

Refugee Studies: Interdisciplinarity and Agency in Contemporary Humanitarian Crises, 1930s-2020s*

Refugee Studies: interdisciplinarietà y agencia en las crisis humanitarias contemporáneas, 1930-2020

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Abstract

Refugee studies is a burgeoning research area that, over the years, has captured the attention of different disciplines: from law to sociology, from anthropology to political science, from psychology to political philosophy and international relations theory. Lately, new works that examine the topic from a historical perspective have emerged, together with new investigations focusing on specific categories of refugees, which return a more multifaceted and in-depth picture of forced migrations than in the past. This essay constitutes an updated reference text for those approaching the study of forced displacements. It reconstructs the evolution of refugee studies from its origins to the present day, taking into account the numerous and most recent academic contributions on the subject. It also reflects on the future developments of this multidisciplinary research field, which brings together theoretical investigation and political practice in order to shed

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light on the refugee issue and provide timely and effective answers to the problems of the world's forcibly displaced population.

Keywords

Refugee, forced displacement, flight, resettlement, refugee studies, multi- and interdisciplinary research

Resumen

Los estudios sobre refugiados son un área de investigación floreciente que, a lo largo de los años, ha captado la atención de diferentes disciplinas: desde el derecho hasta la sociología, desde la antropología hasta la ciencia política, desde la psicología hasta la filosofía política y la teoría de las relaciones internacionales. Últimamente han surgido nuevos trabajos que examinan el tema desde una perspectiva histórica, junto con nuevas investigaciones centradas en categorías específicas de refugiados, que devuelven un panorama más polifacético y profundo de las migraciones forzadas que en el pasado. Este ensayo constituye un texto de referencia actualizado para quienes se acerquen al estudio de los desplazamientos forzados. Reconstruye la evolución de los estudios sobre refugiados desde sus orígenes hasta la actualidad, teniendo en cuenta las numerosas y más recientes aportaciones académicas sobre el tema. Este ensayo reflexiona también sobre los desarrollos futuros de este campo de investigación multidisciplinario, que reúne la investigación teórica y la práctica política para arrojar luz sobre el problema de los refugiados y brindar respuestas oportunas y efectivas a los problemas de las poblaciones desplazadas por la fuerza en el mundo.

Palabras clave

Refugiado, desplazamiento forzado, huida, reasentamiento, estudios sobre refugiados, investigación multi- e interdisciplinar

Introduction: a *moving* reality

How is an academic discipline created? How does academia adapt to the reality that surrounds it and of which it is a part? What position do the humanities and, more specifically, history and historical theory occupy in the everchanging conditions of interdisciplinarity? How does history and the history of historiography attend to the changing realities of contemporary world? These are universal questions in the studies of historiography and the theory of history. Academic disciplines arise from the need of scholars to build analytical spaces that provide them with methodologies, specific tools and useful categories to address research topic with greater guarantees. However, academic disciplines are also subject to change and are not always linear or cumulative. Sometimes there are ruptures, setbacks and even dissolutions and readaptations to other methodological and epistemological frameworks. This is the case of refugee studies; an academic discipline that, while bordering historical and cultural heritage studies

(excessively, in the opinion of the authors of this essay), faces, with scientific tools, the greatest global humanitarian crisis of our time: that of forcibly displaced people.

Indeed, over the last decade, the number of refugees – namely ‘those people who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country’ – has more than doubled worldwide.¹ Currently, this figure stands at over 100 million people. Behind these numbers – as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Filippo Grandi, asserted in June 2020 – there are ‘stories of ruptured lives, exile and uncertainty’, but also testimonies of ‘resurgent hope and renewed opportunities’, ‘courage and resilience’.² In recent years, new crises have aggravated the ‘refugee problem’ on a global scale, producing a dramatic increase in the number of persons forced to flee their homes to escape wars, violence and discrimination. The emergency operations active at the UNHCR at present provide a far from reassuring picture of the global situation, which poses new and pressing challenges to the international community.

Worrying data come from the African continent, which is one of the most affected areas. The Democratic Republic of the Congo has been hit by periodic waves of fighting that have led to the internal displacement of 5 million people and caused over 918,000 to become refugees between 2017 and 2019.³ In South Sudan, the outbreak of a brutal conflict in December 2013 generated more than 2.2 million refugees, while political instability in Burundi set off a flow of over 300,000 refugees who have fled to neighbouring countries starting in 2015. In the Central African Republic, one of the world’s poorest countries, heavy fighting between armed groups has caused even greater suffering and destruction since May 2017, pushing 1.3 million inhabitants to leave the country or move within its borders. In the Lake Chad Basin, the insurgency of the Islamist group Boko Haram in 2014 triggered a humanitarian emergency, with over 2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria and a total of almost 700,000 in Niger, Chad and Cameroon. Further north, in Libya, the clashes between General Haftar’s self-proclaimed Liberation Army and the UN-recognised government of al Serraj has resulted in the forced displacement of over 217,000 people inside the country and more than 43,000 refugees, who continue to seek passage to Europe alongside migrants on perilous routes across the Mediterranean Sea.

As documented by the UNHCR, international humanitarian aid is also increasingly needed in the Middle East, marked by multiple regional crises. The tragic exodus of 11.7 million Syrians (about 5 million refugees and 6.6 million IDPs) over the last six years, fleeing a bloody civil war, is there for all to see. In Iraq, more than 3 million people have been displaced within the country since 2014, escaping mass executions and appalling abuse, while over 260,000 Iraqis have sought refuge outside the country’s borders. Similarly, in Yemen, there are currently 3.6 million IDPs who have fled in the face of

¹ This basic definition of refugee is in <https://www.unhcr.org/what-is-a-refugee.html> [last access in November 2022].

² The quotes are contained in Filippo Grandi’s statement at the Brussels IV Conference, Ministerial Segment, on 30 June 2020. Full text at <https://www.unhcr.org/admin/hcspeeches/5efb3f584/supporting-future-syria-region.html> [last access in November 2022].

³ These figures, as well as the following data, are in taken from <https://www.unhcr.org/emergencies.html> [last access in November 2022].

violence, in addition to poverty, following the conflict that broke out in 2015 between the Houthis, a Shiite armed group, and forces loyal to the Sunni government of Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. No less impressive are the figures concerning the Asia and Pacific region, home to 3.5 million refugees and 1.9 million IDPs. The majority of these people originate from Afghanistan, which has the largest protracted situation in the world in terms of refugee population, and Myanmar, where the persecution of the Muslim Rohingya minority has generated a steady stream of refugees – about 750,000 – who have fled to Bangladesh since 2017. Likewise, in recent years, the international community has devoted considerable attention to displacement in Central America (especially in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua), where gangs and drug cartels foster crime in a general context of unstable institutions, political repression and systematic human rights violations. Authoritarianism, corruption and shady administration are also commonplace in Venezuela – the scene of one of the most significant contemporary humanitarian crises – where over 4 million citizens have left the country in the largest exodus in the recent history of Latin America. Not least, Eastern Europe has recently been the backdrop of another humanitarian tragedy, following the massive refugee flows from Ukraine – including about 7 million externally displaced people and 7 million IDPs – as an effect of the Russian-Ukrainian war which started in February 2022.

Moving from a local to a global scale, the ‘refugee issue’ is, today, more topical than ever. Every day, in different parts of the globe, wars, poor governance, ethnic and religious persecution, and gender-based discrimination, as well as the alarming effects of climate change, oblige entire communities to flee their homes in search of better living conditions. This poses serious problems in terms of respect for the most basic human rights not only in the countries of origin, but also during their flight and in the receiving states. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exasperated the situation. It has severely limited movement and travel, but it has not put an end to conflicts nor to the activities of smugglers, who have opened new and risky illegal routes for human trafficking. Moreover, by heavily impacting the economy in both the origin countries and the host countries, the pandemic has aggravated the already vulnerable position of refugees and IDPs – for instance, by complicating access to health services – particularly given that most of these people are hosted in low and middle-income countries.

Precisely due to the relevance and urgency of the matter, academic researchers have dedicated increasing attention to forced migrations. This essay, which retraces the evolution of refugee studies, has a threefold merit. It constitutes a comprehensive guide to this complex and polyhedral field of study, as it includes crucial references to the multiple disciplines that compose this research area. It sheds light on how academia reflects and theorises about forced displacement starting from today’s challenges. Moreover, it highlights how the humanities and, specifically, history and historical theory contribute to the construction of the analytical categories of refugee, forced migrant, flight and exile, which are critical to analyse not only the past but also, and above all, the present.

This essay is divided into four parts. The first part focuses on the origins and consolidation of refugee studies. The second part discusses the role of historical research on forced displacement, which has long been considered an ahistorical domain. The third part considers some of the most recent developments in refugee studies, which mainly

concern cross-cutting and multidisciplinary investigations on particular categories of forcibly displaced people. Finally, the last section presents the conclusions.

The emergence and consolidation of a multidisciplinary research field

Over the past forty years, scholars from various disciplines have produced a remarkable volume of research *on* refugees, aimed at also being useful *for* refugees. It is no coincidence that forced migration studies have always been closely linked to policy development and practice since they became increasingly widespread in the 1980s. Nonetheless, it is true that the origins of this research field date back to an earlier period. Studies published several decades earlier anticipated – albeit in an embryonic way – the contemporary academic debate.

An early contribution is the special issue on refugees which appeared in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* in May 1939. It consisted of a collection of twenty-two essays that dealt with the origin and nature of the refugee problem, hastily labelled a ‘problem of minorities’ marginalised and persecuted by ‘dominant majorities’.⁴ Although some of the authors tried to provide possible solutions to what they perceived as a serious concern, in general the articles were scarcely critical. They merely emphasised the sizable dimensions of the refugee phenomenon, which had been constantly growing since the First World War. Indeed, according to recent estimates, the 1914–18 conflict generated about thirteen million refugees, many of whom were forced to leave their countries after the dissolution of the great empires.⁵ In most cases, these individuals were moved confusingly from one side to the other of the new borders drawn by the peace treaties. This relocation mechanism followed the criterion of presumed ethnic uniformity on which the new international order, centred on nation-states, was based. The appalling spread of radical nationalism in the interwar years – the National-Socialist project of a racially homogeneous *Großdeutschland* (‘Great Germany’) being the most glaring example – progressively led to the outbreak of an unprecedented humanitarian emergency. The massive ‘ethnic reshuffling’ perpetrated by the Third Reich and its allies in the heart of Europe and the systematic implementation of the Nazi genocide plans provoked the uprooting of about 40 million people.⁶ This is the approximate number of those who embarked on desperate journeys in search of safe destinations that could offer them protection; a human drama that began to shake the consciences of many within the international community as never before.

After the end of the Second World War, new scholarly work on forced migrations was published. This research focused primarily on refugee movements and camps as a consequence of the displacements provoked by the two World Wars.⁷ Academic interest

⁴ Joseph Roucek, “Minorities. A basis of the refugee problem”, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 1 (1939): 1.

⁵ The numeric data is in Peter Gatrell, “Refugees”, in *1914-1918 Online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War* (2014) at <https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/refugees> [last access in November 2022].

⁶ The quote is in Philipp Ther, *The Outsiders. Refugees in Europe since 1492* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 78.

⁷ Eugene M. Kulisher, *Europe on the move: War and population change 1917–1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948); Malcolm Proudfoot, *European Refugees 1939–1952. A study in forced population movement* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957); Edgar H.S. Chandler, *The High Tower of Refuge: The*

in these issues was further stimulated following the foundation of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in 1949 and, above all, the UNHCR in December 1950, which took over the work of its predecessors, namely the International Refugee Organisation and the UN Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. The establishment of these two permanent agencies within the United Nations inspired the creation of the first international organisation for research on involuntary migrants, the Association for the Study of the World Refugee Problem, based in Liechtenstein, in 1951. Moreover, it gave impetus to a new academic line of research that looked at the legal and institutional aspects of the definition and the protection of refugees, with special attention to the role of international organisations. Among the first contributions to this field, the work of the political scientist Louise W. Holborn stands out: books on the International Refugee Organisation (1956) and the UNHCR (1975), along with her earlier essays on the legal status of forced migrants (1938) and the position of the League of Nations on the refugee problem (1939).⁸

Starting in the 1960s and 1970s, the social sciences began to take an increasing interest in refugee studies. In these decades, for instance, anthropology initiated its reflection on concepts such as adaptation mechanisms, social networks, role and sense of belonging, which would become fundamental to the analysis of forced migrations. Looking at refugees' lives, perceptions and expectations, anthropologists – often flanked by human geographers – addressed modifications in the cultural development, social customs and beliefs of those forced to flee.⁹ In doing so, an ethical meaning was attached to this kind of research, whose primary goal was to stimulate a more conscious political debate and support policymakers in formulating initiatives that could alleviate the suffering of refugees and IDPs. Among the earliest contributions in this area is the work of the American anthropologists Elisabeth Colson and Colin Turnbull. Colson published the results of her long-term field research on the Gwembe Tonga in 1971. She analysed the changes in the family life, economic and political organisation, and ritual practices of this Zambian people, as a consequence of their forced evacuation and resettlement after the building of the Kariba Dam on the Middle Zambezi River.¹⁰ Using a similar approach, Turnbull published a well-known study on the Ik in 1972. He traced the evolution of this

inspiring story of refugee relief throughout the world (New York: Praeger, 1959); Robert Kee, *Refuge World* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961); Nikolai Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977); Alfred de Zayas, *Nemesis at Potsdam* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979).

⁸ Louise W. Holborn, "The Legal Status of Political Refugees 1920–1938", *American Journal of International Law*, 4 (1938): 680-703; Id., "The League of Nation and the refugee problem", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 1 (1939): 124-135; Id., *The International Refugee Organisation. A specialized agency of the United Nations. Its history and work* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956); Louise W. Holborn et al., *Refugees: a problem of our time. The work of the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees. 1951–1972. Vol. 1-2* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1975).

⁹ See, for instance, Rosemary Sayigh, *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed, 1979); Art Hansen and Antony Oliver-Smith (eds.), *Involuntary Migration and Resettlement: The Problems and Responses of Dislocated People* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1982); Josephine Reynell, *Political Pawns: Refugees on the Thai-Kampuchean Border* (Oxford: Oxfam, 1989); Veena Das, "Dislocation and Rehabilitation: Defining a Field", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1 (1996): 1509-1514; Renee Hirschon, *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe: The Social Life of Asia Minor Refugees in Piraeus* (Oxford: Berghahn, 1998); Cathrine Brun, "Reterritorialising the Relationship between People and Place in Refugee Studies", *Geografisker Annaler*, 1B (2001): 15-25; Dawn Chatty, *Dispossession and Displacement in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹⁰ Elisabeth Colson, *The social consequences of resettlement: the impact of the Kariba Resettlement upon the Gwembe Tonga* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971).

African tribe from prosperous hunters to scattered groups of aggressive and famished people as the result of their displacement, imposed by the Ugandan government, to the infertile mountains near the Kidepo National Park.¹¹

Following this remarkable early work, many other anthropological studies on forced migrations have been published over the years, focusing on recurrent concepts in the narratives of refugees, such as roots and identity, culture and nationalism, home and homeland. Through a postmodernist and social constructivist analytical lens, anthropologists have progressively questioned the traditional idea of territorial rootedness based on the nation-state, which views sedentarism as normal and territorial displacement as pathological.¹² By contrast, they have suggested that roots are ‘in a state of constant flux and change’ and ‘don’t stay in one place’, and that identity is ‘mobile and processual’.¹³ Ultimately, anthropology has criticised the absolute validity of the identity-territory and culture-nation binomials by introducing the concept of deterritorialization in connection with feelings of belonging among refugees and IDPs. In so doing, it has given due emphasis to the ‘multiplicity of attachments that people form to places through living in, remembering, and imagining them’, attributing academic relevance to the lived experiences of those who have suffered expropriation and uprooting for the first time.¹⁴

Along with anthropology, psychology has contributed to direct the study of forced migration towards a more careful examination of refugees’ life events and their impact on the well-being of forcibly displaced people. Although this field of research has developed consistently over the last two decades, studies on the effects of forced migrations on individuals’ mental health and behaviour started to appear in the late 1950s and grew more numerous beginning in the second half of the 1970s, with the emergence of a considerable mass of displaced persons in Southeast Asia after the Vietnam War.¹⁵

¹¹ Colin Turnbull, *The Mountain People* (New York: Touchstone Press, 1972).

¹² See, among others, Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties Towards Mankind* (New York: Ark, 1952); Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (New York: Blackwell, 1986); Kirkpatrick Sale, “How Paradise Was Lost: What Columbus Discovered”, *The Nation*, 251 (1990): 444-446.

¹³ Dick Hebdige, *Cut ‘n’ Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music* (London: Methuen, 1987), 10; Liisa Malkki, “National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees”, *Cultural Anthropology*, 1 (1992): 37. See also Carol Breckenridge and Arjun Appadurai, “On Moving Targets”, *Public Culture*, 1 (1989): i-iv; Liisa Malkki, “Refugees and Exile: From “Refugee Studies” to the National Order of Things”, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24 (1995): 495-523.

¹⁴ Malkki, “National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees”: 37. See also Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, “Beyond “Culture”: Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference”, *Cultural Anthropology*, 7 (1992): 6-23; Liisa Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Arjun Appadurai, “The Production of Locality”, in *Counterworks: Managing the Diversity of Knowledge*, ed. Richard Fardon (London: Routledge, 1995), 204-225; George Marcus, *Ethnography through Thick and Thin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); David Turton, “The Meaning of Place in a World of Movement: Lessons from Long-Term Field Research in Southern Ethiopia”, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 3 (2005): 258-280.

¹⁵ Among the first contributions, see Claudius Cirtautas, *The Refugee: A Psychological Study* (Boston: Meadow, 1957); Maria Pfister-Ammende, “Mental Hygiene in Refugee Camps”, in Charles Zwinmann and Maria Pfister-Ammende, *Uprooting and After* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1973), 241-251; Robert K. Harding and John Guy Looney, “Problems of Southeast Asian children in a refugee camp”, *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 4 (1977): 407-411; Richard H. Rahe et al., “Psychiatric consultation in a Vietnamese refugee camp”, *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 4 (1978): 185-190; Robert Schmitter and

These studies centred on emotional trauma, the psychological adjustment of refugees in camps and the receiving societies, and on the concept of marginality. The ‘medical model’, which emphasises the diagnosis of psychiatric disorders, has long been predominant in research on refugees by mental health scholars.¹⁶ However, recent studies have used innovative perspectives. These include studies in positive psychology, which aim to build beneficial psychological resources – such as positive emotions, character strengths, optimistic thinking, community connectedness and mindfulness – to promote health and resilience among displaced people, at the same time favourably impacting their participation in the labour market.¹⁷ Overall, by exploring the cognitive processes linked to the experience of flight, psychology has contributed to move beyond the sterile academic study of involuntary population transfers and emphasise the most human dimension of the refugee phenomenon.

If studies on refugees from anthropological and psychological perspectives began to emerge in the 1960s and 1970s, it was in the 1980s that the study of forced migrations experienced exponential growth across a variety of disciplines and acquired global relevance. This was, in part, due to the prolonged refugee situation in Southeast Asia, Pakistan, Iran, Cyprus, Southern Africa and Central America, to name a few areas of the world, along with a significant increase in the number of asylum seekers in the US, Canada and Europe.¹⁸ The pressing need to intervene to contain the multiple humanitarian

Marta Rodriguez-Giegling, “Marginality, Modernity, and Anxiety in Indochinese Refugees”, *Journal of Cross-cultural Psychology*, 4 (1979): 469-478.

¹⁶ A vast literature on the topic exists. Among others, see Caroline L. Williams and Joseph Westermeyer (eds.), *The series in clinical and community psychology. Refugee mental health in resettlement countries* (New York: Hemisphere Publishing Corp, 1986); Federico Allodi, “The Children of Victims of Political Persecution and Torture: A Psychological Study of a Latin American Refugee Community”, *International Journal of Mental Health*, 2 (1989): 3-15; Stevan M. Weine et al., “Testimony Psychotherapy in Bosnian Refugees: A Pilot Study”, *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 155 (1998): 1720-1726; Harvey M. Weinstein et al., “Physical and Psychological Health Issues of Resettled Refugees in the United States”, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 3 (2000): 303-327; Nancy Farwell, “‘Onward through Strength’: Coping and Psychological Support among Refugee Youth Returning to Eritrea from Sudan”, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 1 (2001): 43-69; Dermot Ryan, Barbara Dooley and Ciarán Benson, “Theoretical Perspectives on Post-Migration Adaptation and Psychological Well-Being among Refugees: Towards a Resource-Based Model”, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 1 (2008): 1-18; Kenneth Carswell, Pennie Blackburn and Chris Barker, “The Relationship Between Trauma, Post-Migration Problems and the Psychological Well-Being of Refugees and Asylum Seekers”, *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 2 (2009): 107-119; Alexander Miller et al., “Understanding the mental health consequences of family separation for refugees: Implications for policy and practice”, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 1 (2018): 26-37.

¹⁷ Eranda Jayawickreme, Nuwan Jayawickreme, and Martin E. P. Seligman, “From trauma victims to survivors: The positive psychology of refugee mental health”, in *Natural disaster research, prediction and mitigation. Mass trauma: Impact and recovery issues*, eds. Kathryn Gow and Marek Celinski, (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 1993), 313-330; Nancy L. Sin and Sonja Lyubomirsky, “Enhancing well-being and alleviating depressive symptoms with positive psychology interventions: A practice-friendly meta-analysis”, *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 65 (2009): 467-487; Sevasti Foka et al., “Promoting well-being in refugee children: An exploratory controlled trial of a positive psychology intervention delivered in Greek refugee camps”, *Development and psychopathology*, 1 (2021): 87-95.

¹⁸ With regard to the countries mentioned, see for illustrative, yet non-exhaustive purposes the following studies: Peter Loizios, *The Heart Grown Bitter: A Chronicle of Cypriot War Refugees* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Elisabeth G. Ferris, “The Politics of Asylum: Mexico and the Central American Refugees”, *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 3 (1984): 357-384; Robert Gorman, “Refugee Repatriation in Africa”, *The World Today*, 40 (1984): 436-443; Paul J. Strand and Woodrow Jones, *Indochinese Refugees in America: Problems of Adaptation and Assimilation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1984); Christina Murray, “Mozambican Refugees: South Africa’s

crises and provide concrete support to the masses of displaced people resulted in fruitful research production concerning new aspects of the refugee question, such as the trigger factors of refugee streams, transnational humanitarian aid and state assistance plans for forced migrants.

The appearance of a special issue of the *International Migration Review* in 1981 was proof of the growing interest in this field and represented a starting point for refugee studies, which subsequently began to develop as an autonomous research area. The articles collected in this volume covered a wide range of topics, from the problematic occupational assimilation of displaced persons to psychological dysfunction and behavioural symptomatology. Critical reflections on linguistic barriers that complicate resettlement were also present, as well as analyses of various countries' response to forced migrations.¹⁹ Among the thirty articles contained in this special issue, Egon Kunz's work on the elements affecting refugee outcomes in the areas preceding and succeeding flight stands out, as it delineated an analytic framework for the development of a refugee theory for the very first time.²⁰ A refugee research bibliography was also included in the volume.²¹ It consisted of more than 800 entries which, compared to the 100 bibliographical entries contained in the 1939 special issue of the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, clearly signalled the growth of this field of research.²² Thereafter, the practice of drawing up general bibliographies on forcibly displaced persons was progressively abandoned. The proliferation of studies in the last four decades has made this task and any kind of categorisation impossible. In its place, specialist bibliographies, which collect research on refugees according to clear geographical and thematic criteria, have appeared.²³

Responsibility", *South African Journal of Human Rights*, 2 (1986): 154-163; Gail P. Kelly, "Coping with America: Refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos in the 1970s and 1980s", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 1 (1986): 138-149; Gil Loescher and John Scanlan, *Calculated Kindness: Refugees and America's Half-Open Door* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986); David Busby Edwards, "Marginality and Migration: Cultural Dimensions of the Afghan Refugee Problem", *International Migration Review*, 1 (1986): 313-325; Pierre Centlivres and Micheline Centlivres-Démont, "The Afghan Refugee in Pakistan: an ambiguous identity", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 2 (1988): 141-152.

¹⁹ Christine Robinson Finnan, "Occupational Assimilation of Refugees", *International Migration Review*, 1-2 (1981): 292-309; J. Donald Cohon, "Psychological adaptation and dysfunction among refugees", *International Migration Review*, 1-2 (1981): 255-275; Howard H. Kleimann and James P. Daniel, "Indochinese Resettlement: Language Education and Social Services", *International Migration Review*, 1-2 (1981): 239-245; Michael Lanphier, "Canada's response to Refugees", *International Migration Review*, 1-2 (1981): 113-130; Charles Price, "Immigration policies and refugees in Australia", *International Migration Review*, 1-2 (1981): 99-108; Elizabeth Winkler, "Policy responses: Voluntary Agencies and Governmental Policy", *International Migration Review*, 1-2 (1981): 95-98.

²⁰ Egon F. Kunz, "Exile and resettlements: Refugee theory", *International Migration Review*, 1-2 (1981): 42-51. This article is a more articulated extension of previous research by Kunz, published eight years earlier. See Egon F. Kunz, "The refugees in flight: kinetic models and forms of displacement", *International Migration Review*, 2 (1973): 125-146.

²¹ Barry N. Stein, "Refugee research bibliography", *International Migration Review*, 1-2 (1981): 331-393.

²² Francis J. Brown, "An annotated bibliography on the refugee problem", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 1 (1939): 202-208.

²³ See, among others, John Marston, *An annotated bibliography of Cambodia and Cambodian Refugees* (Minneapolis, MN: South Asian Refugee Studies Project, 1987); Daniele Joly, *Refugees in Britain: an annotated bibliography* (Warwick: Centre for research in Ethnic Relations, 1988); Doreen Indra, *Southeast Asian Refugee Settlement in Canada: A Research Bibliography* (Lethbridge, Alberta: Department of Anthropology, 1988); Michael Mignot, *Kampuchean, Laotian and Vietnamese Refugees in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the U.S., France and the U.K.: A Bibliography* (Oxford: Refugee Studies Program,

Concurrently to this impressive production of research on forced migrations, numerous specialised research centres were established in different countries. In 1981, York University in Toronto founded the Refugee Documentation Project (now called the Centre for Refugee Studies). In 1982, the Refugee Policy Group was created in Washington, D.C. That same year, the University of Oxford inaugurated the Refugee Studies Programme on the initiative of the legal anthropologist Barbara Harrell-Bond, a tenacious defender of legal aid programmes for refugees, who served as director of the centre until 1996. She authored one of the most leading-edge books published in the 1980s, *Imposing Aid*, which addressed policymakers by statistically documenting the effects of aid on forcibly displaced people and the receiving societies, with the primary aim of placing refugees at the centre of humanitarianism.²⁴ Under Harrell-Bond's guidance, the Refugee Studies Programme – now the Refugee Studies Centre (RSC) – has been committed to bridging the gap between scholarship, policy and practice, and has established itself internationally as a reference for all those who investigate forced displacements.

The 1980s saw the emergence on the academic scene of several specialised and multidisciplinary journals which remain among the most authoritative sources of information in the field of forced migration studies today. Beginning in 1980 and 1985, respectively, the US Committee for Refugee – a non-governmental organisation (NGO) whose origins date back to 1911 – started to publish the annual *Refugee Reports* and *World Refugee Survey*, which offer country updates on refugee populations and general considerations on their rights within host countries. In 1982, the UNHCR's Centre for Documentation and Research began to publish the *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, which focuses on the challenges of forced migration from multidisciplinary and policy-oriented perspectives. The *Forced Migration Review* and the *Journal of Refugee Studies* followed in 1987 and 1988. Both are official publications of the RSC and have served as crucial forums for exploring the problems of forcibly displaced people. A year later, Oxford University Press produced the first issue of the *International Journal of Refugee Law*, which publishes high-quality scholarship on refugee law jurisprudence and state practice.

As a direct result of this flourishing scientific production, the academic debate on forced migrations since the 1980s has been characterised by a greater degree of theoretical reflection compared to previous research. Scholars from various disciplines began to perceive a crucial need for conceptual fine-tuning, starting with the very definition of

1988); Ruth Hammond and Gleen Hendricks, *South-east Asian Youth: an annotated bibliography* (Minneapolis, MN: Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, 1988); Laura M. Boyer, *The older generation of Southern-East Asian refugees: an annotated bibliography* (Minneapolis, MN: Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, 1991); Elia Zureik, *Palestinian refugees: an annotated bibliography, 1995–1999* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2000); Mrittunjoy Chowdhury, “Select bibliography: Refugee women”, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 14 (1995): 1-77; UNHCR, *Selected Bibliography on Refugee Women*, 2005, available at <https://www.unhcr.org/42cd4afb2.pdf> [last access in November 2022]; Elisa Mason, “Sources of International Refugee Law: a bibliography”, *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 1 (1996): 95-116; Norwegian Refugee Council, *Global IDP survey bibliography*, 2000, available at www.nrc.no/idp.htm. Cf. Richard Black, “Fifty Years of Refugee Studies: From Theory to Policy”, *International Migration Review*, 1 (2001): 58-59.

²⁴ Barbara Harrell-Bond, *Imposing Aid. Emergency assistance to Refugees* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

‘refugee’, which became one of the main subjects of academic discussion. Establishing who fell into this category was not a mere academic exercise, but rather a concrete necessity. This was especially true given that, in the 1990s, new hotbeds of tension materialised in the world, often as a consequence of the end of the Cold War. The disappearance of communism rekindled internal conflicts fuelled by ethnic, religious and nationalistic factors, as in the emblematic cases of the former Yugoslavia and Somalia. As a result, new waves of forcibly displaced people in need of help emerged, which demanded timely and effective responses. Central to the scholarly debate was the general definition of ‘refugee’ found in the UN Geneva Convention of 1951, which applied to any person in Europe who, following the First and the Second World Wars, had left his/her country due to a ‘well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion’.²⁵ Although the Additional Protocol of 1967 expanded the application of refugee status by removing the temporal and geographical limitations in the original convention, this definition has remained unsatisfactory for many and has been questioned from various perspectives.²⁶

Sociologists, for instance, have raised doubts about the feasibility of clearly differentiating between socio-political and economic reasons for displacement in order to distinguish involuntary migrants from voluntary migrants. Indeed, these factors are often intertwined, which makes it difficult to assign refugee status using this type of criterion. The same concepts of voluntariness and involuntariness in population movements have been criticised by sociologists on the grounds that individuals’ freedom of choice is limited by societal structures.²⁷ Building on this criticism, sociology has contributed to forced migrations studies by combining the analysis of macro-level social transformations with the analysis of social dynamics at the meso and micro levels, in both countries of departure and receiving countries. This approach, based on Antony Giddens’s structuration theory, focuses on the interaction between societal structures – such as political, educational and religious institutions – and agency, understood as the manifestation of individual will, to explain the phenomenon of refugees and their behaviour.²⁸ This has allowed sociologists to highlight the interconnections between the different levels of analysis and present forced migrations as a phenomenon internal to globalisation. More precisely, forced migration has been interpreted as an ‘aspect of global social relations’, which are based on an inclusion/exclusion mechanism that widens the gap between rich countries and poorer countries.²⁹

²⁵ See Article 1 of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, adopted on 28 July 1951, available at https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.23_convention%20refugees.pdf [last access in November 2022].

²⁶ See Article 1 of the Additional Protocol related to the status of refugees, which entered into force the 4th of October 1967, at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/ProtocolStatusOfRefugees.aspx> [last access in November 2022].

²⁷ Anthony H. Richmond, “Sociological Theories of International Migration: The Case of Refugees”, *Current Sociology*, 2 (1988): 7-25. See also Barbara Harrell-Bond, “The Sociology of Involuntary Migration: An Introduction”, *Current Sociology*, 2 (1988): 1-6.

²⁸ Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984). See also Oliver Bakewell, “Some Reflections on Structure and Agency in Migration Theory”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 10 (2010): 1689-1708.

²⁹ Stephen Castles, “Towards a Sociology of Forced Migration and Social Transformation”, *Sociology*, 13 (2003): 13-34. See also Stephen Castles, “Understanding Global Migration: A Social Transformation Perspective”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 10 (2010): 1565-1586.

In so doing, sociologists have expanded the research perspective by shifting attention away from a certain ‘methodological nationalism’ found in earlier works – having the nation as the main unit of study – to transnational flows and relations.³⁰ The transnational approach has offered new food for thought to researchers, who have gained greater awareness of the social networks connecting origin and receiving countries, as well as the communication and transportation networks that make long-distance ties possible.³¹ Complementary to the nationalist and transnational approaches to the analysis of involuntary migrations, a new line of sociological research, which explores the impact of private non-state actors on refugees and IDPs, emerged at the beginning of the twenty-first century. These actors include drug cartels and criminal organisations and warlords, as well as religious and local communities, whose violent struggle for power within the state often leads to the displacement of the population in a general context of weak governments and fragile institutions.³²

Political theory, for its part, has provided valid contributions to forced migration studies from a normative perspective that sheds light on the most problematic ethical knots linked to the refugee issue. The reflections of researchers from this discipline have enriched the debate about who can be identified as a ‘refugee’. In general, political theorists have accorded a broader meaning to this term compared to the narrow definition given by the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 Additional Protocol. Indeed, political theorists’ understanding of the term ‘refugee’ tends to include all individuals whose basic needs are violated in their countries of origin and who are forced to flee in search of

³⁰ The quote is in Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick-Schiller, “Methodological Nationalism and beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences”, *Global Networks*, 4 (2002): 301-334. Among the supporters of a nation-centric sociological approach to the studies of refugees, see Aristide R. Zolberg, “The Formation of New States as a Refugee-Generating Process”, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 467 (1983): 24-38; Jeremy Hein, “Refugees, Immigrants and the State”, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 19 (1993): 43-59.

³¹ See, among others, Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Blanc Szanton, “Transnationalism: A New Analytic Framework for Understanding Migration”, *Annals of the New York Academy of Science*, 1 (1992): 1-24; Nina Glick Schiller, Lina Basch and Cristina Blanc Szanton, “From immigrant to transmigrant: theorizing transnational migration”, *Anthropology Quarterly*, 68 (1995): 48-63; Seteny Shami, “Transnationalism and Refugee Studies: Rethinking Forced Migration and Identity in the Middle East”, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 1 (1996): 3-26; Ninna Nyberg Sørensen, Nicholas Van Hear and Poul Engberg-Pedersen, “The Migration-Development Nexus: Evidence and Policy Options”, *International Migration*, 5 (2002): 1-52; Nicholas Van Hear, *From ‘durable solutions’ to ‘transnational relations’: home and exile among refugee diasporas* (Copenhagen: Centre for Development Research, 2002); Nicholas Van Hear, “Refugees, Diasporas and transnationalism”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*, eds. Elena Fiddian Qasmiyeh et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 176-187; Alice Bloch and Shirin Hirsch, “Inter-generational transnationalism: the impact of refugee backgrounds on second generation”, *Comparative Migration Studies*, 6 (2018); Breanne Leigh Grace, “Family from Afar? Transnationalism and Refugee Extended Families after Resettlement”, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 1 (2019): 125-143; Quintin W.O. Myers and Kayle Anne Nelson, “‘I should not forget!’: qualitative evidence of social and cultural transnationalism among refugees who are disconnected from home”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 7 (2019): 1204-1221.

³² Thomas Hansen and Finn Stepputat, *Sovereign Bodies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen and Ninna N. Sørensen (eds.), *The Migration Industry and the Commercialization of International Migration* (London: Routledge, 2013).

international protection that compensates for this violation.³³ However, this broad interpretation has attracted criticism as it does not specify what these ‘basic needs’ are and ends up attributing refugee status to all those who suffer generalised forms of violence, without distinction. In particular, it has met with the disapproval of legal scholars, who have called for a more rigorous reading of the various international refugee conventions to avoid misleading applications.³⁴

Political theory certainly has the merit of having addressed the crucial question of the duty to allocate forcibly displaced people among states.³⁵ Criticisms emerge as the majority of the world refugee population is concentrated in a few poor countries adjacent to the countries of origin of these displaced people, mainly because they are easier to access. This poses a problem of unequal distribution of refugees between states, which has led political theorists to advocate for a fairer reassignment of the duty to take in refugees, one that is more attentive to the integration capabilities of different countries according to their level of economic development, political stability and territorial sustainability.³⁶ Political theorists have developed critical analyses which cover hot topics such as limits set by states on the reception of forced migrants, the moral duty of states to facilitate the integration of marginalised people, and the conditions for a just return of refugees to their home countries.³⁷ Research on these issues has encouraged a lively debate, which stands as proof of the growing attention to the ethical aspects of the global refugee humanitarian emergency and the efforts of the academic community to direct policymakers towards solutions that pursue justice for refugees and within the international community.

The relationship between refugees and the state system has also been the object of analysis by international relations experts, who identify forced migrants as an intrinsic element of world politics. According to this interpretation, refugees are a ‘side-effect of the creation of separate sovereign states’, which fail to guarantee them protection and

³³ Andrew E. Shacknove, “Who is a Refugee?”, *Ethics*, 2 (1985): 274-284; Matthew J. Gibney, *The Ethics and Politics of Asylum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); David Miller, *National Responsibility and Global Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

³⁴ James C. Hathaway, “Is Refugee Status Really Elitist? An Answer to the Ethical Challenge”, in *Europe and Refugees: A Challenge?*, eds. Jean-Yves Carlier and Dirk Vanheule (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 1997), 79-88.

³⁵ Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); Matthew J. Gibney, “Asylum and the Principle of Proximity”, *Ethics, Place & Environment*, 3 (2000): 313-317.

³⁶ Matthew J. Gibney, “Forced Migration, Engineered Regionalism, and Justice between States”, in *New Regionalism and Asylum Seekers*, eds. Susan Kneebone and Felicity Rawlings Sanei (Oxford: Berghahn, 2007), 57-77; David Owen, “In Loco Civitatis: On the Normative Structure of the International Refugee Regime”, paper presented at the CRASSH Conference, Cambridge University, 2012; Joseph H. Carens, *The Ethics of Immigration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Matthew J. Gibney, “The duties of refugees”, in David Miller and Christine Straehle, *The political philosophy of refuge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 132-153.

³⁷ Gibney, *The Ethics and Politics of Asylum*; David Owen, “Refugees, Fairness and Taking up the Slack: On Justice and the International Refugee Regime”, *Moral Philosophy and Politics*, 2 (2016): 141-164; Serena Parekh, *Refugees and the Ethics of Forced Displacement* (London: Routledge, 2016); Matthew J. Gibney, “The ethics of refugees”, *Philosophy Compass*, 10 (2018); Marion Couldrey and Jenny Peebles (eds.), “Return: voluntary, safe, dignified and durable?”, *Forced Migration Review* 62 (2019); Arianne Shahvisi, “Redistribution and moral consistency: arguments for granting automatic citizenship to refugees”, *Journal of Global Ethics*, 2 (2020): 182-202.

leave them outside the ‘normal citizen-state-territory hierarchy’.³⁸ Although the first studies in international relations were strongly policy-oriented, more recently, relevant theoretical research has been produced on the causes and effects of forced displacements. Some studies have stressed the dual role of refugees as a consequence and, at the same time, an incentive for conflicts, examining the conditions under which forced migrants act as an obstacle to peace-building processes and are instrumentalized as a means to destabilise international security.³⁹ Other studies have addressed issues related to global security by investigating the relationship between refugee flows and transnational terrorism in the post-9/11 era.⁴⁰ Scholars of international relations have also explored institutional and non-institutional reactions to the refugee problem. In particular, the role of international cooperation in supporting refugees and states’ initiatives in terms of granting asylum and burden-sharing have been examined, as has the participation of non-state actors – such as the private sector, NGOs and transnational civil society – in the governance of forced migration.⁴¹ Overall, the work of international relations scholars has enriched refugee studies by furthering understanding of the macro-level determinants that shape the responses of states and international actors to forced displacement. However, much remains to be investigated and a greater degree of theorisation is needed in this area, especially regarding crucial issues such as the protection of human rights,

³⁸ Emma Haddad, “The Refugee: The Individual between Sovereigns”, *Global Society*, 3 (2003): 297. Cf. Alexander Betts and Gil Loescher, “Refugees in International Relations”, in *Refugees in International Relations*, eds. Alexander Betts and Gil Loescher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1-28.

³⁹ Gil Loescher, *Refugee Movements and International Security* (London: Brassey’s for The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1992); Id., *Beyond Charity: International Cooperation and the Global Refugee Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Myron Weiner, *International Migration and Security* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993); Stephen John Stedman and Fred Tanner, *Refugee Manipulation: War, Politics, and the Abuse of Human Suffering* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003); Sarah Kenyon Lischer, *Dangerous Sanctuaries: Refugee Camps, Civil War, and the Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); Idean Salehyan and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, “Refugees and the Spread of Civil War”, *International Organization*, 2 (2006): 335-366; Jack Snyder, “Realism, Refugees, and Strategies of Humanitarianism”, in *Refugees in International Relations*, eds. Betts and Loescher, 29-52; Adam Roberts, “Refugees and Military Intervention”, in *Refugees in International Relations*, eds. Betts and Loescher, 213-236.

⁴⁰ Sharon Pickering, “Border terror: policing, forced migration and terrorism”, *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 3 (2004): 211-226; Elspeth Guild and Madeline Garlick, “Refugee Protection, Counter-Terrorism, and Exclusion in the European Union”, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 4 (2010): 63-82; Daniel Milton, Megan Spencer and Michael Findley, “Radicalism of the Hopeless: Refugee Flows and Transnational Terrorism”, *International Interactions*, 5 (2013): 621-645; Stephen Zunes, “Europe’s Refugee Crisis, Terrorism, and Islamophobia”, *Peace Review*, 1 (2017): 1-6.

⁴¹ Astri Suhrke, “Burden-Sharing during Refugee Emergencies: The Logic of Collective Action Versus National Action”, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 4 (1998): 396-415; Eiko Thielemann, “Between Interests and Norms: Burden-Sharing in the European Union”, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 2 (2003): 253-273; Bruce Cronin, *Institutions for the Common Good: International Protection Regimes in International Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore, *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2004); James Milner, *Refugees, the State and the Politics of Asylum in Africa* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Alexander Betts, *Protection by Persuasion: International Cooperation in the Refugee Regime* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); Id., *Forced Migration and Global Politics* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); Alexander Betts, Louise Bloom, and Naohiko Omata, *Humanitarian Innovation and Refugee Protection* (Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre, 2012); Meltem Ineli-Ciger, “The Global Compact on Refugees and Burden Sharing: Will the Compact Address the Normative Gap Concerning Burden Sharing?”, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 2 (2019): 115-138; Kate Pincock, Alexander Betts and Evan Easton-Calabria, *The Global Governed? Refugees as Providers of Protection and Assistance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

international political economy and international security, in which complex local, national and global dynamics overlap.

A notable absence? History in forced migration studies

Among the wide spectrum of disciplines that have addressed forced migrations, the most conspicuously absent is history – or so it has long been thought. Some scholars have attributed this absence to an alleged methodological divergence between refugee studies and historical research. The practical focus of the former and its close relation to the policy-making process is said to be at odds with the broader analytical approach of the latter.⁴² Indeed, as Tony Kushner has pointed out, historians have shown some ‘resistance’ towards refugee studies, often seeing them as limited by policy-determined queries and labels that tend to standardise the different cases and strip them of their own peculiarities. For their part, non-historians have overlooked the importance of looking into the past to better comprehend the contemporary refugee phenomenon, as they have proven unable to ‘see history and refugees as linked or relevant’.⁴³ This does not imply that historians are not interested in forcibly displaced people. Numerous historical studies on this topic do exist, but they have long been associated with research on interwar Europe, genocide and the Cold War, as well as with transnational and global history, rather than with refugee studies specifically.

The first contributions to the analysis of forced displacements from a historical perspective – although not exclusively written by historians – date from the mid-twentieth century. Studies published in the 1940s and 1950s primarily reconstructed forced populations transfers in Europe between the two World Wars.⁴⁴ Thereafter, historical research on refugees suffered a substantial decline until the second half of the 1980s, when it was resumed with increasing systematicity. The refugee phenomenon began to be examined through a postcolonial and postmodernist lens. Progressively, a certain openness to non-European issues and a greater criticality came to characterise new studies compared to previous research, as can be seen in the work of Marrus, Morris, Kushner and Know – to name a few.⁴⁵ New aspects of the problem of involuntary migrants started to be examined, such as states’ policies with regard to displaced persons in the past and

⁴² Peter Marfleet, “Refugees and History: Why We Must Address the Past”, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 3 (2007): 136.

⁴³ Tony Kushner, *Remembering Refugees: Then and Now* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 40; Peter Gatrell, “Population Displacement in the Baltic Region in the Twentieth Century: From ‘Refugee Studies’ to Refugee History”, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 1 (2007): 43-60.

⁴⁴ See, for instance, Joseph Schechtman, *European Population Transfers 1939–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946); Kulisher, *Europe on the move*; Proudfoot, *European Refugees 1939-1952*.

⁴⁵ Michael Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Tony Kushner and Kathrine Knox, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide: Global, National and Local Perspectives during the Twentieth Century* (London: Frank Cass, 1999). Among the relevant historical works on refugees that were published at the end of the century, see also Wolfgang Jacobmeyer, *Vom Zwangsarbeiter zum Heimatlosen Ausländer: Die Displaced Persons in Westdeutschland 1945-1951* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1985); Claudena Skran, *Refugees in Inter-War Europe: The Emergence of a Regime* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Mark Wyman, *DPs: Europe’s Displaced Persons, 1945-1951* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

their impact on refugees' lives.⁴⁶ However, it was with the advent of the new millennium that there was a significant increase in historical analysis of forced displacement.⁴⁷ Thus, for instance, over the last two decades, historians of the postcolonial period have offered insight into the impact of decolonisation on the emergence of refugees flows in different parts of the world.⁴⁸ A number of studies on the history of international organisations – which have added to previous research on this topic – have been published, together with original historical analyses of the activities of NGOs and non-state actors.⁴⁹ Historical research on refugee movements in interwar and post-war Europe has proliferated, with a focus on their impact on host societies and the response of states to these mass population transfers.⁵⁰ Institutional networks and campaigns to support refugees have been examined from a transnational historical perspective.⁵¹ Studies on the roots of humanitarianism in

⁴⁶ See, for example, Vicky Caron, *Uneasy Asylum: France and the Jewish Refugee Crisis, 1933-1942* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Frank Caestecker, *Alien Policy in Belgium, 1840-1940: The Creation of Guest Workers, Refugees and Illegal Immigrants* (New York: Berghahn, 2000).

⁴⁷ Jerome Elie, "Histories of Refugees and Forced Migration Studies", in *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*, eds. Fiddian Qasmiyeh et al., 23-35.

⁴⁸ See, among others, Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: the Making of India and Pakistan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Jared Manasek, "Protection, Repatriation and Categorization: Refugees and Empire at the end of the Nineteenth Century", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 2 (2017): 301-317. Particularly interesting are the essays contained in Panikos Panayi and Pippa Virdee (eds.), *Refugees and the End of Empire. Imperial Collapse and Forced Migration in the Twentieth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

⁴⁹ Some examples, which also include works by non-historians, are Gil Loescher, *The UNHCR and World Politics: A Perilous Path* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Jerome Elie, "The Historical Roots of Cooperation between the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration", *Global Governance*, 3 (2010): 345-360; Silvia Salvatici, "'Help the People to Help Themselves': UNRRA Relief Workers and European Displaced Persons", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 3 (2012): 428-451; Peter Gatrell, "The world-wide web of humanitarianism: NGOs and population displacement in the third quarter of the twentieth century", *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 1-2 (2016): 101-115; Joël Glasman, "Seeing Like a Refugee Agency: A Short History of UNHCR Classifications in Central Africa (1961-2015)", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 2 (2017): 337-362; Peter Gatrell, "Western NGOs and Refugee Policy in the Twentieth Century", *Journal of Migration History*, 2 (2019): 384-411. Previous works on the history of international organisations related to refugees are Louise W. Holborn, *Refugees: A Problem of our Time: The Work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1951-1972* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1975); Tommie Sjöberg, *The Powers and the Persecuted: The Refugee Problem and the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (IGCR), 1938-1947* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1991).

⁵⁰ Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War One* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Walter Laqueur, *Generation Exodus. The fate of young Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2001); Catherine Gousseff, *L'Exil russe 1920-1939. La fabrique du réfugié apatride* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2008); Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Anna Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism: Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011); Matthew Frank and Jessica Reinisch, *Refugees in Twentieth-Century Europe: The Forty Years' Crisis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016); Peter Gatrell and Liubov Zhvanko, *Europe on the Move: The Great War and its Refugees* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017); Adam R. Seipp and Andrea A. Sinn, "Landscapes of the Uprooted: Displacement in Postwar Europe", *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 1 (2018): 1-7. On this topic, see also the articles contained in the special issue "Refugees and the Nation-State in Europe, 1919-59", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 3 (2014). Some interesting pages on refugees during wartime in Europe are in Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (London: Allen Lane, 1998).

⁵¹ Peter Gatrell, *Free World? The Campaign to Save the World's Refugees, 1956-1963* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

the early twentieth century have also appeared. Additionally, research has been published on forcibly displaced people and their protection in antiquity and the early modern era.⁵²

The origin of the refugee phenomenon has itself become the subject of a vibrant historiographical debate in recent years. Some scholars emphasise the modernity of this phenomenon and trace it back to the aftermath of the two World Wars, which is when, according to Marfleet, forcibly displaced people became a ‘meaningful category’.⁵³ Conversely, other academics place its origins at the end of the fifteenth century, coinciding with the expulsion of the Moors and Jews from the Iberian Peninsula at the height of the Spanish *Reconquista*. This is the position of Philip Ther, who has recently chronicled the historical trajectory of refugees in Europe from 1492 to the present day, distinguishing between religiously motivated flight in the early modern era, flight from ethnic cleansing and radical nationalism in the twentieth century, and politically motivated flight in contemporary society.⁵⁴ Whether or not they accept this long durée approach, historians agree in identifying the twentieth century as the period that marked a profound change in forced migration practices, both qualitatively and quantitatively, more than any other. According to Bessel and Haake, this was due to distinctively modern factors. Radical nationalism, ‘modern racial thinking’ and a capitalist world economy that sharpens the differences between the Global North and the Global South have stimulated dynamics of exclusion and marginalisation on a large scale. Technological progress has had the dual effect of facilitating both travel and communication and the development of advanced instruments of war with increasingly devastating effects.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the twentieth century marked a turning point in the management of emergencies related to forced displacement. It saw an exponential increase not only in attention to the numerous humanitarian crises in the world, but also in local, national and international cooperation, whose main goal is to alleviate the discomfort of refugees and favour their social rehabilitation.

Giving voice to the life experiences of refugees remains the main challenge for historical research within forced migration studies. In most cases, displaced people continue to be portrayed as passive subjects and inert victims of state violence. Their

⁵² On history of humanitarianism, see Julia Irwin, *Making the World Safe: The American Red Cross and a Nation's Humanitarian Awakening* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918-1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Silvia Salvatici, *A history of humanitarianism, 1755-1989* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020). On refugee in ancient world and early modern period, see Owen Stanwood, “Between Eden and Empire: Huguenot Refugees and the Promise of New Worlds”, *The American Historical Review*, 5 (2013): 1319-1344; David Van der Linden, *Experiencing Exile: Huguenot Refugees in the Dutch Republic, 1680-1700* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015); Nicholas Terpstra, *Religious refugees in the early modern world. An alternative history of the Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Benjamin Gray, “Exile, Refuge and the Greek Polis: Between Justice and Humanity”, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 2 (2017): 190-219; Peter J. Heather, “Refugees and the Roman Empire”, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 2 (2017): 220-242; Susanne Lachenicht, “Refugees and Refugee Protection in the Early Modern Period”, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 2 (2017): 261-281; Ther, *The Outsiders: Refugee in Europe since 1492*, 22-54.

⁵³ Marfleet, “Refugees and History: Why We Must Address the Past”, 139.

⁵⁴ Ther, *The Outsiders. Refugees in Europe since 1492*, 8-9. Cf. Jean Pierre Poussou, “Les Réfugiés dans l’histoire de l’Europe à l’époque moderne”, in *Les Réfugiés en Europe du XVIe au XXe siècle*, eds. Oliver Forcade and Philippe Nivet (Paris: Éditions Nouveau Monde, 2008), 43-46.

⁵⁵ Richard Bessel and Claudia B. Haake (eds.), *Removing Peoples: Forced Removal in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

active role in influencing the choice of protective measures and political decisions at the state and global levels is often overlooked, which is why more careful reflection on the agency of involuntary migrants is needed. As Gatrell suggests, social history research proves crucial in this task. By adopting an emic perspective, it can shed light on the reasons behind the experience of flight through the analysis of refugees' accounts, and in so doing can complement sociological and anthropological research.⁵⁶ In this regard, however, a methodological problem linked to the scarcity of sources emerges. On the one hand, state archives are of little use as they provide governmental information suited only to a top-down approach, which neglects a bottom-up perspective. On the other hand, the archives of international organisations contain many documents dealing with refugees, but which do not give them a voice and are often repetitive. Diaries and autobiographies do exist. Nonetheless, as Kleist points out, they usually exclude necessary accounts from the most vulnerable groups – such as women and children – and from illiterate displaced people, thus covering just a fraction of the broad spectrum of experiences of flight.⁵⁷ In order to overcome this problem, bolstering oral history research is crucial, as it helps to reveal and dignify what Elie calls the 'life histories' of refugee and to stimulate a 'forced migration history from below'.⁵⁸

Along with social and oral history, other branches of historical research have the capacity to make significant contributions to forced migration studies. Cultural history could be decisive in reconstructing the cultural representations of displacement and flight, while political history is essential to unveiling the political dynamics and implications of the refugee regime over time. Additional efforts are needed with regard to historical research on forced displacement from a comparative perspective. There is a substantial dearth of such analysis, with the exception of the volume by Caestecker and Moore, which compares the immigration policies for Jewish refugees implemented by liberal Western European countries in the 1930s.⁵⁹ Lastly, further studies on NGOs working with involuntary migrants are also desirable in the near future. Currently, this line of research presents limitations – with regard to both the quantity and the content of existing studies – due to the difficulties in gaining access to the archives of these organisations.

Although much remains to be investigated, lately the academic debate has become increasingly aware of the extent to which contemporary refugee movements are related to those of the past. Here lies the importance of history, which outlines the evolution of forced displacements across space and time. The way in which institutional actors dealt with refugees during previous migration crises, the actions taken by policymakers to address prior humanitarian emergencies, how refugees helped shape host countries, and how the debate on displaced people affected asylum policies in earlier periods can tell us

⁵⁶ Peter Gatrell, "Refugees. What's Wrong with History?", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 2 (2017): 171. Cf. Karen Jacobsen and Lauren B. Landau, "The Dual Imperative in Refugee Research: Some Methodological and Ethical Considerations in Social Science Research on Forced Migration", *Disasters*, 3 (2003): 185-206.

⁵⁷ J. Olaf Kleist, "The History of Refugee Protection: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 2 (2017): 166.

⁵⁸ Elie, "Histories of Refugees and Forced Migration Studies", 30. An example of the use of oral history applied to refugee studies is Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2000).

⁵⁹ Frank Caestecker and Bob Moore, *Refugees from Nazi Germany and the Liberal European States* (New York: Berghahn, 2010); Pertti Aho, "Europe and refugees: 1938 and 2015-16", *Patterns of Prejudice*, 2-3 (2018): 135-148.

much about forced migration today. History does matter in refugee studies. A long-term approach is essential to understanding current crises because it helps to contextualise what Gatrell has defined as ‘refugeedom’, a ‘matrix involving administrative practices, legal norms, social relations, and refugees’ experiences, and how these have been represented in cultural terms’.⁶⁰ Moreover, history is central because it ‘moulds’ refugees. Given that the memory of past migrations often influences the behaviour of forcibly displaced people today, historical research is essential to better understanding the choices of these individuals in the present, thereby helping to shift the attention of scholars and policymakers from the *refugee problem* towards an effective and comprehensive *refugee solution*.

New interdisciplinary areas of research

A multifaceted picture of forced migration studies clearly emerges from the previous pages. The analysis carried out so far has aimed to convey the complexity of the academic debate on refugees to the reader by outlining its essential aspects. Retracing the evolution of this debate has also meant highlighting the contributions of the various disciplinary approaches, which must not be considered mutually exclusive but, on the contrary, profitably complementary. New cross-cutting studies on hitherto scarcely explored aspects of the refugee phenomenon have emerged in recent years, precisely from the combination of different methodologies. This research, which primarily focuses on specific categories of individuals within the refugee population, attests to an ever-greater social commitment and provides useful indicators of further developments in the study of forced displacements.

The lived experience of refugee children, for instance, is increasingly capturing the attention of many scholars, who are intent on evaluating the impact of involuntary migrations in the first years of life. The approaches employed to address this topic are varied. On the one hand, legal scholars have investigated both national and international legislation on the rights of forcibly displaced children and the mechanisms for protecting them. Early studies on this issue appeared in the late 1980s, but it was at the beginning of the twenty-first century that newer research began to see the light.⁶¹ These studies – also produced by private associations, lobbies and think tanks – have focused on laws and policies on refugee children in specific countries, the importance of direct participation by minors and their families in shaping policies, and the conscription of child soldiers in armed conflicts as a crucial cause of flight.⁶² On the other hand, mental health studies

⁶⁰ Gatrell, “Refugees. What’s Wrong with History?”, 170. Cf. Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7-41.

⁶¹ The first comprehensive contribution on this topic was Everett Ressler, Neil Boothby and Daniel Steinbock, *Unaccompanied Children: Care and Protection in Wars, Natural Disasters and Refugee Movements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). For a more up-to-date analysis on the legal protection of refugee children in the light of the most recent legislation, see, among others, Samantha Arnold, *Children’s right and refugee law. Conceptualising children within the Refugee Convention* (London: Routledge, 2017).

⁶² On regulations on refugee children in specific countries, see Jaqueline Bhabha and Wendy Young, “Not Adults in Miniature: Unaccompanied Child Asylum Seekers and the New US Guidelines”, *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 1(1999): 84-125; Jaqueline Bhabha and Nadine Finch, *Seeking Asylum Alone: Unaccompanied and Separated Children and Refugee Protection in the UK*, The Harvard University Committee on Human Rights Studies, November 2006; Thoko Kaime, “The Protection on Refugee Children Under the African Human Rights System: Finding Durable Solution in International Law”, in

have centred on the effects of potentially harmful experiences related to forced migration on minors' psyche and emotional behaviour. Starting in the 1990s, many scholars stressed the vulnerability of children – who were analysed as passive subjects – and primarily focused on the diagnosis of psychic disorders.⁶³ However, more recent research has reversed this trend. Often using ethnographic tools of analysis such as participant observation, novel studies have dwelt upon the influence of environmental factors on children's reactions to potentially traumatic events and the resilience of forcibly displaced minors.⁶⁴ Several studies have also reflected on social work practices in relation to refugee children, with special attention to unaccompanied minors and the role of education in facilitating their integration in host societies.⁶⁵ New stimuli for investigation come precisely from this area. Existing studies have been conducted exclusively on young refugees in Western countries and based on individual or family surveys. Further research on social workers' work with forcibly displaced minors at the community level (i.e., clan or village) and with a focus on the Global South is, therefore, desirable.

Children's Rights in Africa. A Legal Perspective, ed. Julia Sloth Nielsen (London: Routledge, 2008), 183-197. On participation of children and their families in shaping national policies, see, for instance, Haeven Crawley, *Child First, Migrant Second: Ensuring that Every Child Matters* (report) (London: Immigration Lawyers Practitioner Association, 2006); Hilde Lidén and Hilde Rusten, "Asylum, Participation and the Best Interests of the Child: New Lessons from Norway", *Children & Society*, 4 (2007): 273-283. On child recruitment in armed conflicts and its impact on the decision to flee, see Lisa Alfredson, "Child Soldiers, Displacement and Human Security", *Disarmament Forum*, 3 (2002): 17-27; Vera Achvarina and Simon Reich, "No Place to Hide: Refugees, Displaced Persons, and the Recruitment of Child Soldiers", *International Security*, 1 (2006): 127-164; Jason Hart, "Displaced Children's Participation in Political Violence: Towards Greater Understanding of Mobilisation", *Conflict, Security & Development*, 3 (2008): 277-293.

⁶³ Marina Ajduković and Dean Ajduković, "Psychological well-being of refugee children", *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 6 (1993): 843-854; Cécile Rousseau, "The Mental Health of Refugee Children", *Transcultural Psychology*, 3 (1995): 299-331; Peter J. Guarnaccia, "The Mental Health and Adjustment of Immigrant and Refugee Children", *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics*, 3 (1998): 537-553; Ilse Derluyn and Erick Broekaert, "Different perspectives on emotional and behavioral problems in unaccompanied refugee children and adolescents", *Ethnicity & Health*, 2 (2007): 141-162; Robert Hart, "Child refugees, trauma and education: interactionist considerations on social and emotional needs and development", *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 4 (2009): 351-368; Israel Bronstein and Paul Montgomery, "Psychological Distress in Refugee Children: A Systematic Review", *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 14 (2011): 44-56.

⁶⁴ Jo Boyden, "Children under Fire: Challenging Assumptions about Children's Resilience", *Children, Youth and Environments*, 1 (2003): 1-29; Atia Daud, Britt Klinteberg, and Per-Anders Rydelius, "Resilience and Vulnerability among Refugee Children of Traumatized and Non-Traumatized Parents", *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, 2 (2008): 1-11; Zeenatkhanu Kanji and Brenda L. Cameron, "Exploring the Experiences of Resilience in Muslim Afghan Refugee Children", *Journal of Muslim Mental Health*, 1 (2010): 22-40; Lana Stermac, Allyson K. Clarke, and Lindsay Brown, "Pathways to Resilience: The Role of Education in War-Zone Immigrant and Refugee Student Success", in *Handbook of Resilience in Children of War*, eds. Chandi Fernando and Michael Ferrari (New York: Springer, 2013), 211-220; Muireann N. Raghallaigh, "The integration of asylum seeking and refugee children: resilience in the face of adversity", in *Research Handbook on Child Migration*, eds. Jaqueline Bhabha, Jyothi Kanics and Daniel Senovilla Hernández (London: Elgar, 2018), 351-368; Ritu Mitra and Matthew Hodes, "Prevention of psychological distress and promotion of resilience amongst unaccompanied refugee minors in resettlement countries", *Child: health, care and development*, 45 (2019): 198-215.

⁶⁵ Alastair Christie, "Responses of the Social Work Profession to Unaccompanied Children Seeking Asylum in the Republic of Ireland", *European Journal of Social Work*, 2 (2002): 187-198; Jim Wade, Fiona Mitchell and Baylis Graeme, *Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children: The Response of Social Work Services* (London: British Association for Adoption and Fostering, 2006); Ravi S. Kohli, *Social Work with Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

Along with children, the elderly are a sub-category of refugees that has sparked the interest of researchers in recent years. Scholarly attention has been dedicated to the peculiar physical and psychological consequences of forced displacements on older involuntary migrants, who experience the greatest difficulties in adaptation. These studies have highlighted the more intense separation effect that the elderly feel towards their country of origin, whose memory remains alive over time and with which they generally retain strong ties for life. The sense of guilt that the elderly feel towards those relatives and friends who did not manage to flee, the feeling of the loss of their social role as a guide, and the dynamics of dependence on the younger and more productive members of the family in the post-displacement reality have also been scrutinised. However, despite recent publications, this area of study remains relatively unexplored. The existing studies are few and limited in geographical scope. Moreover, they often focus on elderly migrants in general rather than on elderly refugees specifically, which greatly reduces the possibility to produce targeted policies in support of this category of refugees.⁶⁶

Individuals with disabilities constitute another relevant subset of the global refugee population which has recently begun to attract academic interest. Contemporary studies have explored the conditions of the disabled in camps and urban resettlements, pointing out the difficulties they face in physically accessing basic services, such as food and water distribution, medical treatment, educational support and job opportunities.⁶⁷ Scholars have also denounced harassment, abuse and discriminatory practices towards the disabled, which are perpetrated not only by the host communities but also by the communities of origin of these individuals. This new area of research has reported the lack of adequate infrastructures and specialised support staff in refugee camps and urban resettlements due to budgetary constraints of humanitarian programmes. Obstacles affecting the quality of life of disabled refugees in receiving countries after being resettled or granted asylum have also been examined.⁶⁸ In part thanks to recent academic attention

⁶⁶ Andreas Huber and Karen O'Reilly, "The Construction of Heimat under Conditions of Individual Modernity: Swiss and British Elderly Migrants in Spain", *Ageing & Society*, 24 (2004): 327-351; Claudio Bolzman, Rosita Fibbi and Marie Vial, "What to do after Retirement? Elderly Migrants and the Question of Return", *Journal of Ethnic and Migrations Studies*, 8 (2006): 1359-1375; Claudio Bolzman, "Democratization of Ageing: Also a Reality for Elderly Immigrants?", *European Journal of Social Work*, 1 (2012): 97-113; Jonathan Strong et al., "Health status and health needs of older refugees from Syria in Lebanon", *Conflict and Health*, 12 (2015); Lama Bazzi and Zeina Chemali, "A Conceptual Framework of Displaced Elderly Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: Challenges and Opportunities", *Global Journal of Health Science*, 11 (2016): 54-61. An early works on elderly refugees is Helene Scott and Claudio Bolzman, "Age in Exile: Europe's Older Refugees and Exiles", in *Refugees, Citizenship and Social Policy in Europe*, A. Bloch and C. Levy (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1999), 168-186.

⁶⁷ Aleema Shivji, "Disability in Displacement", *Forced Migration Review*, 35 (2010): 4-7; Mansha Mirza, "Unmet Needs and Diminished Opportunities: Disability, Displacement and Humanitarian Healthcare", *New Issues in Refugee Research Working Paper Series*, research paper 212 (Geneva: UNHCR, Policy Development and Evaluation Service, 2011); Id., "Disability and Humanitarianism in Refugee Camps: The Case for a Traveling Supranational Disability Praxis", *Third World Quarterly*, 8 (2011): 1527-1536.

⁶⁸ Keri Roberts and Jennifer Harris, *Disabled People in Refugee and Asylum-Seeking Communities in Britain* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2002); Kim Ward, Neil Amas and Jacob Lagnado, *Supporting Disabled Refugees and Asylum Seekers: Opportunities for New Approaches* (London: Refugee Support/Metropolitan Support Trust, 2008); Mansha Mirza and Allen W. Heinemann, "Service Needs and Service Gaps among Refugees with Disabilities Resettled in the United States", *Disability & Rehabilitation*, 7 (2012): 542-552; Mansha Mirza, "Occupational Upheaval during Resettlement and Migration: Findings of Global Ethnography with Refugees with Disabilities", *OTJR: Occupation, Participation and Health*, 2 (2012): 6-14; Mary Crock, Christine Ernst, Ron McCallum, "Where Disability and Displacement Intersect: Asylum

to this vulnerable minority, in the past few years, the UNHCR has intensified its commitment to protecting disabled persons who experience forced displacement.⁶⁹ However, their legal and physical care needs have been substantially overlooked, and this is one direction that scholars point to for future research. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data analysis will help to fully understand the forced migration experience of refugees with disabilities. Individual interviews and focus groups will be crucial to give them a voice for the first time and to design more effective and durable solutions to tear down the barriers that make an already difficult journey towards a better life even more arduous.

Environmental refugees are also among the hot topics in the ongoing academic debate on forced migration. The term, whose origins are relatively recent, was coined to identify those involuntary migrants who are induced to flee their homes by the severe effects of climate change on the ecosystem where they live.⁷⁰ These extreme effects include rising sea levels, the erosion of riverbanks, floods, drought, tropical cyclones and desertification, which put people's safety at risk, make their livelihoods unsustainable and oblige entire communities to migrate. Publications on climate change and displacement from different methodological and disciplinary perspectives started to appear consistently in the early twenty-first century, with particularly significant contributions from sociology, anthropology and geography.⁷¹ The initial lack of sound empirical research and the need to establish priority areas of research for policymakers in this field stimulated new and more in-depth studies, which began to circulate in the last ten years. The first empirical work on climate-induced displacements dates back to 2011, when

Seekers and Refugees with Disabilities”, *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 4 (2012): 735-764; Rebecca Yeo, “The deprivation experienced by disabled asylum seekers in the United Kingdom: symptoms, causes, and possible solutions”, *Disability & Society*, 5 (2017): 657-677; Cornelius Lätzsch, “Dimensions of Health Care and Social Services Accessibility for Disabled Asylum Seekers in Germany”, in Katharina Crepaz, Ulrich Becker and Elisabeth Wacker (eds.), *Health in Diversity - Diversity in Health* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2020), 51-75.

⁶⁹ See, for instance, the 2019 UNHCR Guidelines on Working with Persons with Disabilities in Forced Displacement available at <https://www.unhcr.org/publications/manuals/4ec3c81c9/working-persons-disabilities-forced-displacement.html> [last access in November 2022]; the 2011 UNHCR Guidelines on Working with Persons with Disabilities in Forced Displacement available at <https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/WH/Working-with-persons-with-disabilities-UNHCR-2011.pdf> [last access in November 2022]; the Executive Committee Conclusion for Refugees with Disabilities and Other Persons with Disabilities Protected and Assisted by UNHCR no. 110 (LXI) - 2010, available at <https://www.unhcr.org/excom/exconc/4cbeb1a99/conclusion-refugees-disabilities-other-persons-disabilities-protected-assisted.html> [last access in November 2022].

⁷⁰ Essam El-Hinnawi, *Environmental Refugees* (Nairobi: United Nations Environmental Programme, 1985); Jodi Jacobson, *Environmental refugees: A yardstick of habitability* (Washington D.C.: World Watch Institute, 1988); Norman Myers, “Environmental Refugees in a Globally Warmed World”, *BioScience*, 11(1993): 752-761.

⁷¹ Richard Black, “Environmental Refugees: Myth or Reality?”, Working Paper 34 (Geneva: UNHCR, 2001); Norman Myers, “Environmental Refugees: A Growing Phenomenon of the 21st Century”, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, 357 (2002): 609-613; Diane C. Bates, “Environmental Refugees? Classifying Human Migrations Caused by Environmental Change”, *Population and Environment*, 5 (2002): 465-477; David Keane, “The Environmental Causes and Consequences of Migration: A Search for the Meaning of Environmental Refugees”, *Georgetown Environmental Law Review*, 16 (2003): 210-223; Roger Zetter, Camillo Boano and Tim Morris, *Environmentally displaced people: understanding the linkages between environmental change, livelihoods and forced migration* (report) (Refugee Studies Centre, 2008); Nick Gill, “‘Environmental Refugees’: Key Debates and the Contributions of Geographers”, *Geography Compass*, 7 (2010): 861-871.

Robert Zimmer addressed the conjuncture between environmental stress and population transfers using case studies of Ghana, Kenya, Bangladesh and Vietnam.⁷² Since then, other case studies have appeared, and the critical debate surrounding the concept of ‘environmental refugees’ – begun in the 1990s – has been fully developed.⁷³ Currently, researchers overall agree in rejecting the ahistorical and apolitical view that suggests a direct causal connection between environmental factors and involuntary migrations. These scholars stress the close link between climate change, economic factors and the socio-political dynamics of power and disempowerment in determining forced displacement, which is recognised as a multicausal process.⁷⁴ However, this analysis does not underestimate the impact on population transfers of climate change, which is expected to generate between 50 and 200 million displaced people by 2050, according to recent estimates.⁷⁵ Hence the need to establish a research agenda for the study of the relationship between environmental change and migration in the short term. This research could potentially reduce concerns that climate change is generating and extending the protection of involuntary migrants’ rights.

Critical examination of the gender dimension of the refugee phenomenon concludes this essential account of novel interdisciplinary areas of research in forced migration studies. The topic is not entirely new. First research that brought attention to gender dynamics in refugee flows dates back to the late 1980s and early 1990s.⁷⁶ Stressing the condition of the female displaced population as an area of special concern, such analysis

⁷² Roger Zetter, *Protecting environmentally displaced people: developing the capacity of legal and normative instruments* (report) (Refugee Studies Centre, 2011).

⁷³ Early criticism to the definition of ‘environmental refugees’ are Richard Bilborrow, “Rural Poverty, migration, and the Environment in Developing Countries: Three Case Studies”, *Background paper for World Development Report* (1992); Astri Surkhe, “Pressure Points: Environmental Degradation, Migration and Conflict”, *Workshop on Environmental Change, Population Displacement, and Acute Conflict*, 1993; Id., “Environmental degradation and population flows”, *Journal of International Affairs*, 2 (1994): 473-496; JoAnn McGregor, “Climate change and involuntary migration: Implications for food security”, *Food Policy*, 2 (1994): 120-132; Steve Lonergan, “The Role of Environmental Degradation in Population Displacement”, *Environmental Change and Security Project Report*, 4 (1998): 5-15. As regards the contemporary debate on the concept of ‘environmental refugees’, see Carol Farbotko and Heather Lazrus, “The first climate refugees? Contesting global narratives of climate change in Tuvalu”, *Global Environment Change*, 2 (2012): 382-390; Issa Ibrahim Berchin et al., “Climate change and forced migrations: An effort towards recognizing climate refugees”, *Geoforum*, 84 (2017): 147-150; Roger Zetter, “Why they are not refugees - Climate change, environmental degradation and population displacement”, *Siirtolaisuus-Migration Quarterly*, 1 (2017): 23-28; Gregory White, “Environmental refugees”, in *Handbook on Migration and Security*, ed. Philippe Bourbeau (London: Elgar, 2017); Mathias Sahinkuye, “A Theoretical Framework for the Protection of Environmental Refugees in International Law”, *Transnational Human Rights Review*, 1 (2019): 1-25.

⁷⁴ Roger Zetter, “The politics of rights protection for environmentally displaced people”, *Siirtolaisuus-Migration Quarterly*, 1 (2017): 5-12.

⁷⁵ The data are available at <https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/policy/environmentally-displaced-people> [last access in November 2022].

⁷⁶ Genevieve Camus-Jacques, “Refugee Women: The Forgotten Majority”, in *Refugees and International Relations*, eds. Gil Loescher and Laila Monahan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 141-147; Jaqueline Greatbatch, “The Gendered Difference: Feminist Critiques of Refugee Discourse”, *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 4 (1989): 518-527; Doreen Indra, “Ethnic Human Rights and Feminist Theory: Gender Implications for Refugee Studies and Practice”, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 2 (1989): 221-242; Eileen Pittaway and Linda Bartolomei, “Refugees, Race, and Gender: The Multiple Discrimination against Refugee Women”, *Refuge*, 6 (1991): 21-32; Cynthia Enloe, “‘Women and children’: Propaganda Tools of Patriarchy”, in *Mobilising Democracy: Changing the US Role in the Middle East*, ed. Greg Bates (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1991), 29-32.

stimulated an international debate on this issue. Not by chance, in 1991, the UNHCR published the *Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women*, which identified the specific risks faced by female involuntary migrants and outlined various measures to protect them.⁷⁷ However, these early reflections had obvious limitations. They mainly focused on sexual violence perpetrated against women, without considering other types of gender-based persecution and the reasons behind them. Moreover, these initial studies depicted female refugees as passive victims and weak subjects, essentially denying them their own independent capacity for action.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the amount of feminist and gendered research on forced migration has progressively increased. The latest studies have fully recognised the uniqueness and the relevance of women's experience of flight. These investigations have started to examine female refugees – long treated as almost invisible subjects – in consideration of their specificity and agency. There is now greater awareness of the ways in which expectations and possibilities in the asylum application process, as well as in resettlement or repatriation, vary depending on gender. Accordingly, current research is particularly attentive to how gender identities (also including LGBTI individuals) and gender relations influence the experience of forced displacements. Thus, for instance, some studies have emphasised the plurality of patriarchal systems with which women and LGBTI refugees frequently clash in departure and receiving countries, as well as during their stay in refugee camps.⁷⁸ Other works have stressed the opportunities in terms of gender empowerment that can result from forced displacement, following the breakdown of the old social order and the creation of a new one with a more gender-balanced distribution of social tasks.⁷⁹ Gendered barriers to integration and practices of marginalisation that forced migrants face in host, resettlement and origin countries have also been investigated, as have cases of sexual and gender-based violence. In this respect, the experiences of men have also been included.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ The whole text is available at <https://www.unhcr.org/publications/legal/3d4f915e4/guidelines-protection-refugee-women.html> [last access in November 2022].

⁷⁸ Agnés Callamard, "Refugee Women: A Gendered and Political Analysis of the Refugee Experience", in *Refugees: Perspectives on the Experience of Forced Migration*, ed. Alastair Ager (London: Continuum; 1999), 194-214; Sharon Carlson, "Contesting and Reinforcing Patriarchy: An Analysis of Domestic Violence in the Dzaleka Refugee Camp", *RSC Working Paper No. 23* (2005): 1-59; Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, "'Ideal' Refugee Women and Gender Equality Mainstreaming: 'Good Practice' for Whom?", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 2 (2010): 64-84; Id., *The Ideal Refugees: Gender, Islam and the Sahrawi Politics of Survival* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014). Cf. Jane Freedman, *Gendering the International Asylum and Refugee Debate* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁷⁹ Ulrike Krause, "Analysis of empowerment of refugee women in camps and settlements", *Journal of internal displacement*, 1 (2014): 28-52; Sahar Almakhamreh, Hana Zuhair Asfour and Aisha Hutchinson, "Negotiating patriarchal relationships to become economically active: an insight into the agency of Syrian refugee women in Jordan using frameworks of womanism and intersectionality", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 4 (2020): 595-613.

⁸⁰ Charlie Carpenter, "Recognizing Gender-Based Violence against Civilian Men and Boys in Conflict Situations", *Security Dialogue*, 37 (2006): 83-103; Heaven Crawley, "Gender, Persecution and the Concept of Politics in the Asylum Determination Process", *Forced Migration Review*, 9 (2009): 17-20; Sharalyn R. Jordan, "Un/Convention(al) Refugees: Contextualizing the Accounts of Refugees Facing Homophobic or Transphobic Persecution", *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 2 (2009): 165-182; Sabine Jansen and Thomas Spijkerboer, *Fleeing Homophobia: Asylum Claims Related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Europe* (Amsterdam: COC Nederland, Vrije Universiteit, 2011); Amanda Gray and Alexandra McDowall, "LGBT Refugee Protection in the UK: From Discretion to Belief?", *Forced Migration Review*, 42 (2013): 22-25; Jane Freedman, "Sexual and gender-based violence against refugee women: a hidden

Despite the progress made towards a better understanding of the gender dynamics in forced population transfers, a more critical reflection would be beneficial. In fact, the current trend is still to analyse the flight experiences of women and LGBTI individuals as ‘exceptional’ compared to what is usually seen as the ‘normal’ experience, namely that of men. Following UNHCR indications, the future goal is to undertake a ‘conceptual shift from pre-identified groups of “vulnerable” or “extremely vulnerable persons”, to the broader concepts of age, gender and diversity’.⁸¹ This will allow the ‘different vulnerabilities and capacities of all age and gender groups’ to be examined without discrimination.⁸² Moreover, as Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh has stressed, this will also help to correct the imbalance of power that often occurs in national and international aid programmes, and in so doing make their commitment to encouraging gender equality truly effective.⁸³

Conclusions

Forced migration studies constitute a lively and constantly expanding area of research. Tracing the history of this field in detail is hardly a practicable undertaking, given the impressive amount of work published over the years. Nonetheless, it is useful to reflect on the most important advances produced by past studies and the potential venues that future research has to offer, as this article has attempted to do. It is not a mere intellectual exercise. In refugee studies, theoretical enquiry is deeply intertwined with policy practices, which have a direct impact on millions of people. Setting a research agenda is crucial to balancing two apparently opposing needs. On the one hand, it is important to develop a sound analytical framework, accurate conceptual definitions and a wide-ranging reflection to better comprehend the causes and effects of forced migrations. On the other hand, it is indispensable to plan timely policy decisions that adequately address the demands of the world’s refugee population. In this regard, increased attention to the necessities of politics by academia is expected, along with a greater commitment by policymakers to giving more space to theoretical and methodological considerations.

A multidisciplinary approach has proved fundamental for research on the refugee phenomenon, which, due to its complexity, has important entailments in various fields. However, the main limitation of existing works lies in the predominantly top-down analytical perspective they adopt, which tends to flatten and homogenise the varied realities of flight. Future research on forced migrations can only advance by addressing the human experience of uprooting and emphasising the heterogeneity and agency of forcibly displaced persons using a bottom-up approach. Giving a voice to refugees and employing the humanities to analyse, preserve and hybridize the cultural heritages of

aspect of the refugee “crisis”, *Reproductive Health Matters*, 47 (2016): 18-26; Saime Ozcurumez, Seline Akyuz and Hannah Bradby, “The Conceptualization problem in research and responses to sexual and gender-based violence in forced migration”, *Journal of Gender Studies*, 1 (2020): 66-78.

⁸¹ The quote is in Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s Programme, “Age, gender and diversity mainstreaming” (2010), available at <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4cc96e1d2.pdf> [last access in November 2022].

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, “Gender and forced migration”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*, eds. Fiddian Qasmiyeh et al., 406.

forced migrant populations will make it possible to incorporate first-hand information on the dynamics of flight, life in camps, resettlements and integration through direct accounts. Moreover, enabling involuntary migrants to tell their stories on their own terms fulfils the moral imperative to promote the understanding of their culture and life experience, which is key to strengthening their social integration. Ultimately, refugee studies can contribute not only to analysing a past and present reality, but also to influence the subjects and dynamics of the present and the future. The place of the humanities cannot be underestimated in this context. Also in refugee studies, history matters.

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