across Punjab. Drawing on his own experiences, Singh gave testimony to the impact on individuals and communities:

Hundreds of thousands of Hindus and Sikhs who had lived for centuries on the Northwest Frontier abandoned their homes and fled toward the protection of the predominantly Sikh and Hindu communities in the east... Along the way – at fords, at crossroads, at railway stations – they collided with panicky swarms of Muslims fleeing to safety in the west (Singh 1981: 1)

Singh allows a host of characters from one fictional village, including Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Christians, to bear witness to both the reality of sectarian tensions and to generations of mutual accommodation and interaction between and among families and neighbours; arrangements that were shattered by Partition. More than 30 years were to pass before other writers addressed these experiences. In the 1990s a small group of researchers embraced the possibilities provided by oral history. Butalia (1998: 13) describes the change of approach: “I had come to believe that there is no way we can understand what Partition was about, unless we look at how people remember it.” Conscious of conceptual and methodological problems associated with testimony and memory, they nonetheless engaged with oral history as a means “of turning the historical lens to a somewhat different angle” (ibid). Several have since used testimony and unofficial records including letters, diaries and memoirs to bring “the voices of ordinary people” into their accounts of 1947 and its aftermath (Butalia 2001: 215).²¹ These confirm the searing impact of conflict and unwilling migration. At the same time, they record community integrity before Partition – the complex relations between people of varying ethnic and religious affiliations and their resistance to new national borders and cultural boundaries.

Here, refugee testimony disrupts “uncluttered national history”. It challenges dominant ideas about the birth of nations and the inevitability of ethnic separatism. In doing so, it also subverts dominant political ideologies across South Asia, with their emphasis on ethnic identity and national rivalries. Kaul (2001: 9) comments that states of the region require “fear of Partition and of future partitions to justify privilege and authoritarian forms of rule”. When refugees and their descendants speak, they challenge national narratives *and* the political and socio-cultural arrangements which continue to endorse them. This is one key reason why state authorities, agencies and academics ignore refugees past *and* present.²²

METHODOLOGY

Kushner (2006: 47) observes of professional historians that their neglect of refugees has not been accidental – the latter’s history, he suggests, “has been actively

forgotten". The idea of "forgetting" suggests a slip of memory: here it amounts to the excision from the past of those who bear witness to the tensions, conflicts, crises and wars endemic to industrial capitalism and the modern state system. Historians construct narratives which continue to exclude those not allocated roles in the usual national dramas. This creates enormous problems for those concerned with forced migration. Our field of study *focuses* on people ejected by this system. How do we engage with histories that ignore them?

Our challenge is to undertake work that sees refugees less as mere ciphers than as *subjects* of history. This means, first, uncovering something of their lived experience. We can learn much from those who have tackled similar problems. In the 1940s, British historians who wished to bring into focus the lives and achievements of the mass of people argued for a history "from below". They challenged directly the preoccupations of mainstream academic history – states and their rulers, elites, military leaders, parliaments and assemblies, and national political parties – addressing instead the circumstances of urban and rural workers, artisans, the peasantry and the poor. The aim, suggested Thompson, was to rescue ordinary people "from the enormous condescension of posterity" (Thompson 1968: 13). Not all found their place in the new perspectives, however. A generation later feminist historians determined to uncover the "hidden" histories of women. They maintained that women had been silenced in mainstream history, just as they had been marginalised in society at large. In a pioneering study, Rowbotham (1973) undertook to bring to light their experiences and achievements.²³ Similar initiatives, often described as "recovery" work, have been undertaken in relation to minority communities in Western societies. Writers such as Fryer (1984) and Holmes (1991) observe that for centuries the presence of Black African people in Europe has been concealed – part of sustained efforts to develop ideas about ethnic homogeneity that complement notions of nation and national identity. Their work, and projects to explore Black, indigenous and native histories, undertakes to record the lives of those excluded by centuries of forgetting.²⁴

We can learn much from these initiatives which, to paraphrase Thompson (1968), facilitate history in which people are present in the making of their own lives. Of special importance has been the willingness of researchers to mobilise all manner of materials, formal and informal. Fifty years ago, historians "from below" were pioneers in the use of archives held by trade unions, community organisations and local groups. Later, oral historians encouraged the use of personal testimony. First used by anthropologists in the United States in the late 19th century and developed by the US Library of Congress in the 1930s, this was eventually formalised in the 1970s as a systematic approach. The first issue of the *Journal of the Oral History Society*, published in Britain, declared for "flesh and blood archives" in which personal testimonies could be stored and studied – not merely as materials of incidental interest but of intrinsic value (Evans 1970).

These approaches are especially relevant to refugee histories. Displaced people experience severe disadvantage, even in relation to other marginal social groups. They are often unable to articulate publicly their experiences and needs and it may be years before their voices are heard. As we have seen, refugee testimonies

destabilise dominant narratives and may even subvert them by departing sharply from the approved script: a key reason why they are discouraged and *actively* forgotten. In order to introduce refugee experiences to current research, and to place them on the historic record, personal testimony is essential. This is not merely a matter of collecting recollections however. As the fields of narrative and memory studies have recently established, the process of remembering is complex and often contradictory, so that testimony needs to be set in the context of critical theories of memory. Together with imaginative use of written records, formal and informal, testimony can play a key role in shaping histories in which forced migration is given due weight as a lived experience and as a phenomenon affecting the wider society. Much can be learned from the work of Indian researchers on Partition and more recent refugee movements in South Asia. Their use of oral accounts, “grey” literature, letters, memoirs, and creative writing combines insights from feminist history, history from below, cultural history and memory work.

Recent technological changes have facilitated collection and dissemination of personal and collective testimony. The internet has provided opportunities for refugees to record their own experiences of displacement, flight and lives in exile; in the case of some long-term communities, complex links have been established across territorial borders to share histories as part of projects to reconstitute communal and national identity.²⁵ Institutional bodies in Europe and North America are also taking the first steps in systematic work on refugee history. In 2006, after groundbreaking work based upon a mass of personal accounts from refugees, the Museum of London produced *Belonging* – an exhibition – together with a valuable website, the first such initiative in Britain.²⁶

These new resources should be brought to bear on the task of constructing comparative histories of displacement. The emphasis on refugee experience should not be taken to suggest, however, that conventional historical concerns must be excluded. It is in developing *holistic* approaches that embrace global developments, state agendas, institutional bodies and wider socio-cultural influences that refugee experiences can be located most advantageously. Historians including Kushner (2006) and Neumann (2004) have recently addressed colleagues on the absence of refugees from their discipline. It is now the responsibility of researchers in Refugee Studies to make good the deficit in our own field, providing materials that help us to reflect on displacements past and present and to anticipate – and perhaps even ameliorate – some of the refugee crises to come.

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Notes

- ¹ There is substantial historical work on slavery, indentured labour and other forms of transportation, including to labour camps, concentration camps and death camps. There is little however on displaced people who might be considered refugees in the context of traditions of refuge, sanctuary or asylum.
- ² This is a large subject. The purpose of this article is to examine a number of "headline" issues in hope of stimulating discussions which are both more extensive and intensive.
- ³ For an analysis of the global dimensions of forced migration see Castles 2004 and Marfleet 2006.
- ⁴ See <http://www.unhcr.org/iraq.html>
- ⁵ See UNHCR report of 2003 which anticipated "significant numbers" of returnees in 2004: <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/iraq?page=press&id=3f26b0a44>
- ⁶ Among professional historians the imprecise term "pre-modern" usually refers to any period before the 17th century AD/CE. The "early modern" is usually associated with developments in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries.
- ⁷ On the significance of these principles in Classical tradition, see Claassen 1999.
- ⁸ Muhammed and the early community of Muslims were compelled to flee Mecca in the *hijra* or flight from Mecca, finding security in the city of Medina.
- ⁹ For the Quranic sources see Al Baqarah, Verse 77; Al Tauba, Verse 60; Al Anfal, Verse 41.
- ¹⁰ Quoted in Pandey, 2001: 4.
- ¹¹ The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the Geneva Convention, was applicable only to those who had become refugees in Europe.

- ¹² See Cottret 1991: 7
- ¹³ For a brief account see Marfleet 2006. For one of the rare analyses of responses to refugees in the early modern period see Olson 2001.
- ¹⁴ Many were populated by displaced people from Europe, notably religious dissenters such as the Calvinists of France, and Levellers, Quakers and other non-conformists transported by the British state.
- ¹⁵ As with Jewish refugees from Europe associated with the birth of the Israeli state. See Lertal 1988.
- ¹⁶ Following the Second World War the United States and some European governments accepted for protection Nazi officers and scientists whom they believed could assist their cause. For the US intelligence service they were "freedom fighters" useful in pursuing American foreign policy objectives. See Loescher & Scanlan 1986: 35-36; also Cesarani 2001.
- ¹⁷ See the observations of Kushner & Knox, 1999. For a full account of the Belgians' experience in Britain see Cahalan 1982.
- ¹⁸ The study by Cahalan (ibid) remains the sole substantial investigation of the Belgian episode.
- ¹⁹ Pandey (2001: 90-91) examines these figures and their significance as part of the history of Partition.
- ²⁰ Kaul (2001: 14) suggests that the book is of dubious literary value but that its popularity has been assured by the fact that for long there was little else written about Partition.
- ²¹ See also Hasan 1997, Menon & Bhasin 1998. For a comprehensive list of work in this area see Pandey 2001: 5 n7.
- ²² This is most acute in cases in which refugee experiences are linked directly to mass exclusion at the hands of states or proto-states. Here the latter may deny even the presence of refugee populations - as in the case of Palestine/Israel, or the Sahrawi/Morocco conflict.
In the late 1990s Bose and Manchanda (1997: 2) estimated that the Indian subcontinent had the fourth largest concentration of refugees in the world. None was recognised formally by states of the region: none of the states of South Asia was a signatory to the Geneva Convention and none has since adhered to it.
- ²³ These approaches are nevertheless constrained by national frames of reference. History from below was a largely *national* project, focused almost exclusively on English matters – on people's history in the context of people, nation and state. Feminist histories too were initially set within the context of national societies, eventually prompting debates about how to pursue comparative analysis. See for example Maynes et al 1996.
- ²⁴ See for example: <http://www.blackhistory.com/>
- ²⁵ See for example the role played by two Palestinian NGOs, Palestine Remembered: <http://www.palestineremembered.com/>, and Shaml: <http://www.shaml.org/zshaml/site/>
- ²⁶ See <http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/English/EventsExhibitions/Special/Belonging/Projects/>. Also <http://www.movinghere.org.uk/>