Past and Present Amongst Refugees in the Eastern Mediterranean: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges in the Study of Forced Migration

The Age of the Exile?

If we were to describe the times in which we live in a single sentence, how would we phrase it? For Vladimiro Ariel Dorfman, the eminent Argentinian-Chilean-American professor of literature and human rights activist, that sentence would be: “We live in the age of the refugee, the age of the exile.” Indeed, any person reading the news today would find it difficult to dispute Dorfman’s claim. It is certainly true that in our time, a large number of people migrate, not because they want to, but because they are forced to do so. Uprooted by poverty, wars, and repression, they risk their lives to escape destitution and persecution. Many end up in refugee camps or in the slums of sprawling cities. Some lucky few will find a better life in an affluent country. All, in their different ways, are at the mercy of economic and political forces beyond their control. As we approach the second decade of the twenty-first century, gruesome images of drowned adults and children washed away onto European shores have become common front-pagers in newspapers and television channels. The inability, and often unwillingness, of governments both in Europe and elsewhere to respond to the “refugee crisis” in a humane manner is not only obvious, but also disheartening. Hence, the need to find sustainable, long-term solutions to forced migration has never been more urgent.

The phenomenon of forced migration is a broad problem with many dimensions. Forced migration can be described as “internal” when it displaces people within national borders, or “external” when forcing people out of their own country.\(^1\) Forced migration may be the result of natural disasters, such as floods, droughts, or hurricanes that are intensified by the effects of climate-change. It can also occur because of geophysical phenomena,

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\(^1\) Researchers generally tend to use the term IDPs (internally displaced people) when displaced people have not crossed a national border and “refugee” or “asylum seeker” if they cross an international border.
such as earthquakes, tsunamis, or volcanic activity, or by biological factors, such as pandemics of such incurable diseases as Ebola. Yet, forced migration often has man-made causes, such as political instability, social and economic inequality, civil wars, and military interventions sprouting not only from contentions over natural resources, but also from differences between minorities and majorities as well as opposing views concerning territory or ideology (including religious and national). The recent case between Kurds and Assyrians in Iraq or Kurds and Yazidi being a good example of such disputes.

Still, the distinctions between voluntary and involuntary migration as well as between migration for economic reasons and forced displacement linked to political persecution or armed conflict are blurred and often controversial (Schuster, 2015; Yarris & Castañeda, 2015). This is because contemporary migration flows entail economic and socio-political inequalities, both of which contribute to migration’s causality, and among all types of cross-border movements, “forced migration” is surely the most unsettling. For these reasons, while acknowledging that man-made causes may also refer to man’s indirectly and partially producing conditions for displacement, in this issue, we isolate the scope of inquiry to a narrower range of causes (hereafter, man-made direct causes), such as war and conflict.

There are many definitions of forced migration. For example, Bartram, Poros, and Monforte (2014) define it as a type of movement that “results from some sort of compulsion or threat to well-being or survival, emerging in conditions ranging from violent conflict to severe economic hardship” (p. 69). However, when conceptualizing forced migration, the difficulty is in determining what counts as compulsion. Many migration scholars no longer believe that a conventional dichotomy between economic migrants and refugees, for example, is cogent or persuasive (Bartram et al., 2014).

At the center of the issue of forced migration is the character we call the “refugee.” In its broadest connotation, the term “refugee” refers to “individuals who have left their country in the belief that they cannot or should not return to it in the near future, although they might hope to do so if conditions permit” (Thielemann, 2006, p. 4). Most such definitions rely on the legal definition of refugees as written in the 1951 United Nations multilateral treaty Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Article 1, section A, paragraph 2: 14), which defines a refugee as someone who

...owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (UNHCR, n.d.).

2 An extended version of the 1951 definition was proposed during the 1984 Cartagena Convention (see UNHCR, 2013).
Definitions are important; however, there are some considerations that must be made clear from the beginning and that will set the tone that resonates with the papers in this special issue. First, instead of a binary opposition between refugees (asylum seekers) and economic migrants, scholars of migration now perceive a continuum where *compulsion* plays a greater or lesser role in migration flows depending on the circumstances. The archetypical instance of forced migration, as Bartram et al. (2014) point out, is displacement or refugee flows arising from violent conflicts, persecution, and/or deliberate expulsion. Hence, the element of compulsion is obvious. However, and second, it is also important to highlight the role of migration as a *strategy* and *part of human development* and the cycle of life. Doing so allows us to recognize the *agency* of migrants and refugees. In that way, we cease to see refugees as mere victims of a fate beyond their control, and change our perception of them as actors responding to extremely challenging conditions by relying on the social and cultural resources that remain under their control (Monsutti, 2010). Third, by understanding resilience among the most vulnerable populations and by understanding what helps them to move on and regain stability and productivity in their new lives under adverse conditions, we can learn valuable lessons about the nature of human survival and how people overcome adversity even when all odds are against them.

For reasons that will be made clear, authors focus almost exclusively on the Eastern Mediterranean region whilst discussing both ontological and epistemological aspects of forced migration. That is, while their research focuses on the historical legacies of forced migration in the region, political contexts and backgrounds, the psychological effects of displacement on migrants and refugees, and how the law interprets the conditions of displacement, each author reflects on the methodological aspects of studying forced migration and the importance of questioning concepts.

**Past and Present**

Scholarly research is often necessarily limited to specific time periods, to strict geographic regions, or to a given population—be it large or small. However, forced displacement is a phenomenon that is as old as civilization itself (McNeil, 1984) and certainly not limited to national borders or regions. Therefore, it is important to keep this broad spatial and temporal context in mind, as this will serve to remind us that forced migration is perhaps best understood from a multidisciplinary and multi-methodological perspective. Indeed, the multifaceted, multidimensional global processes that may trigger forced displacement force scholars to look beyond disciplinary boundaries when researching this topic, since this form of migration neither is the result of simple causes, nor is it a strictly modern-day phenomenon.

Let us take the element of time as a case in point. Since antiquity, forced displacement of large populations across vast geographies has shaped and reshaped our world. Some of these were recorded and then recounted orally for generations before being written down, only then to become part of the foundational myths shared by the three great monotheistic
religions of the world: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. All of these religions describe in their sacred texts how coerced displacement and long-term exile were pivotal in the shaping of cultures and societies in the Eastern Mediterranean, the region on which we have chosen to focus our attention in this volume. In the earlier of these texts, the Jewish TANAKH (also known as the Hebrew Bible), we see myths and legends that clearly evoke displacement as a core notion in the development of civilization. According to this tradition, a displeased God forced the very first humans, Adam and Eve, out of Eden, while their son Cain became a fugitive after having killed his own brother Abel, and being forced to flee to the land of Nod, a place “east of Eden” (Genesis 4: 2–16). Then, Noah is forced out of his land by a supposed natural disaster—the great flood story (Genesis 7: 2–12)—in a retelling of the Epic of Gilgamesh. Later, Abraham, the legendary patriarch, was also forced out of Canaan as the land experienced a great period of famine that prompted him and his family to seek refuge in Egypt (Genesis 12: 10). Generations later, Moses, Abraham’s descendant and the key character in the Exodus story, becomes a “refugee” after he flees Egypt with his companions in search of the “promised land” whilst declaring, “I have been a stranger in a strange land” (Exodus 2: 22). Centuries later, when the Temple of Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, many were forced into a long exile in Babylon where they “sat down and wept” after being “carried away captive” (Psalm 137: 2–3). While all these narratives have a male dominated approach, a female dimension is found in the Book of Genesis, where Hagar and her son Ishmael are forced out into the desert. A later and similar incident occurs in the Christian New Testament when the small child Jesus, with his mother and father, are forced to flee to Egypt, away from a vindictive emperor. In Islamic tradition, the “Hegira” describes the migration of the Islamic prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Yathrib in 622 (Shaikh, 2001). These narratives forged long-standing traditions that placed forced migration and displacement at the heart of what was to become the foundational myths of Asia Minor, the Middle East, and Europe. From this, we can make the assertion that forced displacement is a phenomenon that resonates throughout vast periods of history, from the Bronze Age Mesopotamia to modern-day Syria.

In the present special issue, our focus is on the modern manifestations of displacement and as such, we begin our work in the nineteenth century, the period when global colonial empires began to give way to a new system of governance, a system of political and economic organization that became homogenous throughout the world after World War I: the nation-state. As in the distant past, great numbers of people displaced by war, famine, persecution, and either natural or environmental disasters have constantly agitated the modern world. Indeed, as the second decade of the twenty-first century ends, hardly a day goes by without us being made aware of those issues involving immigrants, asylum seekers, or refugees. With the advent of modern population surveying, we now have a much better grasp of the size of displaced populations around the globe and at a glance, these numbers are overwhelming.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Global Trends Report on Forced Migration, a record high 65.3 million people, or one in 113
persons, were displaced from their homes by conflict and persecution between 2015 and 2016 (UNHCR, 2015), a majority of which are women and children (International Rescue Committee [IRC], 2014; Sherwood, 2014). According to the same report, Syria is the largest source country for refugees, with a total refugee population of 4.9 million (and 7.6 million who are internally displaced persons (IDPs henceforth) at the end of 2015, while Afghanistan was the second-largest source country with 2.7 million refugees. Unfortunately, the signs indicate that these numbers will continue to increase, especially because of the long and bloody conflict in Syria and the lack of a foreseeable diplomatic resolution. According to the International Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) GRID – Global Report on Internal Displacement – the total number of conflict-related IDPs throughout the world as of December 2015 is 40.8 million (2016). Furthermore, another 22 million people in Asia are currently displaced as a direct consequence of natural disasters. The estimated total figure of IDPs around the world is 55 million, of which a significant number will never return home. For those who do return, the average time of displacement is 17.5 years. According to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Federation, approximately 73 million people in the world are, or have recently been, forced to migrate (2015). If correct, these numbers indicate that one in one hundred individuals in the world today is either an IDP or an international refugee. Contrary to popular perception, most refugees do not live in camps, but rather in inner cities. In these urban environments, refugees face harsh economic hardships, including a lack of money to pay rent, maintain children at school, or even to buy food.

Numbers can never fully convey the scale of human suffering. However, by looking at these statistics, we learn that forced migration is a very complex problem that changes in nature on a daily basis. It is a problem that seems to have intensified since the end of the Cold War in 1989 (Castels, 2003). Take the recent crisis in Yemen as an illustrative example of such complexity. The UNHCR has reported, “Nearly one in every ten persons in Yemen is internally displaced” (or approximately 2.4 million people) as of January 31, 2016 (UNHCR, 2016). However, at the time of the publication of the report, Yemen also hosted 267,675 registered refugees from Somalia, Ethiopia, and Syria, as well as other minority groups from both African and Middle-Eastern countries, with 7,705 new arrivals in February 2016 alone. To mention another case, in Sudan, more than one in ten Sudanese were displaced in 2011, including 4.9 million IDPs.

Given this history and the current scale of forced migration around the globe, it is not surprising that forced migration has become an important discussion topic within the social sciences, attracting the interest of sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, economists, political scientists, psychologists, lawyers, historians, and demographers, as well as scholars interested in culture and the arts, not to mention policy makers (O’Reilly, 2016). Nevertheless, and although there has been a long tradition within the humanities and social sciences of scholarly work concerned with forced migration, it is only since the 1980’s that a more concerted effort to define forced migration as a legitimate field of inquiry has taken place. Still, there is no consensus on where the boundaries of the field should be (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Loescher, Long,
This is because the complexity of issues pertaining to the study of forced migration and refugee studies drive scholars to reach out across disciplinary boundaries and to use diverse methodological tools with important consequences for our understanding of the issues involved. As such, this special issue contributes to this growing field by casting a critical eye on how we conceptualize and study historical and contemporary cases of displacement. We do so while simultaneously recognizing the importance of interdisciplinary and multi-methodological perspectives in discussions of forced migration.

Concepts and Methodologies

Although the contributions in this special issue are undoubtedly concerned with engaging in an ontological discussion, that is, the outcomes of research and the potential consequences of our findings for policy makers, civil society, and governments more broadly, the main focus rests on an epistemological preoccupation with concepts (i.e., refugees, asylum seekers, or migrants) and methodologies (how we put such concepts to use in research) used in the study of forced migration.

Scholars who research and write on forced migration tend to spend their time studying the meanings of concepts and definitions inbuilt in such questions as: Who is a refugee? Who should have the right to seek asylum in another country? Should internally displaced people be classified as “refugees?” If so, then what are their rights? When can we classify migration as either “forced” or “voluntary?” What are the merits of such a classification for both scholarly work and policy makers? What criteria are used to discern, for example, an “economic migrant” from a “genuine” asylum seeker? And how appropriate, ethical, or moral, are such differentiations? In other words, this attention to concepts and methodologies becomes a framework through which we can discuss the outcome of original research conducted across diverse settings ranging from mixed methodology (quantitative and qualitative) psychosocial studies on trauma and coping, to archival research, analyses of past and present legislation and ethnographic case studies of refugees and asylum seekers. Authors discuss the historical legacies of forced migration in the Eastern Mediterranean region and the experiences of modern-day refugees, the political contexts and backgrounds that favor forced displacement, the psychological effects of displacement on migrants and refugees, and how the law should interpret the conditions of displacement and the case for moral responsibility. Individual contributors also analyze other important themes, such as resilience, religion, land reform and its effects on populations, challenges faced by mental health professionals working with displaced people (in particular IDPs), the possibility of back migration or permanent resettlement, and the differences between migration policies and political discourses. Others focus on the physical and mental barriers imposed by borders, historical continuities between past and present, and the differences between the narratives of displacement offered by those who are displaced and by those who displace.
Taken as a whole, our mission in putting together this special issue is two-fold. First, we seek to better understand the practical, ethical, and epistemological challenges and opportunities presented by research on forced migration, a field of inquiry that is fraught with difficulties given the long-term period that it covers as well as the fluid social, cultural, economic, and political contexts that influence it. Second, and no less important, we aim to offer a cross-disciplinary platform to highlight ontological questions and thus bring forth the findings of this new research. With these two aims in mind, each author was asked to consider how we should conceptualize, approach, and work with historical and contemporary cases involving migrants and refugees? Meanwhile, each author was also asked to answer the following questions: 1) What is the relationship between the context and the research outcome? 2) Are there gaps between methodology, experience, and practice, in sum, between our available methods and the reality of forced migration? 3) How should our methodologies value, engage with, and take into account all the complex political, historical, cultural, economic, and social dimensions contributing to forced displacement in the Eastern Mediterranean region?

One could argue that perhaps by asking how and where concepts originate and how methods of inquiry more closely relate to and influence our understanding of what we see, we will not only be better able to understand whence problems originate, but also how to avoid them in the present and in the future. Hence, the value of the contributions found in this anthology is based on the fact that most studies dealing with the methodologies applied in the study of forced migration tend to focus on one discipline and therefore offer little comparative cases between disciplines (for other studies dealing with the problem of methodology and forced migration see Chatty, 2007; Crisp, 1999; Crush & Williams, 2001; Harrell-Bond & Voutira, 2007; Jocabsen & Landau, 2003; Lammers, 2003; Macchiavello, 2003; MacKenzie, McDowell, & Pittaway, 2007; McMichael, Nunn, Gilford, & Correa-Velez, 2015). Thus, a discussion of concepts and methodologies merit scholarly attention even if these may seem at first not necessarily or directly applicable to policy making. Undoubtedly, there is a perceived division in the study of forced migration regarding “policy relevant” and “policy irrelevant” research. We hope that in their own distinct ways, the contributions found in this special issue will bring to light nuances and contextualization that will render such dichotomy to be problematic at best. We propose that relevant concepts and their application in the study of forced migration are a legitimate focus of inquiry in their own right. This is because both the theoretical concepts that we as policy makers, politicians, academics, and interpreters of the law produce and how we set about studying and applying these concepts in the field often have important practical consequences in the lives of displaced people. Whilst it is understandable that scholars who study forced migration are often motivated to conduct research out of a sense of ethical or moral responsibility or duty toward what they believe to be the injustices inflicted by powerful agents upon people in vulnerable conditions, one should question and reflect upon the often-conflictual relationship between theory and practice, and the
growing pressure put on academics to produce work that can be *measured* in terms of the impact their research may have on policy formation.

The Eastern Mediterranean Basin

It is evident in the title of this special issue that the purpose in producing this collection of papers is to add to a growing body of academic work on forced migration by offering a multidisciplinary volume focused on one region of the world that has become almost synonymous with displacement: the Eastern Mediterranean. Although our numerous contributors show a preoccupation with the unfolding Syrian crisis, described by Antonio Guterres (the former United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, now UN Secretary-General) as “the most dramatic humanitarian crisis that we [UNHCR] have ever faced” ([Chulov, 2013](#)), this anthology looks at forced migration more broadly. Specifically, it adopts a geographical approach by describing and discussing research findings dealing with the historical and contemporary situation of populations living in the wider Eastern Mediterranean basin. This approach is relevant because, clearly, there are common, historically recurrent concerns that transcend national, ethnic, cultural, religious, and political boundaries.

However, considering the widespread nature of the phenomenon of forced migration (in historical terms and in the twenty-first century), a justification of why we have decided to focus on the Eastern Mediterranean is required. During contemporary history from the nineteenth century onward, this region has experienced various streams of migration (immigration and emigration). This history of migration has had diverse implications both for those who have migrated (most of whom were refugees), and for the host societies that have sheltered them. The consequences of this movement are still evident within cultural artifacts and memories as well as within the social contexts of the host country. Here we see historical crimes left untreated only to re-emerge in similar or new forms later with reverberating and multiple consequences. Actual and pragmatic solutions tend to acquire a more permanent character, such as an *ad hoc* approach to refugees. An understanding of the past offers a guide for how streams of forced migration consolidate themselves. Indeed, the refugee traffic in the region has affected the immediate neighborhoods in the Mediterranean, Europe, and the Caucasus, not to mention international relations ([Betts & Loescher, 2011](#)) between countries and organizations, such as the United Nations.

Unfortunately, the Eastern Mediterranean has been the setting of a long stream of unsettling conflicts that have caused deep instability in the region and that in turn have left millions of people displaced. To mention only some of the better documented cases, the region has been the stage for widespread massacres and destruction of villages and cities, events which only a minority of affected persons escaped alive and which involved Armenians, Assyrians, and other Christian minorities from what is now the Republic
of Turkey by the Ottoman Empire (1915), and the subsequent “population exchange” between Greece and Turkey that occurred in 1923, known as the mübâdele.

The region has also experienced the still-ongoing Israeli-Palestinian territorial dispute that was fueled by the aftermath of World War II when the region was divided by the French and British mandates resulting in the founding of the modern state of Israel (since 1948—the main phase being between 1964 and 1993). Next, came the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990) and the still-ongoing Kurdish war of independence (since 1983) against the Republic of Turkey. The Gulf War (1990–1991) resultant from the invasion by Iraqi forces into Kuwait and the subsequent deployment of British, other European, and American troops to the region has left a legacy of destruction and displacement still felt by the populations of the countries involved. Next, came the Afghan Civil Wars (1996–2001)\(^3\) and the invasions of Iraq (2003–2014) and Afghanistan (2001–2014), both in retaliation from the United States following the September 11th attacks in New York. During the same period, we witnessed the Arab Spring and the fall of many North African regimes that temporarily changed the character of the politics in the region, although the popular revolts quickly dissipated in the mist of often brutally violent responses from the threatened governments, whilst the repression by the latter in turn resulted in even more refugees. Finally, the region has suffered the consequences of the still-ongoing and highly destructive Syrian civil/military war (since 2011). Stigmatized and considered a “burden,” Syrians, Iraqis, Afghans, Lebanese, Jordanians, Armenians, Assyrians, Yezidis, Mandaeans, Palestinians, Yemenis, Somalians, Eritreans, Sudanese, and many other populations have suffered the double-burden often imposed by forced migration: they have had their human rights violated and their land often taken from them while also not being accepted elsewhere as citizens. For these reasons, the Eastern Mediterranean has become a synonym for forced displacement in the twenty-first century.

Given the scale of human suffering in the region, we hope the insights found in this special issue will be useful for decision makers attempting to produce policies that are sensitive to the dynamic and intricate nature of forced migration in the region. In particular, by challenging certain aspects of national and international law, by paying attention to the way anthropologists understand space and culture, and by developing an awareness not only of the psychological effects of displacement, but of how narrative methods of inquiry may help us better understand people’s aspirations, motivations, and coping mechanisms. We also hope that the texts included in this issue will be useful for students and established scholars interested in not only the way in which policy is formed, maintained, and reproduced, but also its effects on displaced populations. Finally, we further aim to inspire fresh discussion on the ethics of studying victims of forced migration and on issues concerning morality and justice. Each contribution is placed

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\(^3\) It could also be argued that the Afghan civil wars began in either 1979- or 1992, depending on whether it is measured from the standpoint of Soviet withdrawal.
within broader themes, ranging from public administration and policy research, historical legacies, ethnographies, and psychosocial approaches for the study of refugees to insights into the juridical aspects of forced migration vis-à-vis national and international law.

In the reminder, a short description of each of the sections contained in this special issue and a brief description of each of the contributions found within each section is presented.

Part I–The Anthropological Perspective

Dawn Chatty’s paper assesses the current situation of Syrian refugees and the refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. She bases her analysis on a qualitative study that has sought to explore the different perceptions and aspirations of Syria’s refugees, humanitarian assistance practitioners, and their host communities. Her paper probes what social factors within the host community would positively contribute, when circumstances permit, to the reshaping and re-integration of Syrian society post–conflict. Chatty’s exploratory study has two aims: first, to explore whether a consensual view on “protection in exile” might be articulated in a culturally-sensitive manner, which does not necessarily require encampment; and second, to probe how grassroots “coexistence initiatives” within the host community might facilitate improved mechanisms for return once the Syrian uprising has been resolved.

In her in-depth study, Annika Rabo explores the past and present of forced migratory movements in the Raqqa province, Syria. Infamous as being central to the territorial claims of Da’sh/ISIS today, the Raqqa province is built on and from the ruins of earlier human settlements dating back to the Assyrian and Babylonian civilizations and to the peak of the Arab Islamic era. Throughout the centuries, there has been intermittent depopulation and repopulation along a continuum from forced to voluntary mobility. Rabo argues that everywhere, including the Raqqa province, people voice opinions on migration, and that human mobility affects people of all backgrounds. Moreover, people construct memories and historical accounts of mobility (from forced to voluntary) and rootedness. She then asks the question: What future is there for people in the Raqqa province after years of intense and very brutal armed conflict? In her attempt to answer the question, Rabo wonders if there is “material” in the history of the Raqqa province to develop reconciliatory processes for a future co-existence whilst highlighting the regional history of mobility and settlement over the last few centuries. The latter becomes an important backdrop for the discussion on coping, resilience, and construction of memories.

Last, drawing primarily on oral history recordings with people born and raised in Yarmouk Camp in Damascus and in Khan Eshieh camp 20 km south of Damascus, Mette Lundsfryd studied the border-crossing experiences of Palestinians who had escaped Syria into Lebanon between 2012 and 2014. Through inter-subjective authorship, her study shows how three generations of forced displacement affect subjective memories and reflect nearly seventy years of an on going “catastrophe”. Applying an oral history
approach, Lundsryd shows how the geography of Syria has become a network of borders that she calls “a world of checkpoints,” where access to safe territory is repeatedly scarce or denied. Her study contests and renegotiates the conventional notions of borders and illuminates how personal memories of escaping from Syria intertwine collective memories of uprooting, displacement, and resilience.

**Part II-The Historical Perspective**

In her paper, Ella Fratantuono asks yet another important question: When, for example, do migrants become a social issue eligible for state-driven solutions? In the second half of the nineteenth century, millions of Muslims migrated from former Ottoman lands, fleeing an encroaching Russian Empire in the North Caucasus and Crimea, on the one hand, and from nationalist struggles in the Balkans, on the other. This mid-nineteenth century influx of refugees into the Ottoman Empire was neither the first time the state had welcomed large groups fleeing from elsewhere, nor the first attempt at Ottoman “population politics” to facilitate state security. Despite these historical precedents, an independent institution for migrant administration did not exist until the formation of an Ottoman migration commission on January 5, 1860. So, how did nineteenth century refugees come “to be constructed as a ‘problem’ amenable to a ‘solution?’” Fratantuono’s paper explores the history of migration administration in the Ottoman Empire to evaluate state strategies and ideals regarding migrant settlement. Establishing this background contributes to our understanding of the relationship between the Ottoman state and the refugees through recognizing the shortcomings of Ottoman organization as state officials might have defined them and through providing insight into the very migration regimes that conditioned terms of negotiation among state officials and newcomers.

Matthew Goldman examines the impact of land tenure insecurity on forced migration and the possibilities of return in southeast Anatolia from the first major cadastral modernization project initiated by the Ottoman Empire in 1858 up to the recently completed World Bank-funded cadastral modernization project (2008–2013). He presents preliminary evidence from the Turkish press indicating that the latest attempt to administer property rights for land faces old problems. Leaving land conflicts poorly resolved threatens to exacerbate the on-going conflict between the Turkish state and its allied militias and the Kurdish nationalist armed group, the PKK (Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan, or “Workers Party of Kurdistan”). Those displaced by the conflict and who attempt to return, often find that new tenants have claimed their old lands, often having acquired the legal title from the state as well. Rather than entering the legal system for help, many prefer to solve their land disputes themselves through violence. Given the tenuous peace or controlled conflict that prevails in much of the region today, creating flashpoints for conflict is a risky prospect. Goldman concludes with a series of general recommendations to improve the current cadastral process and promote social peace and the rights of displaced people.
Part III–Law, Policy, and Political Perspectives

In his paper, Umut Korkut, critically analyzes the political responses of the Turkish Republic when faced with incursions of forced migrants from its neighboring countries. He applies the Theory of Discursive Analysis to what he calls the “governance of forced migration”, whilst discussing the plight of Syrians and other groups who have migrated to Turkey as a result of conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean region. He makes the argument that the restrictive Turkish asylum regime, and aversive Turkish public philosophy to immigration, have led political authorities to continuously resort to discursive rather than institutionalized means to handle the impact of forced migration in the country, with many negative consequences for forced migrants. He compares the reception of Syrians with other refugee groups that have been in the country prior to and during the Syrian crisis. He also compares it with those who migrated during the summer and autumn months of 2014 within the context of the incursions of the Islamic State in the region. He illustrates how the Turkish humanitarian assistance to refugees, although often selective, can be inclusive and generous depending on which nationality a refugee may hold. The differences in the reception of these groups, also reveals the discrepancy between government and public positions regarding the swelling numbers of Syrian refuges in the country.

Lena Karamanidou uses discourse analysis to explore one field that invokes collective experiences of migration: that of political discourse, specifically parliamentary debates on legislation in Greece. Drawing on the critical discourse analysis of 20 parliamentary debates on eight different laws on migration and asylum, she examines how constructions of the experience of emigration and forced migration are employed by political actors to legitimize or delegitimize asylum and migration policies. She demonstrates that references to collective migration experiences are not only employed to argue for greater tolerance or inclusiveness–as has been suggested in a similar analysis of the use of emigration experiences in Irish discourses of migration, but also for greater exclusion and to represent “us,” the host society, in a positive manner.

In her paper, Georgiana Turculet argues that the Syrian case is a typical situation of “engineered regionalism,” according to which states take proactive measures to keep refugees in their region of origin. According to Turculet’s argument, all such measures have pernicious implications that not only affect the lives of refugees directly, but that also indirectly affect the lives of the citizens of host countries. Her normative inquiry concludes that states addressing the humanitarian crisis ought to be persuaded that by acting against the interests of the refugees, they are also (potentially) acting against the interests of their own citizens. For example, states prioritizing short-sighted political goals, and therefore policies, might be more disruptive than assessing the “refugee issue” realistically based on the magnitude of the crisis. Such policies generally follow the underlying and misleading assumption that the “refugee crisis” is temporary.

Lastly, Hannibal Travis explores the issue of forced migration from the perspective of international law. He makes the argument that, since the 1980s, it has become increasingly
common for members of the international community to condemn as “genocide” such policies as forcing communities to flee their homes because they are seen as a security risk. He offers a comparison of the Armenians and Assyrians in 1915, the Kurds and Assyrians in the 1930s and 1980s-1990s, northern Cyprus starting in 1974, and the Assyrians and Yezidis in 2014. His work covers the law of genocidal intent during wartime or other threats to national security. Travis also discusses how criminal tribunals analyze genocidal intent by examining evidence of massacres, rapes, forcible deportation, area bombardment, and deprivation of property. For instance, the Security Council, confronted with national-security justifications for alleged atrocities in Bosnia in 1993 and Kosovo in 1999 referred the acts to international tribunals for genocide prosecutions, often pointing to the plight of Muslim refugees from Yugoslav attacks. The UN General Assembly, despite Yugoslavia’s protestations, harshly condemned ethnic cleansing as genocide in Bosnia, emphasizing the plight of refugees as well. Treatise writers have also viewed genocidal intent and counterinsurgency or other defensive warfare as not being necessarily irreconcilable. Hannibal concludes with a comparison of the plight of Bosnian refugees in 1993 and the condemnation of the Bosnian Serb and Yugoslav forces for genocide in that year, with the plight of Assyrian and Yezidi refugees from the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in 2014.

Part IV-The Psychosocial Perspective

In their joint study, Önver A. Cetrez and Valerie DeMarinis use action research to describe the psychological dimension of forced migration as well as the ethical challenges in research among vulnerable populations in their quantitative research of Syrian Christian refugees in Turkey. They focus their work on refugees attending the Qnushyo activity center, in Istanbul, a safe heaven developed through the joint collaboration of researchers, refugees and other concerned individuals.

They describe how refugees often find themselves in a vulnerable position as they attempt to reach a safe heaven, away from war and conflict. For instance, the ever-increasing uncertainty associated with an unsettled existence, between what was their home and an imagined home in resettlement brings a variety of health-related risks for those who are forced to migrate. The long drawn war in Syria and the resultant protracted liminal status of Syrians in Turkey often jeopardizes their mental and physical health whilst exacerbating physical pain and causing low levels of mental health and self-esteem. Still, despite these challenging conditions, many refugees also show high levels of resilience often drawn from what the authors describe as “health-sustaining resources”, such as family, community, and culture, all of which become eventual sources of meaning-making. Different strategies are often used to cope with the challenges of an unsettled life and to form a sense of community with those in a similar situation and who share similar beliefs and hopes as a result of their religious or other meaning-giving system.
In the same vein, my own paper, describes what I call the “fear factor” and how it influences the implementation and analysis of research data. In my paper, I explore the findings of a multidisciplinary study of Syrian refugees in Turkey. I am particularly concerned with the population of refugees living in Mersin and Adana – two major destinations for Syrians in the East Mediterranean. My original aim was to learn how displaced people experienced and coped with the trauma of being forced to emigrate, how they built resilience and, given their overtly religious background, whether religion had any role in helping them build coping strategies. As my research encountered many difficulties associated with the context in which the data collection took place, I was forced to go beyond a focus on the ontology of forced migration (that is, the research findings) and to give weight to the epistemological aspect (in this case the methodological challenges) in the study of forced migration, including the ethics, and the risks involved in conducting research of this type within the context of “hyper-fluid” or unsettled political contexts.

Finally, Akar Tamer Aker and Esra Isık, discuss the methodological challenges regarding forced displacement studies in Turkey. They argue that Turkish mental health professionals have faced two major methodological challenges concerning displacement and migration studies in the last two decades. The first refers to internal displacement in Turkey, mainly the Kurdish population. The second relates to the movement of Syrian refugees to that same country. Both movements have their own characteristics whilst presenting different research and intervention difficulties different research and intervention difficulties. For Aker and Isık, forced displacement carries not only political, legal, and socio-economic implications and ramifications, but they also affect the physical and psychological health of those who are displaced.

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References


