

Forced migrations

Forced migrations, while historically conditioned, have been a recurring and perhaps constant phenomenon in human history. The earliest chronicles convey tales of refugees from natural disaster, expelled communities, resettled communities, and the enslaved. The Hebrew Bible conveys tales of the great flood of Noah's time, of the enslavement and resettlement of the Hebrews by the Egyptian and Babylonian states. Passages of the *Shih Ji* of Han China tell of Yellow River floods and their devastation, and of the expulsion of defeated parties from early Chinese kingdoms.

The term 'forced migration', while commonly invoked in academic discussion of slavery and refugees, has yet to achieve a clear, technical definition. In this entry, a broad framework is proposed to encompass most of the historical phenomena that arguably qualify as both migratory and forced. The framework takes the form of a typology in three stages: expulsion, voyaging, and resettlement. At the first and most central stage, forced migration is the expulsion of people from their homeland either by natural forces or by human forces. The natural phenomena include flood, famine, earthquake and epidemic; the human forces include the actions of families, communities, ethnic groups, and states. In addition, expulsion depends on interactions of natural and human forces, as when those displaced by famine encounter robbery and enslavement.

The second and third stages of forced migration consist of the movement of expelled persons through unfamiliar regions and their settlement in a region of destination. For both of these stages, the question is whether the forced migrants are able to regain the initiative: whether they travel as free migrants or under coercion in their journey from home, and whether they are free or coerced in settling. Thus refugees from natural disasters and persons expelled by families or states have commonly been able to travel and settle on their own initiative. But for slaves and for subject ethnic groups, it was often the case that they were transported under guard or under lock and key, and that they were settled in places and under conditions determined by state or private authorities.

Forced migration is generally accompanied by high mortality at all three stages, but especially at the initial stage of expulsion.

The high mortality came from natural causes (floods, earthquakes, epidemics), from social causes (massacres and warfare), and also from the human and natural hazards of travel. An extreme case is that of genocidal killing in the homeland and flight by those who can get away.

The main patterns of forced migration have been enslavement, natural disasters, expulsion of groups from localities, and forced resettlement by imperial powers. Of these, enslavement has been most consistently documented. One should distinguish, however, between *forced migration* (the seizure and transportation of captives) and *forced labour* (the exploitation of those held in slavery). The two processes, while inextricably linked, are quite different.

Slavery, emancipation, nationhood, and genocide, 1850–1945

Up until 1850, the principal instance of forced migration had been the pairing of enslavement and slavery – of forced migration and forced labour. Africans especially were sent to the Americas, to other Old World destinations, and held within Africa. From 1850 forced migration both declined and expanded. The anti-slave-trade movement grew in the Atlantic and spread steadily to other regions. Yet during the 19th century the forced migration of slaves expanded in parts of the Americas (Brazil and Cuba), in many parts of Africa, and in lands bordering the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean. Slave trade was almost fully interrupted at the end of the century, but the abolition of forced migration did not end forced labour. Despite the abolition of slave trade in the US and British territories after 1808, slavery continued until 1838 in British territories, 1865 in the US, and until 1888 in Brazil. In Africa, European conquerors at the end of the 19th century systematically abolished slave trade but not *corvée* labour, and they generally declined to emancipate slaves, allowing forced labour to continue for several decades.

The balance of forced and voluntary migration changed sharply in about 1850. The beginning of safe and dependable steamship travel encouraged the dramatic expansion of voluntary and contract migration, especially from the 1840s, for millions who left the densely populated areas of Europe, South Asia, and East Asia to travel, predominantly, to the Americas and Southeast Asia. Ironically

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but not accidentally, this great expansion in voluntary movement across frontiers coincided with the development of stronger national states, firmer national boundaries, and the expansion of empires governed by the great powers.

Nineteenth-century emancipation brought the granting of rights of citizenship to slaves and, in Europe, to serfs (in 1848 for Austria and Prussia; in 1861 for Russia), and to Jews and Romani previously restricted by law. Yet these moves toward emancipation opened the door to another sort of forced migration. An ideology of racial categorization and racial hierarchy arose, partly in response to innovative biological thinking of the era. In its social function, this ideology provided a reason for marginalizing those who were just gaining rights of full participation in society. This reasoning of racial hierarchy gave new justification for forced resettlements that had already been taking place – the expulsion of Amerindians in the US and of Algerians under French rule from their homes, the resettlement of Jews under Russian rule in the Pale, and displacement of Kurds by various powers. Forced and voluntary migration mixed with each other, with floods and famines, and with imperial expansion in what Mike Davis has called ‘Victorian Holocausts’.

Colonial occupation of Africa, 1890–1910, generated flight by conquered African populations. Perhaps most extreme was the Herero War of 1904–05 in German Southwest Africa, where the German military pursued a genocidal response to a rebellion, and drove most surviving Herero north into Angola. The Ottoman Empire responded to Armenian nationalism during World War I with a policy of forced relocation from eastern Armenia to Mesopotamia, resulting in a far larger number of mass killings and large-scale flight. Nineteenth-century Russian policies, including Jewish displacement and Siberian exile of dissident individuals and groups, had their sequel in Soviet-era forced migration of Kurdish and Chechen ethnic groups as well as the exile of Baltic and Ukrainian individuals considered anti-Soviet.

Anti-black racism and anti-Semitism appeared to be entering a slow decline in the 1920s, until the rise of Nazi Germany brought ethnic and racial discrimination to an unprecedented level of restriction, expulsion, and then full-scale genocide. Forced migration and massacre reached a global

peak in almost every theatre of World War 2 but concentrated in Eastern Europe. Postwar realization of the scale of this oppression brought near-universal denunciation of such practices, but did not bring to an end either their causes or consequences. Research continues into the balance of state action and vigilante assault in the killings and expulsions of World War 2.

Forced migration since 1945

In the aftermath of the horror of the Holocaust and the other mass killings of World War 2, the United Nations formed and adopted both a declaration of human rights and a convention opposing genocide in 1948, and created the United Nations High Commission for Refugees in 1950. But the hope that forced migration could be ended by mutual agreement proved illusory.

The great wave of decolonization from 1946 into the 1980s led to formation of new sovereignties and sometimes new borders. The 1947 flight and expulsion across the hastily defined boundary between India and Pakistan killed many thousands and displaced millions, and each stage of decolonization brought more conflicts and refugees. Since this process took place in the atmosphere of the Cold War confrontation of the US and the Soviet Union, the United Nations underwent political struggles over who could be defined as a refugee. The United States, where many refugees wished to settle, developed increasingly elaborate and restrictive distinctions between economic and political migrants as devices to limit immigration.

Natural disasters, though they had never been absent as a cause for forced migration, became especially prominent in the late 20th century. A series of great famines in Africa beginning in 1967, powerful earthquakes in Guatemala, Iran, and elsewhere, and the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 are only the most obvious examples. The effect of the hurricane-induced 2005 flooding of New Orleans was outstanding in that, because it was in the US, the waves of disruption brought by the forced migration of the city’s inhabitants were unusually well documented. The transnational dimension of the latter disaster – the dispersal of the city’s thousands of Mexican immigrants, many of them undocumented – confirmed that the policing of national borders had become a factor in the response to natural calamity.

The recurring tendencies to resolve national conflicts by identifying certain groups as pure citizens of the nation and others as impure threats to the nation led to a mixture of expulsion and genocidal killing. Such waves of killing in Cambodia (1973), Rwanda (1994), and Bosnia (1995) confirmed that genocide might recur despite the horrors it brought.

Slavery, finally, reappeared in the public eye. While enslavement was everywhere illegal, acts of enslavement took place wherever moral scruples were lacking and profits were to be made. Slavery lost its importance in agricultural production, but it continued in domestic service and it expanded in sexual slavery, as young males and especially females were transported and exploited to meet the demands of an affluent clientele.

Forced migration thus continues as a factor in human society, not only as a result of natural disasters that drive people from their homes, but because groups of people decide, for a shifting range of reasons, to expel neighbors or to resettle others forcibly. It is surely important that the United Nations has facilitated the articulation of a global consensus opposing the various sorts of forced migration and offering aid to refugees. But it appears that the very largest

forced migrations have taken place within the past century, so it is unlikely that we have escaped our history of association with this phenomenon.

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