Displacements of Memory

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Abstract

The experiences of refugees—their "voices" and memories— have routinely been excluded from the historical record. With rare exceptions, refugees are absent from mainstream history: although specific episodes of forced migration may be carefully recorded and even celebrated in national histories, most refugee movements are ignored and their participants silenced. This article examines the practice of exclusion and its implications for historical research and for the study of forced migration. It considers experiences of refugees from the early modern era until the twenty-first century, mobilizing examples from Europe, the Americas, and South Asia, and offering comparative observations. It examines relationships between forced migrants and institutions of the nation-state, and the meanings of exclusion within ideologies of national belonging. It considers remedial measures and their implications for current efforts to ensure refugee voices are heard and understood.

Résumé

Les expériences des réfugiés—leurs « voix » et leurs souvenirs—ont été exclues de façon systématique des chroniques et témoignages historiques. Sauf quelques rares exceptions, les réfugiés sont absents de l'histoire conventionnelle. Bien que des instances spécifiques de migrations forcées soient soigneusement documentées et même commémorées dans le cadre des histoires nationales, la majorité des mouvements de réfugiés sont ignorés et leurs participants sont réduits au silence. Cet article examine la pratique de l'exclusion et ses implications pour la recherche historique, ainsi que pour l'étude de la migration forcée. Il considère les expériences des réfugiés depuis les débuts de l'ère moderne jusqu'au xxIᵉ siècle, en rassemblant des cas provenant de l'Europe, des Amériques et de l'Asie du Sud, et offrant des observations comparatives. Il se penche sur les liens entre les migrants forcés et les institutions de l'état-nation, ainsi que sur la signification de l'exclusion dans le contexte des idéologies d'appartenance nationale. Il étudie des mesures de réparation et leurs implications pour les initiatives actuelles visant à garantir que les voix des réfugiés sont entendues et comprises.

"Collective Amnesia"

For centuries refugees have been associated with processes of enormous importance to the modern world order. Their experiences have rarely been of interest to archivists and professional historians, however, with the result that refugee voices are largely absent from mainstream history. What explains this striking deficit—and what measures might be taken to enable a different approach?

Emergence of the nation-state in the early modern era was closely associated with major episodes of forced migration in Europe. The term *réfugié* was coined during this period, and refugees, often referred to as "exiles," were widely dispersed across the new states.[1] As the nation-state became the dominant form of socio-political organization worldwide, forced migration became more general: by the twentieth century, refugee movements were on such a scale that influential states collaborated to produce the first formal measures to recognize and manage mass displacement.[2] The refugee experience was nonetheless seldom viewed as a matter of intrinsic interest, and refugees were largely absent from the historical record. Tony Kushner and Katherine Knox describe a "general silence on refugee questions in the discipline [history]."[3] They continue, "If their [refugees'] presence is one of 'the hallmarks of our time,' then modern and contemporary historians have hardly noticed it."[4]

The practice of exclusion has been evident, even in relation to major episodes of forced migration. For example, in 1914 some 250,000 Belgian refugees arrived in Britain, fleeing

German military offensives at the start of the First World War. Their migration involved the largest refugee movement in British history, but for almost a century it was "forgotten." Historians did not recognize the Belgians' arrival, their experiences in Britain, or their hasty departure at the end of the war—an expression of what Tony Kushner calls "collective amnesia" in relation to the refugees[5]—and it was almost one hundred years before researchers stimulated by growing attention in Britain to family and community history began systematic work on the 1914 migrations.[6] Records of the Great War, part of the dominant narrative of British history in the twentieth century, silenced the refugees: neither their experiences nor those of millions of people with whom they came into contact had been judged worthy of interest by professional historians.

The Belgian migrations of 1914 were striking in many ways, including the very large numbers involved, the abrupt arrivals, the enthusiastic public reception, and the hesitant and contradictory responses of government. They mark an important episode—one ignored by professional historians until addressed by Peter Cahalan in *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War*, published in 1982.[7] Reviewing refugee movements in Britain during the twentieth century, Kushner and Knox comment that, given the importance of the Belgian migrations, it is significant that Cahalan's book remained for decades the only major study of the movement.[8] When Pierre Purseigle examined the events again, twenty years after Cahalan's landmark publication, he observed, "The experiences of the four million people who fled their homes before the [German] invasion have been surprisingly neglected, as if historiography and collective memory alike concurred in marginalising the Western Front refugees."[9]

Many major episodes of mass displacement have similarly "disappeared" from official history—from accounts that constitute what the Indian historian Gyanendra Pandey calls "national memory."[10] Until the emergence of the school of world history in 1970s, scholarly research in Europe and North America was shaped almost exclusively by national concerns.[11] Methodological nationalism confined perspectives on the past: the nation-state framework and the agendas of those in authority in the state (or those who wished for such authority) constituted what Wimmer and Glick Schiller call an "iron cage," confining and limiting historical analysis.[12] History as an account of the past framed in national terms largely excluded outsiders, especially those who arrived as part of abrupt or unexpected population movements. Since emergence of the nation-state in the early modern era, control of state borders and of population movements had been key issues for those holding authority in institutions of government. People

attempting to cross borders in unplanned movements were often viewed as a threat to territorial and socio-cultural integrity. With certain important exceptions, their admission was inhibited; they were often detained, deported, or repatriated. Exclusion was sometimes publicized widely in efforts to assert governmental authority, but as a rule those rejected or expelled were "forgotten"—victims of a general amnesia about refugees.[13]

Silences of Partition

This pattern continued down the centuries. Partition of the colonial state of India, enacted formally in 1947, produced a series of complex mass displacements. For almost forty years, however, a fictional work, Kushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, was the only focused attempt to address the experiences of those affected.[14] Singh had been a witness to migrations in which millions of people were compelled to undertake dangerous journeys to uncertain destinations. Many were affected by extreme violence as two new independent states, India and Pakistan, were established amid intense ethno-religious conflict. Opening his novel, published in 1956, Singh wrote, "Muslims said the Hindus had planned and started the killing. According to the Hindus, the Muslims were to blame. The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped … all of northern India was in arms, in terror or in hiding."[15]

The experiential aspect of these events was, however, "forgotten" by historians, politicians, and mass media. While mainstream accounts focused on political figures and "decisions made far away,"[16] millions of people directly affected, observes Tarun Saint, remained "neglected aspects of this catastrophe."[17] Decades passed after publication of *Train to Pakistan* before the first systematic research into the clashes of 1947 and their long-term consequences.[18] Saint observes that this required a radical reorientation among historians in relation to Partition—a "reconfiguring" of the historical archive.[19]

Mainstream history in India, says Urvashi Butalia, assumed that Partition was "over, done with, a thing of the past."[20] In the late 1980s feminist historians began to investigate experiences of those affected by communal conflict and mass displacement, revealing that Partition had been less a specific episode than a continuous experience over decades of separation and exclusion, sometimes of intimidation and further violence—what Vazira Zamindar calls "the long Partition."[21] Challenging the dominant historical narrative, Butalia suggests that "all around us was a different reality: partitions everywhere, communal tension, religious fundamentalism, continuing divisions on the basis of religion."[22]

In order to understand both the displacements of 1947 and their outcomes, it is necessary to focus upon those

affected, Butalia suggests. This requires attention to the past as a lived experience and as experience recalled—for "memories, individual and collective, familial and historical, are what make up the reality of Partition."[23] According to this view, mass displacement and the making of refugees have a profound, long-term impact on individual lives and on the wider society. In the case of Partition, displacement should be viewed less as a series of events than as a process associated with powerful socio-political forces that both maintained structures of exclusion *and* sought to deny their purpose and effect. "Official" history often sanitizes such processes, ignoring the testimony of those who might question the dominant account and who might challenge the practices of the state today. Here is an indication as to the significance of historians' silence on refugees' experiences, for the latter can challenge and even subvert both official accounts *and* contemporary attitudes that rest upon them. To understand Partition then and now, Butalia concludes, official records must be questioned by "turning the historical lens to a somewhat different angle."[24] This requires attention to oral narrative: a willingness to hear testimony and to engage with memory.

Nations, Denial, and "Forgetting"

Foundational events in the histories of nation-states are often associated with mass movements of people affected by inclusion/exclusion in relation to both cultural boundaries and physical territories of the state. This is examined in the Indian context in Kushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*. Here a small rural community, Mano Majra, is home to Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians. Notwithstanding their differences, each has engaged with the others and each venerates the local deity, a rock that stands in the centre of the village. Mano Majra is connected to cities east and west by the railway, and in the summer of 1947 "ghost trains" begin to arrive in the village loaded with the corpses of people from afar. They bring communal conflicts that dwarf the minor disputes of village life, and many people leave in fear. As the local death toll mounts, more trains arrive. A mass grave is dug, bodies are buried, and the pit is closed: "The place looked like the scar of a healed-up wound," writes Singh, but "nobody wanted to know who the dead people were."[25]

Singh's words were prophetic. In the new Indian state there was little space for critical reflection on experiences of those present at its birth or on the implications for contemporary society. For decades "national memory" depicted Partition as a series of discrete events in which new borders emerged and new institutions were established; the searing violence of 1947 and its long-term impact on countless communities was officially "forgotten." Ideologues of the new India, says Pandey, together with "the long arm of the

publishing houses and modern media and the homogenisation of culture" produced and disseminated a particular memory—that centred on the state itself and its agenda for national integration and development.[26] Denial and forgetting have long been integral to histories of the nation-state. Almost without exception, modern states have been born in violent circumstances—wars, military occupations, civil conflicts, revolutions, and campaigns of exclusion that aim to discipline volatile populations and/or to secure forms of ethno-religious homogeneity, facilitating new ideologies of national belonging. For Ernest Renan, writing in the 1880s, "Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality. Indeed, historical enquiry brings to light deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations, even of those whose consequences have been altogether beneficial. Unity is always effected by means of brutality."[27]

For Renan, a partisan of liberal nationalism, even "beneficial" outcomes were intimately associated with experiences of violence later discarded from memories of nation. This involved "error"—the omission of key historic episodes that in the case of France included massacres of those who resisted subordination to central authority.[28] Although reflections on the past never embrace the presence of all historic actors (history is famously written "by the victors"), Renan's observations highlight how narratives of nation may exclude entire communities, ethno-religious groups, and regional populations. In the early modern era, absolutist states in Europe organized repeated mass expulsions, first in Spain and then in Portugal, in which centralizing monarchies removed large numbers of Jews and Muslims whose religious affiliation they deemed incompatible with the Catholicism of the Crown. The practice was repeated in France, where the state-building project was closely associated with imposition of religious orthodoxy, resulting in displacement of many members of the Protestant minority. By the nineteenth century, as "nationalization" swept Europe from west to east, construction of nation-states proper involved displacement of many ethno-religious and linguistic groups. This increasingly took the form of campaigns of exclusion in which removal of a target population was enforced by armies, militias, and officials of the state or putative state, after which return of those displaced was prevented on the basis that their "race," religion, language, or traditions were incompatible with those of national society. Philipp Ther comments on the importance for socio-political arrangements across the continent, asserting, "Ethnic cleansing is a product of the nation-state and hence *one of the basic components of Europe*" (emphasis added).[29] Related forms of displacement by

states, proto-states, and national movements have included deportation, "transfer," resettlement, "repatriation," and—in the case of the most focused campaigns—genocide.[30] At the same time, colonial powers deported certain groups (including religious dissenters, political radicals, and petty criminals) to their overseas territories, so that colonial settlement was linked to consolidating national identity in the domestic context. Mass displacement was integral to the making of the modern state-centred order and to this extent forced migrants were part of that order, necessary to its development and consolidation.

As mass displacement in and from Europe gathered pace, those affected experienced a common difficulty—that of their vulnerability vis-à-vis those in authority in the new states. Forced migrants had long been disadvantaged in relation to central authorities, principally imperial powers, religious institutions, and local power-holders. The state-making process intensified these problems. It stimulated mass displacement and directed attention to new borders, greatly increasing the vulnerability of those in flight. As Soguk makes clear in the case of France, the centralizing state mapped domestic territory much more precisely than before, introducing policies of surveillance that required statistics and registers, and attempting to regulate "internal" migrations.[31] Those who sought protection abroad as refugees faced not only the problem of their dispossession (and associated loss of key resources) but also vulnerability vis-à-vis organs of the states to which they journeyed—the latter's police forces, border patrols, judicial authorities, and officials who assessed appeals for refuge. Those who sought security abroad were people upon whom the state itself practised policies of the kind that brought about refugee exclusions.

A key feature of the new states was the claim of central authorities to a monopoly of means of violence. Monarchies, parliaments, and assemblies wrote new legal codes, established new judicial and penal systems, and constructed or substantially reformed police forces, standing armies, and volunteer reserves.[32] At the same time ideologues of the state, including academics, officials, and popular writers worked energetically to disseminate ideas about national affiliation and responsibilities to those in authority. The nation was presented as timeless, familial ("motherland"/"fatherland"), and guarantor of security and integrity vis-à-vis Others. Displaced people, even those formally accepted as refugees, were seldom placed within these accounts. Most remained outsiders without influence on major institutions of public life.

Billig observes that Renan's insight on the subject of forgetting has important implications: "Once a nation is established it depends for its existence upon a collective amnesia," he suggests, adding, "The dialectic, however, is more complex than Renan implied. Not only is the past forgotten, as it

is ostensibly being recalled, but so there is a parallel forgetting of the present."[33] Recounting foundational myths and reflecting upon traditions and symbols of the nation embed practices "in which nationhood is mindlessly and countlessly flagged."[34] Here the past shapes everyday life. With its "banal" repetition of the discourse of nation, history continuously reasserts principles of inclusion and exclusion. The nation is projected onto Others: indeed it seeks Others and at the same time denies them a place in national society. The nation is fascinated by outsiders but, to paraphrase Kushwant Singh, no one wishes to learn who they are or to understand their circumstances, experiences, and aspirations: these are in fact systematically negated.

This is especially marked in nation-states to which there have been multiple migrations. In the case of the United States, argues Behdad, "amnesiac" practices are part of a process by which the nation has been continuously fashioned as a unified imagined community.[35] A rare example of a state in which historians have celebrated the foundational role of migrants (the "Pilgrim Fathers" of the seventeenth century), the United States has nonetheless developed and maintained histories of nation in which incomers have been systematically excluded. This amounts to a practice of "historical disavowal" embedded in national culture, suggests Behdad.[36] It has been practised in the United States vis-à-vis indigenous people, in relation to people of African origin enslaved before and after colonial rule, to Mexicans of the border-wars period, and to international migrants of the "melting pot" era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is also evident in recent border crises during which the state's techniques of coercion and discipline, exerted against forced migrants, "enable a normalized sense of national identity."[37]

National Liberation and Exclusion

"Nationalization" of European society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was driven not only by the imperative of achieving control over local territories and populations but also by competition among states, especially in the colonial arena. In the Americas, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, European powers established states that mimicked those of metropolitan society—with (notionally) fixed borders and centralized political regimes. Colonial states rarely had an official history as such: they were viewed within the national histories of Europe as sites for pioneering deeds and civilizing missions in which colonial subjects were present largely as the focus of metropolitan policy. In the case of colonial genocides such as those perpetrated in the Americas, Africa, and Australasia, mainstream history was for generations a practice of institutional forgetting in which those encountered by the colonizers were marked

solely by their absence. In the context of "voice," we might say that the silence of indigenous people in official records and in academic narratives was deafening.

Movements for national self-determination in the colonies brought a modified approach. National histories in new independent polities such as the United States of America addressed colonization and its outcomes: they did not, however, change practices by which those in authority placed themselves centrally within the historical record, marginalizing or excluding others as part of the exercise of power. In the case of the United States, liberation from Britain was accompanied by a new surge of colonization to the south and west, and by an ideology of nation-building in which Native Americans, African Americans, Mexicans, and many others were systematically excluded. The paradox of nationalism, what Tom Nairn calls its "Janus-face," was starkly clear:[38] like European nationalisms, movements for liberation from colonial rule established national categories that referenced a specific past (usually based on highly charged myths of origin), rejected "non-national" Others, and developed narratives of contemporary history in which the latter had no place. This pattern was particularly marked in Latin America as independent states emerged in the in nineteenth century, continuing into the twentieth century and the post-colonial era in Africa and Asia. Here retreat of colonial powers was often associated with conflicts in which projects for independence were shaped by struggles against external enemies (usually the colonizers) and "internal" rivals emplaced by European administrations for which unity of the colonial state had been premised upon identification of ethno-religious, sectarian, or regional difference (the practice of *divide et impera*). Even in rare cases in which "nation-building" proceeded without major conflict in relation to the colonial power or local rivals, discourses of national unity required a heightened sense of belonging and readiness to participate actively in practices of exclusion. In the 1960s, as European powers retreated from some parts of Africa, the construction of Tanzania as an independent state was viewed as a uniquely peaceful transition from British rule, with limited use of state violence to repress competing identities of "race," ethnicity, and religion. Even here, however, notes Ronald Aminzade, "violence or the threat of it was an intrinsic part of the formation of the Tanzanian nation."[39] Tanzania's first president, Julius Nyerere, declared that the key weapons required by the state were the plough and the gun—the latter being necessitated because Tanzania required "identification of those who were actual or potential enemies of the nation" and readiness to confront them.[40]

By the late nineteenth century most of the Global South had been comprehensively "nationalized." Among the last regions to be affected were territories of the Ottoman Empire, where with the support of European powers new states were established in the Balkans and later in Anatolia, the Arab East, and the Arabian Peninsula. During the First World War, what remained of the empire was dissected and its territories distributed between the two dominant European powers, Britain and France. Everywhere the process was accompanied by mass displacement, as "non-national" populations were expelled, often after intense and violent conflict.[41] It included genocidal assaults on "minority" populations in Anatolia during the First World War and ethnic cleansing in Palestine thirty years later. Each was associated with mass displacement that had a lasting effect in many states of the region.

Anatolia had been a zone of special cultural heterogeneity, home to people of diverse linguistic groups and ethno-religious affiliations, including numerous Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and syncretic currents. The Turkish republic that came into existence in 1923 enforced new principles of national belonging under which those deemed insufficiently Turkish were penalized aggressively. Aktar writes of "homogenising the nation"—a process supported energetically by republican intellectuals.[42] Keyder observes that for almost a century these ideologues of the new state ignored upheavals associated with its establishment and the fate of diverse communities of Ottoman Anatolia.[43] "The principal event of the nationalist struggle was repressed in the collective memory of the [Turkish] nation," Keyder argues; what remained of the multi-ethnicity of the Ottoman era was "silence."[44] At the same time, incoming migrants—notably those who moved as part of population "exchanges" with the independent state of Greece—were marginalized within Turkish society. These refugees, formally placed within a new national homeland, were deemed ""others,' those who were not really of us."[45]

In the case of Palestine, a complex multi-ethnic society was transformed in 1948 into an ethnocentric state. Ideologues of the new Israel elaborated a highly contentious account of local history in which the indigenous population had no significant role. Palestinians were silenced by the impacts of mass displacement and by an ideological agenda that celebrated certain traditions, rights, and achievements embedded in the new national agenda. At the same time they were affected by continuous efforts of the Israeli state to enforce further ethnic cleansing, a process described by Yiftachel as "ethno-spatial domination and exclusion."[46]

The dominant Zionist account of foundational events in Israel can be seen as a paradigmatic example of Renan's contention that "deeds of violence" are excluded from the national narrative. Those who have challenged this record, notably Palestinian academics and Israel's "revisionist"

historians, have often been accused of seeking to "delegitimize" the Israel state—a marker of the importance of the past in contemporary politics.[47] The Palestinian experience also reveals the significance of mass displacement as a functional practice for exclusionary regimes. Most of the Palestinians displaced in 1948, and their descendants to the fourth or even fifth generation, remain in "camps" and settlements in Arab states and in Israel and Israeli-occupied territories, while "internal" displacement (within the borders of Israel) continues. Exclusion of Palestinian Arabs appears to be an existential principle for the Zionist movement. Here, the violence of the "founding fathers" is revisited continuously upon a historic Other.

Vulnerable Migrants

In some specific contexts, forced migrants have been integrated into mainstream history and play a key role in narratives of the nation. In colonial-settler states such as South Africa and Australia, European migrants—including transportees and "exiles"—bring progressive change to regions perceived as backward or even "empty."[48] In both the United States and Israel, stories about foundational episodes in construction of the state incorporate refugees. Roger Daniels memorably comments that the Pilgrim Fathers, religious dissenters from Europe allocated a key role in the settlement in colonial North America, have been represented as "the kind of people American myth-makers … liked to imagine we were descended from."[49] In Israel, the story of refugees from Europe who journeyed to Palestine (most as survivors of fascism and related hyper-nationalisms) is integral to Zionist narratives of Israel as a Jewish national homeland.

Among people displaced in the mid-twentieth century during Partition of colonial India, most soon disappeared from histories of South Asia—indeed most disappeared even from journalistic coverage of contemporary affairs. In the case of Pakistan, however, certain migrants were periodically a focus of attention. Their experiences, observes Khan, were "woven into the fabric of national history."[50] Judged suitable for assimilation into official accounts, they were identified as *shuhada* ("witnesses"—martyrs), "bathed in the language of martyrdom" as part of efforts in the new state to repackage Partition as "a war of liberation."[51] These refugees have been viewed both as victims of India's ethnic separatism and, paradoxically, as agents of political change—in this case the construction of a religiously sanctioned state in which key foundational episodes were facilitated by mass martyrdom. Here refugee voices are made to speak on behalf of those who shape national memory. Millions of non-Muslims evicted from territories that became part of the new state meanwhile remained invisible and silent.

The vulnerability of displaced people is a key factor in understanding how readily some refugees are excluded from or integrated into dominant narratives. This was especially clear in the Cold War era of the mid-twentieth century when refugees were first defined in legal terms, and movements of people between East and West (viewed as political blocs) became a matter of ideological importance. The presence of people granted asylum who originated in states of a rival bloc was seen as a means of embellishing values of the receiving society. Tuitt comments that refugees functioned as "ambassadors of the Cold War period … living witnesses of 'corrupt,' 'evil' and 'oppressive' governments and to the 'heraldry' of the host state."[52] In these circumstances, refugees were invited to speak publicly about their experiences, their testimony integrated into the rhetoric of imperial rivalry. Carl Bon Tempo describes developments in the United States: "Refugee admissions struck a rhetorical blow against the Soviets and reminded the world of the United States' unbending commitment to anticommunism and winning the Cold War. It is little wonder, then, that for much of the post–World War II era, Americans, from presidents to the public, associated refugees with anti-communism."[53]

The willingness of state authorities to promote specific refugee narratives raises important questions about means by which refugee voices can be heard. Following the Second World War, the Australian government was keen to stimulate immigration from Europe but reluctant to admit certain refugees, notably Jews.[54] Still pursuing a "white Australia" policy initiated in 1901, the authorities favoured Anglo-Saxon or Scandinavian immigrants; as a close ally of the United States and of European members of the Western bloc, they also sought anti-Communists—among whom were a significant number of fascists and fascist collaborators from Yugoslavia and the Baltic states. Aarons notes that in the political climate of the Cold War and in the context of attempts to suppress domestic dissidence (including banning the Australian Communist Party), leading Australian politicians "warmly welcomed these anti-Communist refugees and actively took up their causes."[55] Members of organizations such as the Croatian Ustashe, known to have been involved in some of the worst atrocities of the Second World War, were readily accommodated. Some became leading figures in mainstream political parties in Australia, notably the Liberal Party, which governed for over two decades from the late 1940s, during which time it in effect amnestied many European migrants known to be suspected of the most serious war crimes.[56] Certain narratives of the refugee experience were favoured and advanced by powerful lobbies within Australian society; other stories uncongenial to these parties and networks were dismissed or even suppressed.

Testimony and Memory

Critical awareness of problems of exclusion and silencing has led some historians, archivists, and sympathetic researchers to address refugees in ways that challenge mainstream approaches—addressing them as social actors whose life stories, aspirations, and ambitions are of intrinsic value in understanding forced migration and wider aspects of modern society. Over the past two decades there have been focused efforts to record refugee testimony through the practice of oral history. Paul Thompson observes that "oral history is as old as history itself. It was the first kind of history."[57] Systematic collection of oral testimony in a form that could be mobilized in historical texts, however, began only in the late nineteenth century with the work of cultural anthropologists in the United States. A related current emerged fifty years later in Britain, focused upon history "from below." This introduced to the historical record those earlier excluded from history but who, argued Edward Thompson, were emphatically present in the making of the modern social order.[58] Others "hidden from history" were also the focus of attention, notably women addressed in an extensive literature produced by feminist historians.[59] This field expanded rapidly: by the early 1990s Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai could reflect on "an enormous volume of women's oral history, making available in accessible forms the words of women who had previously been silenced or ignored."[60] Migrants in general received less attention. Takaki comments that even in the late 1990s, Asian Americans—present in the United States for over 150 years—were entirely overlooked.[61] "They are entitled to be viewed as subjects," he argued, "as men and women with minds, wills and voices."[62]

Important advances in oral history had taken place in relation to survivors of the Holocaust, whose experiences were of special importance to those concerned with refugees, memory, and "voice." At the end of the Second World War, American psychologist David Boder recorded lengthy testimonies of survivors in Europe, then viewed as "displaced persons."[63] His book of 1949, *I Did Not Interview the Dead*, is probably the first significant record of refugee testimony.[64] As awareness developed of fascist atrocities in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s, there were sustained efforts to collect testimony, with projects focused on "giving voice" to survivors by compiling oral records, together with collection of written memoirs, personal histories, novels, poems, and analysis of these texts in the context of literary studies.[65] Assessing these initiatives, James Young observed that the events of the Holocaust could be recorded and understood but must be set alongside an appreciation of how memory, meaning, and understanding are constructed in narrative.[66] "What is remembered of the Holocaust depends on how it is remembered," he observed.[67] It was not enough to "give voice" in the sense of merely reproducing testimony, Young argued, for the latter should be understood in the context of storytelling and recall. These insights had their influence on Indian scholars who had begun to reassess Partition and its outcomes: the historiography of the Holocaust and work within Holocaust studies was widely quoted in the 1990s by researchers investigating the Indian experience.[68]

"Cultural Retrieval"

Most refugees worldwide nonetheless remained outside or at the margins of historical enquiry. Edward Said provides a key explanation, observing that in the case of the Palestinians the weight of a dominant national discourse—the Zionist account of Israel and its modern history—inhibited development of a "socially acceptable narrative" of the Palestinian experience.[69] Here, as in so many cases of displacement, refugees are silenced by powerful institutions and ideological agendas. Ted Swedenburg also notes "the relative absence of any space for Palestinians to assert their narrative," arguing that this amounts to a "censorship of Palestinian culture."[70] The same author draws attention to a further difficulty that presents special problems for those attentive to the refugee experience. When in the 1990s researchers began to collect Palestinian testimony, they encountered powerful narratives that claimed to authenticate the refugee experience in all-embracing ways. A resistance movement that from the 1960s mobilized mass support across the Palestinian diaspora attempted to identify and formalize a national history—to "articulate subaltern memories with its [*sic*] hegemonic principles to create an agreed-upon definition of what 'the past' was really like."[71] Here memory was shaped by a powerful narrative constructed "from below" but was also part of a specific act of collective recall. What was remembered of the *nakba* (the dispossession of 1948) depended on *how* it was remembered.

Mass displacements have often been followed by intense self-activity among refugee populations, mobilized around specific projects of national liberation or ethno-religious affiliation. These may have a long-term impact, with "memory" transmitted across generations and through social and political networks. People with no personal experience of displacement, flight, settlement, or resettlement integrate into their world view memories that derive from earlier generations and/or from a collective "recall" given weight by the influence of such movements, producing what Marianne Hirsch calls "postmemory."[72] This highlights a key problem in oral history that has recently prompted much discussion in narrative studies and "memory work." Memory, like socio-cultural identity, is fluid. It is modified continuously within the contingent circumstances of individual lives, in

response to changing needs and in the context of complex relations between researcher and research participant.[73] Khalili notes the importance for contemporary Palestinian nationalism of discourses and acts of commemoration that are central to assertion of Palestinian identity and to the coherence of the movement.[74] For almost two decades the Palestine Liberation Organisation, based in Jordan and then in Lebanon, acted as a proto-state with all the concerns of a state "proper," producing commemorative publications, establishing monuments to martyrs and massacres, and declaring commemorative days and ceremonies. After the expulsion of the armed movement from Lebanon in 1982, commemorative practices changed, reflecting the differing approaches of factions within the movement and the efforts of specific groups of Palestinians to mark local histories and experiences by including establishment of "memory museums," publication of village books, and collection of local oral histories. Khalili observes that ceremonial or narrative forms have been "appropriated, localized and transformed," as the popularization of commemorative practice challenges state-based discourses.[75] Butalia makes a similar observation in relation to India, asking about the meanings of "rehearsed performances" of stories told generations after the events upon which they focus—but also insisting upon the need to find space for "the small, the individual voice."[76]

Conclusion: "Forgetting" the Belgians

Amnesia has a continuous productive function for the nation-state. In a world of states, forced migrants are by definition persons with attachments to other states and cultures, potentially a source of threat that can be mobilized within discourses of national identity and social coherence. They are made to play a central role in national/nationalist dramas, especially during border crises—episodes that dramatize issues of inclusion and exclusion—in which they are allocated non-speaking parts, the script being provided by narratives embedded in national memory. Outsiders are used, in effect, as a screen onto which all manner of threats can be projected—a practice facilitated by the predicaments of certain migrants, especially refugees, whose vulnerability means that, except in rare and specific circumstances, they are rendered "silent" in the face of powerful institutions and political actors. They have a key role in narratives of nation but—paradoxically—only to the extent that they remain mute. Forgotten by history, they are silenced in the present.

Today the accounts of forced migrants seeking sanctuary in desired countries of asylum in the Global North are routinely viewed as fanciful or false, treated with disbelief and dismissed in line with policies that view uninvited migrants as intruders or even as enemies.[77] In these circumstances refugees are rendered voiceless in the sense that

they have few or no resources with which to address their circumstances: against a din of official noise amplified by the state itself and by mass media, they go unheard. Their stories, however, are matters of importance for the wider society. Economic change and political and ethno-religious conflicts associated with mass displacement often have feedback effects at the local or even regional level. They are part of the process by which states or proto-states come into being, by which governmental authorities attempt to assert legitimacy, and regimes of exclusion are established and maintained. As Pradip Kumar Bose observes in the case of India, the more that researchers probe how "the common people" experienced Partition, the more attention is paid to Partition as an active element in the life of contemporary society.[78] Here Partition is not "as a leaf in archives, but as renewal, as currency, as presence."[79]

National memory is a powerful influence on popular attitudes but also one subject to disruption and subversion. Histories of the nation-state give ample evidence of difficulties faced by those in authority in maintaining ideas about national belonging. Although migrants have often been used to energize such notions, they can also been seen as a focal point for solidarity, as popular ethics challenge dominant ideas about threat and exclusion. In 1914 a British government reluctant to accept refugees from Belgium was forced to come to terms with a public mood of empathy and support for the migrants, as *both* official history and popular notions about refuge, protection, and hospitality influenced the public response. Cahalan notes that the Belgians' plight prompted a search for means to understand their presence, with mainstream British history providing an important resource—ordinary people "delved into the past to place the Belgian refugees in context, and their search for a usable past took some back as far as the French Huguenots and other Protestant exiles."[80] At the same time, popular attitudes challenged a government not only reluctant to change unprecedentedly restrictive policies on asylum but also about to embark on mass incarceration (in the form of internment) of people deemed enemy aliens.[81] The government's Belgian Refugee Committee, reporting weeks after the first arrivals, noted widespread public support. Reception at British ports, it recorded, "was entirely carried out by volunteers."[82] The committee reported, without irony, "The chief complaints have been from eager hosts to whom suitable [sic] refugees were not sent as quickly or as to the extent they desired."[83] As the conflict continued, at terrible cost in the war zone and on the domestic front, public support for the refugees ebbed and there was little resistance to a government campaign that by 1919 had repatriated most Belgian refugees. As they disappeared from British towns and cities, they were removed from the official record of

traumatic events, leaving only a trace in local archives and in popular memory.

At the end of the war, the British government expelled all manner of people deemed out of place, including thousands of troops earlier mobilized from the colonies.[84] Borders were closed and immigration radically reduced as Britain, like other states of Europe and North America, entered an era of autarky. People in urgent need of refuge were once more rejected outright—notably Jewish refugees who only years before the First World War had been the main object of exclusions formalized by the Aliens Act. The reception and accommodation of the Belgians in 1914 was an inconvenient chapter in recent history and one that politicians and historians alike preferred to ignore.

If mass displacement is part of the modern socio-political order, so too are the experiences and memories of refugees and those who empathize and solidarize with them. They are not only profoundly important for those affected but—understood in the context of their transmission and representation—of real significance for understanding contemporary realities.

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Notes

1 Anglicised as *refugee*, the term seems to have entered general use following the mass movement of French Calvinists, the Huguenots, during the early 1680s. See Anne Dunan-Page, *The Religious Culture of the Huguenots, 1660–1750* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 24.

2 Initially through the League of Nations, later by means of agreements facilitated by the United Nations and formalized in 1951 in the form of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees—the "Geneva Convention."

3 Tony Kushner and Katherine Knox, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide* (Abingdon, UK: Frank Cass, 1999), 4.

4 Here Kushner and Knox quote Michael Marrus, who notes that the presence of refugees in the twentieth century is "one of the hallmarks of our time." Kushner and Knox, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide*, 4; see Michael Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 11.

5 Tony Kushner, *Remembering Refugees: Then and Now* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2006), 234.

6 The Centre for Research on Belgian Refugees was established in 2012, initially at Imperial College, London. See http://belgianrefugees.blogspot.co.uk/2012/02/getting-started.html.

7 Peter Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief in England during the Great War* (New York: Garland, 1982).

8 Kushner and Knox, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide*, 49. Kushner and Knox provide a rare and valuable account of the Belgian immigration based on research in Hampshire, southern England.

9 Pierre Purseigle, "'A Wave on to Our Shores': The Exile and Resettlement of Refugees from the Western Front, 1914–1918," *Contemporary European History* 16, no. 4 (2007): 427.

10 Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 9.

11 Scholarly work outside the Western academy sometimes used a different lens. Muslim scholars concerned with political and social arrangements, for example, continued until the twentieth century to reflect on transnational developments—an aspect of their concern with the *umma*, the collective of Muslims that predates the modern state. This was modified in the early twentieth century by imposition of the nation-state in predominantly Muslim regions.

12 Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, "Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-state Building, Migration and the Social Sciences," *Global Networks* 2, no. 2 (2002): 301–34.

13 See Philip Marfleet, "Refugees and History: Why We Must Address the Past," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (2007): 136–48; Marfleet, "Explorations in a Foreign Land: States, Refugees and the Problem of History," in "Conceptual Problems in Forced Migration," special issue of *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2013): 14–34.

14 Kushwant Singh, *Train to Pakistan* (1956; New York: Grove, 1981).

15 Ibid., 1.

16 Pippa Virdee, "'No Home but in Memory': The Legacies of Colonial Rule in the Punjab," in *Refugees and the End of Empire*, ed. Panikos Panay and Pippa Virdee (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), 181.

17 Tarun K. Saint, *Witnessing Partition: Memory, History, Fiction* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2010), 2.

18 There were isolated exceptions to a general disinterest in these experiences: see, for example, Penderel Moon, *Divide and Quit: An Eye-Witness Account of the Partition of India* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962). One important study in the context of development and political change was Stephen Keller's analysis of refugee and non-refugee populations in Punjab and Haryana: see Stephen Keller, *Uprooting and Social Change: The Role of Refugees in Development* (New Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1975).

19 Saint, *Witnessing Partition*, 2.

20 Urvashi Butalia, The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1998), 7.

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

22 Butalia, *Other Side of Silence*, 7.

23 Ibid., 10.

24 Ibid., 13.

25 Singh, *Train to Pakistan*, 144–145.

26 Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, 9.

27 Ernest Renan, "What Is a Nation?," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha (Abingdon: Routledge, 1990), 11.

28 Ibid.

29 Philipp Ther, *The Dark Side of Nation States: Ethnic Cleansing in Modern Europe* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2014), 1.

30 For discussion of differences between these modes of displacement, see ibid., chaps. 1 and 2.

31 Nevzat Soguk, *States and Strangers: Refugees and Displacements of Statecraft* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

32 In the case of Britain, see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (London: Vintage, 1996); in relation to France, see Graham Robb, *The Discovery of France* (London: Picador, 2007).

33 Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995), 35.

34 Ibid., 38.

35 Ali Behdad, *A Forgetful Nation: On Immigration and Cultural Identity in the United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 23.

36 Ibid., xiii.

37 Ibid., 164.

38 See Tom Nairn, "The Modern Janus," *New Left Review* 1, no. 94 (1975): 3–29.

39 Ronald Aminzade, *Race, Nation and Citizenship: The Case of Tanzania* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 166.

40 Ibid.

41 See Dawn Chatty, *Displacement and Dispossession in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

42 Ayhan Aktar, "Homogenising the Nation, Turkifying the Economy: The Turkish Experience of Population Exchange Reconsidered," in *Crossing the Aegean: An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey*, ed. Renée Hirschon (Oxford: Berghahn, 2003), 79.

43 Çağlar Keyder, "The Consequences of the Exchange of Populations for Turkey," in Hirschon, *Crossing the Aegean*, 39.

44 Ibid., 48.

45 Ibid., 49–50.

46 Oren Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 189.

47 See, for example Alan Dershowitz, "Countering Challenges to Israel's Legitimacy," Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 2011, http://jcpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Kiyum-dershowitz.pdf.

48 In relation to Australia, settler history, and national narrative, see Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore* (London: Vintage, 2003).

49 Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (New York: Harper, 2002).

50 Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 180.

51 Ibid., 175.

52 Patricia Tuitt, *False Images: Law's Construction of the Refugee* (London: Pluto, 1996), 17.

53 Carl Bon Tempo, *Americans at the Gate: The United States and Refugees during the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 4.

54 On research resources for Jewish history in Australia, see Malcolm J. Turnball, "Safe Haven: Records of the Jewish Experience in Australia," National Archives of Australia, 1999, http://guides.naa.gov.au/safe-haven/chapter2/post-45-policy.aspx.

55 Mark Aarons, *Sanctuary! Nazi Refugees in Australia* (Melbourne: William Heinemann Australia, 1989) 115.

56 Ibid., 313.

57 Paul Thompson, *Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 10.

58 Edward Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963; London: Penguin, 1968) 9.

59 See, for example, the pioneer work in Britain of the History Workshop group, which in 1976 published *History Workshop Journal*, originally as "a journal of socialist historians," later as "a journal of socialist and feminist historians." See http://hwj.oxfordjournals.org/. Similar initiatives were launched in the United States by, among others, *Radical History Review*, http://www.radicalhistoryreview.org/.

60 Sherna Berger *Gluck* and Daphne *Patai*, *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (London: Routledge, 1991), 2.

61 Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (1989; Boston: Little, Brown, 1998), 6.

62 Ibid., 7.

63 See Alan Rosen, *The Wonder of Their Voices: The 1946 Holocaust Interviews of David Boder* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); also Voices of the Holocaust, http://voices.iit.edu/david_boder.

64 David Boder, *I Did Not Interview the Dead* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1949).

65 See, for example, letters reproduced in Anne Joseph, *From the Edge of the World: The Jewish Refugee Experience through Letters and Stories* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2010). See also Andrea Reiter, *Narrating the Holocaust* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), for a detailed review of written materials and analysis of their content, style, and meaning.

66 James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), vii.

67 Ibid., 1.

68 See Javeed Alam and Suresh Sharma,"*Remembering Parti-tion*," *Seminar* 461 (1998*)*: 98–103; also Butalia, *Other Side of Silence*; and Pandey, *Remembering Partition*.

69 Edward Said, *The Politics of Dispossession*: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination 1969–1994 (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994), 254.

70 Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936–1939 Rebel-lion and the Palestinian National Past* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2003), 4.

71 Ibid., 18.

72 Here memories of life-changing episodes mark the lives of those who were not there to experience them. Successive generations inherit such histories through all manner of images, objects, stories, behaviours, and emotions trans-mitted within families, communities, and the wider cul-ture: Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Potstmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

73 For an examination of conceptual and methodologi-cal problems, and recent debates in the field, see Molly Andrews, Corinne Squire, and Maria Tamboukou, *Doing Narrative Research* (London: Sage, 2013).

74 Laleh Khalili, "Commemorating Contested Lands," in *Exile and Return, Predicaments of Palestinians and Jews*, ed. Ann M. Lesch and Ian S. Lustick (Philadelphia: Uni-versity of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 24.

75 Ibid., 26.

76 Butalia, *Other Side of Silence*, 12–13.

77 See, for example, research on the "culture of disbelief" and the "culture of denial" in Refugee Status Determination procedures in the United Kingdom: Olga Jubany, "Con-structing Truths in a Culture of Disbelief: Understanding Asylum Screening from Within," *International Sociology* 26, no. 1 (2011): 74–94; and James Souter, "A Culture of Dis-belief or Denial? Critiquing Refugee Status Determination in the United Kingdom," *Oxford Monitor of Forced Migra-tion* 1, no. 1 (2011): 48–59.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid., 3.

80 Cahalan, *Belgian Refugee Relief*, 67.

81 Panikos Panayi, *Enemy in Our Midst: Germans in Britain during the First World War* (Oxford: Berg, 1991).

82 "Ladies and gentlemen … worked without rest, refusing no call made upon their services and daily acting as cooks, nurses, waiting maids, booking clerks, chauffeurs, porters and refreshment attendants." Government Belgian Refu-gees Committee, 1914, *First Report of the Departmental Committee Appointed by the President of the Local Govern-ment Board to Consider and Report on Questions Arising in Connection with the Reception and Employment of the Belgian Refugees in this Country* (London: HMSO, 1914), 5.

83 Ibid., 7.

84 Neil MacMaster, Racism in Europe 1870–2000 (Bas-ingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2011), chap. 4.