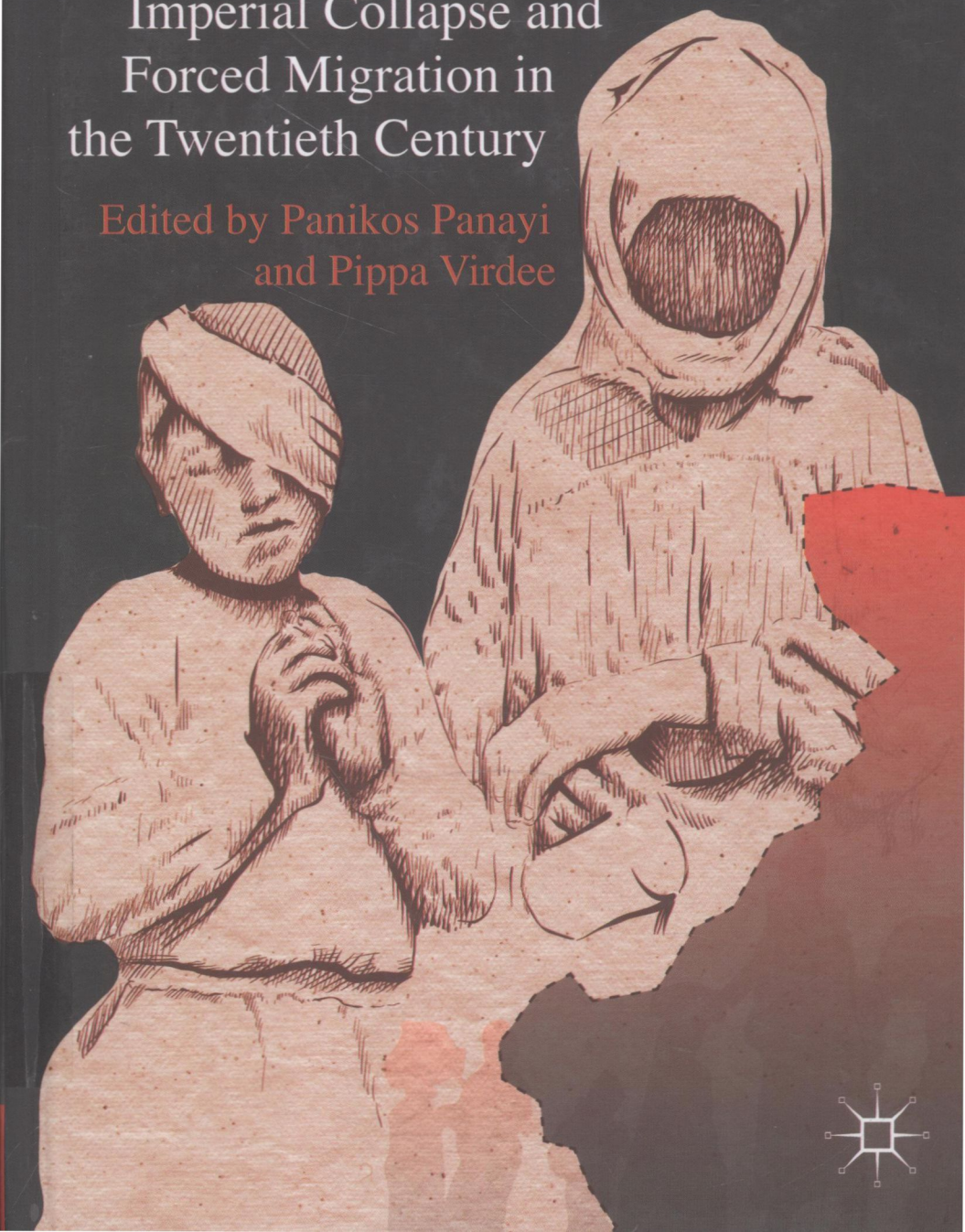
Refugees and the End of Empire

Imperial Collapse and Forced Migration in the Twentieth Century

Edited by Panikos Panayi and Pippa Virdee



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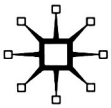

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Preface: Key Themes, Concepts and Rationale

One of the most negative legacies of the twentieth century was the development of the refugee as a result of forced migration. Millions of people have been forced to flee their homes and migrate owing to political persecution, conflict, imperial collapse or regime change. In the legal definition constructed by the United Nations in 1951, a refugee is someone who, 'owing to a 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 to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country'.[1] The scope of this definition originally extended only to deal with people displaced after the Second World War in Europe; however this limitation was removed in the 1967 Protocol to the Convention.

Since 1951, when the legal definition of refugee was conceived, the term has undergone vast change and now encompasses displacements caused by multiple factors. These include natural disasters, development projects that have displaced people and, of course, political conflict such as civil war and persecution of minorities. All these forms of displacement have led to the forced migration of people but it is political conflict that has often pushed people into statelessness. While Forced Migration Studies[2] has grown as a discipline and has contributed to our understanding of refugees and forced migration, there has to date been no attempt to examine this phenomenon at the end of empire, when the state of flux and vacuum created by the decline of imperial control led to successor nationalisms, exclusionary nationalism and expulsion of people to create purist states.

The United Nations Convention, however, represents a key moment in the development of the concept of the refugee, even though the existence of such a person had become recognized earlier in the twentieth century.[3] Refugees also existed throughout history, as any general account of the evolution of the Jews from the Bible onwards would indicate.[4] Nevertheless, the twentieth century has come to be seen as the century of the refugee and the U.N. figures from the first decade of the

new millennium point to the continued existence of tens of millions of refugees in the world.[5]

Certainly there can be no dispute that the twentieth century witnessed a vast increase in the number of refugees in the world. A portent of what would follow emerged during the nineteenth century with the flight of exiles from the European continent as repressive regimes tried to crush emerging liberal and left-wing political movements. The numbers of people involved totalled tens of thousands at most.[6] More pertinent are the mass deportations which would take place in the collapsing Ottoman Empire, which, according to some estimates, totalled millions of people.[7] In the twentieth century, the figure increased, not simply to hundreds of thousands but to millions and then tens of millions, a situation which remains with us until the present day.

The increase in refugees began to take off with the collapse of the empires which had controlled Europe and the Middle East from the Middle Ages, especially the Ottoman Empire, in the era of the First World War, when newly emerging nation-states eliminated people without the correct ethnic credentials from their territories. During the interwar years, the number of refugees decreased but certainly did not disappear, especially as a result of the policies of the Soviet and Nazi regimes. While the victims of the Nazis usually receive consideration under the theme of genocide, they certainly underwent displacement, either internal or between borders, to use current U.N. terminology.[8]

Contemporary scholars recognized the immediate aftermath of the Second World War as the period when European refugees reached their peak numbers, with estimates of more than 30 million people in the decade following the death throes of the Third Reich. People moved all over Europe, either to return home because the Nazis had transported them to another part of Europe, to satisfy the new borders of the post-war peace settlement, or, in the case of Germans in Eastern Europe, to escape vengeful regimes, which wanted to cleanse their territories of anyone associated with the regime which had decimated their countries.[9]

The early post-war years, however, did not simply witness an explosion in the number of refugees who found themselves in Europe, but also a similar enormous increase in the number of refugees outside Europe,[10] most notably in the Indian subcontinent, where, due to the end of the British Empire and the partitioning of India to create a new state of Pakistan, an estimated 15 million people were forcibly displaced in one of the largest migrations of the twentieth century.[11] Consequently, a process seen as a solution to the emergence of nation-states with ethnic minorities in Europe formalized under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne,

which legitimized the 'exchange of populations' between Greece and Turkey, and now became accepted as a method for ending similar conflicts, not only within Europe, but also beyond. Just as importantly, the later 1940s witnessed the emergence of one of the most long-lasting refugee crises following the creation of Israel, which also carried out ethnic cleansing.[12]

Following the orgy of expulsion in the aftermath of the Second World War, the number of refugees in the world remained relatively low for several decades, despite the continuing imperial collapse, largely as a result of the Cold War freeze. Refugees certainly did not disappear from Europe, as the example of Algeria following independence,[13] the expulsion of Indians from Uganda,[14] the ethnic cleansing following the Turkish invasion of Cyprus[15] and the flight from the Iranian revolution of 1979 would indicate.[16] Similarly, the number of refugees as a result of decolonization and its aftermath also grew, indicated by the classic *Refugees: A Problem of Our Time*.[17] One of the most publicized exoduses consisted of those who fled as a result of the failure of U.S. policy in Vietnam.[18]

The post-war period, and more specifically the 1960s onwards, has seen a shift in refugee crises from the European nation-states to the non-European nation-states. When the U.N. High Commissioner's Office for Refugees (UNHCR) was founded in December 1949, its scope and agenda was more comprehensive than its predecessor, the International Refugee Organization. However, apart from the Palestinian refugee crisis,[19] the UNHCR was largely concerned with the European refugee crisis, even though there were problems elsewhere, including the refugees in India and Pakistan. During the 1960s, we witnessed an increase in population displacements emerging from the developing world, which highlighted the inadequacies of the 1951 Convention on Refugees. This shift is reflected in changes such as the adoption of the 1967 protocol and the broader conceptualization of refugee concerns for the U.N. in Africa which was formalized in 1969 in the Organisation of African Unity Refugee Convention in Africa.[20] This broader definition also included refugees escaping from violence and the devastation caused by war. Significantly though, overseas settlement was rarely offered to Africans as a solution, as was the case when the U.N. was dealing with the post-war European refugee crisis: the preferred solution in Africa was repatriation.[21] In the early 1970s, the UNHCR further extended its mandate to include people in 'refugee-like situations', although the burden on the international community of the mandate quickly highlighted the inadequacies.[22]

The number of refugees throughout the world began to increase during the 1980s, partly as a result of the increasingly intolerant and repressive policies of the Soviet Bloc regimes desperately hanging on to power.[23] A new global refugee crisis would emerge following the end of the Cold War, as extreme nationalism surfaced in areas which had previously witnessed mild manifestations of this ideology. The collapsing Soviet Empire and death of Yugoslavia represented the key developments in Europe. But the Cold War thaw outside Europe meant an even larger increase in the number of refugees there, especially in Africa and the Middle East, which have become the key areas of concern for the UNHCR.[24]

Refugees have, therefore, formed a key aspect of the evolution of the world since the First World War. While they may have declined in numbers in particular periods, tens, if not hundreds, of millions of people have found themselves displaced globally over the past century. The purpose of the present volume consists of an attempt to explain the emergence of refugees by concentrating upon one particular theme and three particular geographical foci. It does not claim to cover all examples of the relationship between imperial collapse and the end of empire.

Refugee creation does not always link with imperial collapse. The establishment of revolutionary regimes wishing to make a break with the past and, above all, total war, have played a central role in displacement in the twentieth century. In fact, the most dramatic examples of forced migration have occurred when these three factors have come together.[25] Nevertheless, this volume constitutes the first attempt to examine in detail the link between the end of empire and refugee creation. It aims to analyse the relationship between imperial collapse, the emergence of successor nationalism, the exclusion of ethnic groups with the wrong credentials and the refugee experience. Rather than taking a global approach to the issue, the volume essentially examines the end of the European empires in the era of the First World War and the British Empire in India and its wider legacies in the second, contextualized with introductory essays, which set the scene in Part I.

This focus receives partial explanation in the papers which emerged from the conference upon which this volume is based.[26] While more than 30 people spoke at the event, the editors decided to work with those which best illustrated the developments suggested in the initial call for papers. Nevertheless, there are key intellectual reasons for the three geographical concentrations. One of these consists of the fact that the events which occurred in India and Pakistan in 1947 essentially fol-

lowed the template laid down as a result of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Lord Curzon was the first to phrase this as 'the unmixing of peoples' in response to the unravelling of the Ottoman Empire and, subsequently, the complete restructuring of populations.[27] It is the end of this regime which prepares the way for much of the forced migration which would take place later in the twentieth century and beyond.

The essays in the introductory section in particular provide a background to the developments which would occur in the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empire at the end of the First World War and the Nazi Empire at the end of the Second World War. Parts I and II, therefore, set the background for the events in South Asia and its aftermath in 1947. Without the events which followed the collapsing Ottoman Empire in particular, the ethnic cleansing accompanying the partition of India may not have happened in the way that it did.

Significantly, the largest population displacements which occurred in the twentieth century did so in the aftermath of the Second World War. While we cannot ignore the plight of the Palestinians, the scale of their expulsion remained smaller in number than that of the Germans in Eastern Europe or those who fled from India and Pakistan. The policy-makers who authorized the expulsion of perhaps 30 million people in total from these events had become desensitized to the human suffering inherent in ethnic cleansing as a policy partly because of the precedents set by the collapsing Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, the background of the mass killing of the Second World War in both Europe and Asia must also have played a role in the callous policies pursued. Perhaps at no other point during the twentieth century had the wishes of individuals become so meaningless for policy-makers.

The European and Middle Eastern section of the volume partly acts as a background for events in South Asia, while the three parts demonstrate continuities. The essays by Virdee and Robertson, together with the conclusion and the essays by Panayi, Levene and Frank, demonstrate the centrality of ethnic cleansing as a policy throughout the twentieth century. While it may have reached its height in the aftermath of the Second World War, its legacy has continued until the present. The main focus of the book may consist of Europe, the Middle East and the collapse of the British Empire in South Asia, which represent a series of case studies, but it does not ignore events elsewhere.

The volume has two key themes. In the first place, it attempts to explain the reasons why forced migration and consequent refugee creation has formed such a key aspect of imperial collapse. As several of the essays will demonstrate, from the end of the Ottoman Empire

until the present, it almost seems as though ethnic purification had become accepted as part of the process of the move away from imperial to nation-state control. While the former old-fashioned method of rule could operate upon the basis of several ethnic groups living together in relative harmony (although not in the Nazi case) with an imperial people who ultimately remained in control (whether Turkish Muslims in the Ottoman case, or white Britons in the British Empire), this formula could not operate in the early stages of emerging nation-states. The latter require more centralization, which partly operates through the manufacturing of citizens with a common nationality, meaning that those who do not have the right credentials face expulsion. The precedent here again consists of the collapsing Ottoman Empire, where ethnic cleansing happened upon all sides, especially during the era of the First World War. Not only did, for example, the move from Ottomanism to Turkish nationalism mean the elimination of Greeks and Armenians from Anatolia, the emerging nation-states in the Balkans expelled their Turkish populations. Several of the essays, especially in Parts I and II of the volume, therefore, tackle the reasons for forced migration and refugee creation at the end of empire.

The volume takes a broad definition of empire, uniting both the medieval European regimes, which had controlled much of the continent and found themselves rapidly disintegrating during the nineteenth century, and also the 'colonial' empires, which rose and declined more rapidly. Both forms of control had the characteristic of accepting a loose form of rule, which recognized the existence of ethnicity, largely in order to ensure that the loose form of control survived.[28] This contrasts, however, with the Nazi Empire, which tried to crush ethnicity, although, according to the Nazi Racial hierarchy, some racial groups had a higher status than others.[29] On the one hand, the book deals with traditional concepts of decolonization, as understood when referring to the European retreat from Africa and Asia.[30] However, the volume revolves around the issue of imperial collapse, in which the First World War, in the case of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires,[31] and the Second World War, in the case of the Nazis,[32] played a key role. In the case of the first two, the unravelling of empire had taken hundreds of years, rather than the decades in the case of Britain overseas.

The ethnic groups which had emerged in the Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, British and French empires gradually increased their confidence during the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, whether their ethnic basis relied upon religion, language or appearance. These ethnic groups would eventually emerge into nationalities, help-

ing to overthrow these empires. Unlike the previous regimes, which tolerated a variety of ethnicities, the new nation-states had a clearer conception of who belonged, as opposed to those who could not fit into this pattern.[33] Those who fell into the latter category would face expulsion beyond the borders of the newly constructed national entities. This forced migration became a characteristic of twentieth-century state creation, legitimized by a whole series of treaties which established new nation-states. Thus, while some of the essays in this volume try to tackle the issue of individual experiences, the macro approach taken by some of the others, accepts the tens of millions of people affected by the act of expulsion practised from the end of the nineteenth century and legitimized at the highest state and diplomatic level particularly, as an important precedent and template, by the Treaty of Lausanne. Forced migration, the expulsion of millions of refugees from their homes during the course of the twentieth century, became part of the state-building process.[34]

The second key theme of the book consists of the experience of the refugee. While policy-makers and governments increasingly ignored the plight of the people on the ground, tens of millions of people suffered loss of homes, relatives, trauma and dislocation: their experiences have been captured with the development of oral history within the discipline. The use of oral history was popularized in the 1960s as a means of democratizing history, but its emergence within the discipline has also coincided with wider social–political developments, namely, decolonization and feminist and civil rights movements in the 1960s.[35] These developments demanded new forms of capturing voices that had previously been left out of the history pages.[36] Oral history has, therefore, been associated with the marginalized in society, which also aptly fits into the marginal status of oral history itself within mainstream historiography which often refuses to consider personal memories as valid sources.[37]

Ronald J. Grele, Luisa Passerini and Alessandro Portelli[38] have been crucial in pushing the boundaries of oral history, challenging us to consider not just *what* people remember but rather *why* they remember.[39] Indeed, without the work on memory,[40] we would have little understanding of the true horrors of holocaust: the experiences of people in the concentration camps, the fight for survival, and about the pain and loss experienced by individuals.[41] Those lived experiences of individuals which cannot be revealed through official documents because they do not capture the emotional and human dimension are more often concerned with the 'high politics'. For this reason, first-hand accounts are

more useful in ascertaining perceptions and opinions. The combined approach of documentary sources and personal accounts provides a more balanced picture and, thus, lessens some of the methodological problems associated with first-hand accounts.[42] Oral testimonies can, therefore, help us in filling those gaps and provide a more nuanced understanding of individual refugee experiences of migration, resettlement and the associated trauma. For a historian, they can compliment the official source material, providing an altogether more comprehensive analysis. Furthermore, the level of detail required in localized case studies is often absent in official documentation, especially if the emphasis is on the people rather than the place.

In the historiography of India/Pakistan Partition literature, developments in oral history allowed scholars to explore events from a completely different perspective. The use of oral narratives have traditionally been associated with the rights of women[43] and stem from the association of providing a voice to the 'voiceless' in society. Within Partition literature, the human dimension and the female voice has been completely absent and generally overlooked in favour of the nationalist discourse. Thus, the plight of women during the Partition has, until recently, received no scholarly discussion. Sheila Rowbotham's contention is that gendered accounts were often 'hidden from history' and now allow us to challenge 'historical interpretations based upon the lives and documentation of men'.[44] Similarly, Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin[45] have all contributed significantly to re-address this imbalance and have forced sensitive and often taboo subjects on to the agenda. Oral history has bought the experiences of women to the fore and has begun to expose the harsh realities of abduction, rape and violence against women in a patriarchal society, revealing personal and subjective accounts of individuals who experienced the turmoil of partition first hand.

Some of the chapters included in this volume continue this trend within oral history and more specifically within Partition Studies of exploring marginal and localized experiences. For example, Rowe's study draws on memoirs and narratives by women to explore their experiences of the Armenian genocide; Chatty utilizes a number of interviews conducted with refugees in the Middle East; Sen focuses on the Andaman Islands and the refugees who were relocated from camps in West Bengal; Chattha's localized study incorporates narratives from Kashmiris settled in Sialkot; Robertson's study of York focuses on a female migrant expelled from Uganda; while Virdee's essay brings in narratives from both India and Pakistan to provide a comparative

dimension. The methodology, therefore, fits aptly into these new directions of understanding refugee accounts and, therefore, the human dimension of 'population exchange'.

However, the different contributors have employed a range of methodologies. Thus, the conceptual essays in Part I are broader historical narratives, while some of the latter essays are narrower in their focus and are based on case studies which utilize personal narratives and deal with individual refugee experiences. This mixture of methodologies and concerns with the macro and micro within these contributions attempts to capture the changes and developments within the study of forced migration and refugees. There is, then, a logical progression from the broad canvas of state politics and exclusionary nationalism presented by Panayi, Talbot and Levene to the narrow and individualized accounts presented in Robertson, Sen and Virdee which help us to understand the impact of these policies on individuals.

The key concept under consideration in this volume therefore consists of refugees, both collectively and individually. Most of the essays which deal with their creation essentially tackle the issue as a mass phenomenon. During the Yugoslav conflict, the idea of ethnic cleansing emerged as Serbs, Croats and Muslims expelled their populations, essentially continuing the precedent which had been set in the Balkans and the Middle East in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Some of the articles in the volume, therefore, deal with refugee creation as a mass phenomenon, rather than with the plight of individuals fleeing due to a well-founded fear of persecution, a phenomenon which reached its peak during the nineteenth-century Age of Revolutions and the Cold War in Europe. The processes under consideration have attracted a number of labels over the years, whether forced migration, population displacement, population exchange, ethnic cleansing or even genocide. All of these have led to refugee creation on a large scale, even though Genocide Studies, for instance, rarely tackle concepts such as refugees, especially in the context of events in Nazi Europe. On the other hand, the link between ethnic cleansing and refugee creation in the Armenian case, for example, remains more obvious, especially as the League of Nations Office for Refugees emerged partly from the concern for Armenians.[46]

This volume tries to fit into two historiographies, covering forced migration and refugees and the collapse of empire. While studies of refugees certainly predate the Second World War, a good starting point consists of its immediate aftermath, when Jacques Vernant and Eugene Kulishcer considered the consequences of the two World Wars for dis-

placement.[47] In 1975, there followed the detailed account by Louise Holborn, which provided a history of refugees in the twentieth century but concentrated more upon the contemporary situation.[48] From that time, country-specific studies have dealt with refugees. For instance, while American and British scholars increasingly became obsessed with the crimes of the Nazis, German research devoted much attention to the refugees who had fled to the Federal Republic from further East in the aftermath of the Second World War.[49] In South Asia, much of the early scholarly discussion was centred around and influenced by nationalism: for two post-colonial, nascent and fragile nations, the priority was the need to strengthen the nation-state. From a European perspective, a seminal work consisted of *The Unwanted* by Michael Marrus, published in 1985, before the collapse of the Soviet Union and its consequences, which provided a summary of the major catastrophes until that time. More recently, the *Journal of Refugee Studies* came into existence in 1988, linked with the Refugee Studies Centre at Oxford. However, an analysis by Tony Kushner demonstrated that only 4 per cent of papers submitted to the *Journal of Refugee Studies* covered historical themes.[50] While it would be erroneous to suggest that historians have ignored refugees as a theme of study, paradigms have tended to follow particular groups or particular nation-states, with key areas of study including refugees from Nazism, post-war refugees to Germany and Palestinians.

While many of the refugee movements studied by historians have looked at the consequences of the collapse of empire, few students have actually focused specifically upon this theme. Books on the Armenian Genocide, for example, tend to use the concept of genocide partly to prove that this constituted such an act against Armenians in opposition to denials by the Turkish state.[51] One scholar who has helped the move away from this paradigm is Donald Bloxham, not only in his study of the Armenian Genocide, but also in his more recent volume which has examined the 'unweaving of Europe', where the focus remains firmly upon genocide.[52] Similarly, the increasing numbers of volumes on ethnic cleansing, while they might take a long-term historical approach, examine refugee creation as a consequence of imperial collapse (if they do at all) implicitly rather than explicitly.[53]

The essays which follow will examine the relationship between imperial collapse, the emergence of successor nationalism, the exclusion of ethnic groups with the wrong credentials and personal refugee experiences. The individual essays examine both the structural forces which created refugees as a result of imperial collapse, as well as focusing upon the consequences of these processes for individuals. The book emerges

out of the De Montfort University Conference on 'Refugees and the End of Empire'. The organizers and editors have selected the nine best and most appropriate papers, while Panikos Panayi has written a new overview paper on twentieth-century Europe, and Pippa Virdee has added a new contribution. They are also bookended by this preface, a conclusion and a bibliography. Although the remainder of the essays originate in the conference, their authors have revised and significantly extended the original presentations.

The editors decided to divide the volume into three distinct sections. The first of these contains three overview pieces, focusing upon the End of Empire in Europe and beyond. Part II focuses specifically upon the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires at the end of the First World War, with individual essays on specific case studies. Part III examines 'The Consequences and Legacy of British Imperial Collapse', with a particular focus upon the experiences of South Asians immediately after the Partition of India and the specific case of Uganda.

Panikos Panayi's 'Imperial Collapse and the Creation of Refugees in Twentieth-Century Europe' traces the consequences of the end of empire for those groups which found themselves in a series of successor states at key moments. First, the collapse of the Russian, Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires after the First World War; second, the end of the Third Reich in 1945; and third, the end of the Cold War and its consequences in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Ian Talbot on 'The End of the European Colonial Empires and Forced Migration Studies' focuses upon the collapse of the British, French, Dutch and Portuguese empires during the twentieth century and covers a series of key themes. These consist of the consequences of imperial collapse for refugee creation, and, more specifically, the experiences of European settlers and collaborators. He devotes particular attention to the Partition of India in 1947 and its consequences for forced migration, but also demonstrates the ways in which the end of empire sometimes has repercussions for minority populations decades later. Talbot's contribution further focuses upon the personal experiences for individuals by examining 'Trauma, Loss and Identity'. Mark Levene's contribution on the theme of 'The Tragedy of the Rimlands, Nation-State Formation and the Destruction of Imperial Peoples, 1912–1948' places the mass expulsion of European and Middle Eastern imperial peoples within the context of radical or abrupt nation-state development, particularly in the period 1912–48. By concentrating on the rimland regions of the Ottoman, Romanov and 'German' empires (Habsburg and Hohenzollern), Levene demonstrates a fatal synergy between ruptured time – that is from the time of

the European crises from ca. 1912 – and geographical space, which set on course the creation of new political formations and, in turn, determined a 'minority' status for non-dominant communities. By co-relating the European and Middle Eastern incidence of extreme violence, including genocide, to these rimland regions, the essay shows how mass human displacement, whether through conscious ethnic cleansing or 'voluntary' migration, was a further consequence of this same pattern.

Part II of the book focuses upon the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires at the end of the First World War. Matthew Frank in 'Fantasies of Ethnic Unmixing: "Population Transfer" and the End of Empire in Europe' examines the genesis of the concept of 'population transfer' which emerged in response to the rapid retreat of the Ottoman Empire from south-eastern Europe in the late nineteenth century and the fear that the minorities left behind – both Christian and Muslim– would continue to be a target of persecution and a focus of irredentism, and therefore a source of instability *within* the state and *between* states. The essay locates population transfer in the 'fantasies of ethnic unmixing' that emerged in early twentieth-century writing on the so-called 'nationalities question', which sketched out radical schemes for the reshaping of the ethnographic and political map of Europe and which became even more far-reaching in scope with the outbreak of the First World War. Frank pays particular attention to the ideas of Siegfried Lichtenstädter and George Montandon who, at the start of the twentieth century, viewed ethnic cleansing as an inevitable outcome of the collapse of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires. There then follows Julie Thorpe's contribution on 'Displacing Empire: Refugee Welfare, National Activism and State Legitimacy in Austria-Hungary in the First World War', which examines how, on the eve of imperial collapse, the Austro-Hungarian Empire incarcerated its displaced internal nationalities, despite the fact that they held the citizenship of the empire. She argues that the internment of wartime refugees became a means of separating 'citizens' from 'unreliable' nationalities in Austria-Hungary along ethnic and civic lines of belonging, which helped create a popular stereotype of the refugee that would re-emerge in the interwar period. Dawn Chatty's chapter on 'Integration without Assimilation in an Impermanent Landscape: Dispossession and Forced Migration in the Arab Middle East' outlines the waves of involuntary migration from outside the Ottoman Empire and along its borders into the heart of its former Arab provinces. It then sets out to make sense of the individual experiences within the dispossessed populations, as a step in understanding the mechanisms whereby new 'communities' came into being,