



# Reflections and Directions for Research in Refugee Studies

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### Reflections and Directions for Research in Refugee Studies

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## Reflections and Directions for Research in Refugee Studies

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### ABSTRACT

This paper reflects on how refugee studies has developed and identifies areas for future research. First, the paper sets the scene through an overview of refugee protection regime and on patterns of displacement. Second, the development of theories that try to explain refugee movements are explored. Third, the policy focus of refugee studies and the inherent tensions are examined. This is followed by an exploration of three areas for further research: durable solutions, borders and bordering practices and the inter-generational impacts of refugee migration. These areas allow for multi-level analyses, expose the tensions between structure and agency, power and resistance and the post-colonial world order, and place emphasis on everyday lived experiences. The paper argues that social science disciplines have an important role to play in the field of study but need to include historical analyses and engage in inter-disciplinary alliances to enable shifting paradigms.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

### KEYWORDS

Refugee studies, Forced migration, Borders, Durable solutions, Second generation, Refugee policy

Refugee studies emerged as an area of scholarship in the 1980s and has been influenced by the demands of nation states, of humanitarian organisations and by changing mobilities (Castles, 2003; Chatty and Marfleet, 2013). Social science research has made significant theoretical, policy, practice and empirical contributions to refugee studies and its wider reaching descendant, forced migration studies. The field of scholarship is necessarily part of an inter-disciplinary and transnational project with blurred disciplinary lines. No one discipline can adequately grapple with the range of factors – structural and local – that are inherent in this area of work and so each needs to inform the other so that research can shed light on the causes of refugee migration and on the different and complex ways that refugee migration affects individuals, families, groups, communities, countries and regions.

There is a long history of seminal research that has and continues to influence scholarship. For example Harrell-Bond's (1986) work on refugees as a resource, Malkki's (1992) work on sedentary bias that critiques the framing of mobility as the exception and the work by Zetter (1991; 2007) on bureaucratic labels. However within refugee studies there is a tendency to reinvent the

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3 wheel (Hathaway 2019). Such a criticism can be directed at most areas but  
4 looking back before going forward offers essential context and an historic  
5 understanding of pre-existing knowledge to anchor new ideas and to avoid the  
6 repetition of mistakes. This is not to ignore some of the positive developments  
7 including the shift to critical analyses of sex and gender and post-colonial  
8 framings of the field and in the expansion of participatory models of research,  
9 policy and practice.  
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12 This paper, in a modest way, sets out to make a contribution by looking  
13 backwards and forwards. As a review piece it reflects on how the field of  
14 research has developed but it also identifies areas going forward. Of course  
15 these are subjective and reflect my own knowledge, interests and concerns.  
16 Others writing this paper would prioritise different facets of the past, for  
17 example the changing patterns and actors within the humanitarian field, and  
18 the future priorities notably the impact of climate change on forced  
19 displacement. There is much debate to be had. The paper is in four main  
20 sections. The first section sets the scene, providing the context of the  
21 international refugee protection regime and on contemporary patterns of  
22 displacement. The second part explores the development of theory with a  
23 focus on the theories that try to explain refugee movements. Although there is  
24 also a large body of theoretical and empirical literature on assimilation,  
25 integration and refugee settlement, this work usually emerges from national  
26 contexts and is generally applied to those specific migratory and social policy  
27 settings so is too specific for the objectives of a review article. The third  
28 section examines the policy focus of refugee studies and the complex and  
29 sometimes competing interests of stakeholders. The final section identifies  
30 three crucial areas: durable solutions, borders and bordering practices and  
31 second generation people from refugee backgrounds arguing that these areas  
32 need to be central to research and scholarship going forward. Durable  
33 solutions continue to frame international responses to refugee movements but  
34 continue to fail, partly because states are able to renege on their international  
35 obligations, as they implement increasingly restrictive domestic policies.  
36 Borders and bordering practices are significant because they encompass not  
37 only the physical space of the border but a host of areas that relate to borders  
38 including surveillance (external and internal), fences, journeys, death, state  
39 sanctioned injury, agency and power at the macro and micro levels. The third  
40 area of further research, are the longer-term impacts of refugee migration.  
41 Relatively little is known about the various and complex ways that the children  
42 of refugees are affected by their parent's experiences. My own collaborative  
43 research highlights the need for more social science research on the inter-  
44 generational aspects of refugee migration and how these shape everyday  
45 lives (Bloch et al, 2015).  
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### 52 **Contemporary context**

53 The international framework for refugee protection is the 1951 Geneva  
54 Convention and the 1967 New York Protocol Relating to the Status of  
55 Refugees. Developed in the post-WWII era, and restricted to refugees from  
56 Europe and those who had emerged as a result of events occurring before  
57 January 1st 1951, the Geneva Convention defines a refugee as a person  
58 who,  
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4 Owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race,  
5 religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political  
6 opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing  
7 to such a fear is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that  
8 country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country  
9 of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or,  
10 owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.  
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13 Although 30 million people were displaced in Europe the regional focus  
14 ignored other mass displacements of that era, notably the partition of Indian in  
15 1947 that left 14 million people displaced with little international assistance.  
16 The New York Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, in 1967, removed  
17 the geographical and temporal limitations of the refugee definition. This was at  
18 a time when the majority of colonised states had already gained  
19 independence.  
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22 In addition to the international protection framework, there are also regional  
23 laws and standards that expand the grounds for protection. The Organisation  
24 of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee  
25 Problems in Africa (OAU), in 1969, has its origins in the conflicts that  
26 accompanied the end of the colonial era in Africa. People fleeing civil  
27 disturbances, widespread violence and war are entitled to claim refugee  
28 status in states that are parties to the OAU Convention regardless of whether  
29 they have a well-founded fear of persecution. The 1984 Cartagena  
30 Declaration focuses on protection in the Latin American region and includes  
31 persons who have fled their country, 'because their lives, safety or freedom  
32 have been threatened by generalised violence, foreign aggression, internal  
33 conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which  
34 have seriously disturbed public order' (Reed-Hurtato 2013). Most recently has  
35 been the Kampala Convention (adopted in 2009) that established the  
36 responsibilities of states for the protection of internally displaced people  
37 (IDPs) as a consequence of natural or human made disasters including  
38 climate change.  
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43 The numbers of forced migrants have peaked and troughed over the decades  
44 since the end of WWII. Major sites of displacement globally have included: the  
45 Algerian war of independence that displaced 1.2 million from the mid-1950s to  
46 the early 1960s, the Biafran war where 2 million people were displaced  
47 between 1967 and 1970, the Bangladesh war of independence displaced 10  
48 million Bengalis from east Pakistan to India in 1971, the Soviet invasion of  
49 Afghanistan in 1979 led to the displacement of 6.3 million Afghans to Iran and  
50 Pakistan, civil war in Mozambique displaced 5.7 million internally and to  
51 Malawi between 1976 and 1992, civil wars in the central American countries  
52 of Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala displaced 2 million people mostly to  
53 neighbouring countries in the 1980s, the Rwandan genocide of 1994  
54 displaced 3.5 million (2 million to Zaire, Uganda, Tanzania and Burundi), the  
55 break up of Yugoslavia in 1992-95 displaced 2.5 million, civil conflict in  
56 Colombia has led to the displacement of almost 6 million people from 2000,  
57 the war in Syria has displaced more than 13 million since 2011 (5 million are  
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3 refugees outside of Syria mainly in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon) and more  
4 than 2 million people were displaced due to the civil war in south Sudan  
5 between 2013 and 2015.  
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8 The numbers of forcibly displaced people are at their highest ever and more  
9 are outside the refugee protection framework. At the end of 2018 there were  
10 70.8 million forcibly displaced people of whom 25.9 million were refugees,  
11 41.3 million were internally displaced people (IDPs)<sup>i</sup>, an additional 3.5 million  
12 people were asylum seekers and 10 million were stateless. Most displaced  
13 people stay in their region of origin (UNHCR 2018) reflecting the geography of  
14 forced migration, the costs and risks of longer distance travel and the political  
15 agenda of Europe, north America and Australia where borders, barriers,  
16 racism, exclusion and hostility are a central part of the maintenance of the  
17 post-colonial world order (Chimni 2009).  
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21 The debates about the limitations of the refugee protection system are well  
22 rehearsed with some arguing for the specificity of refugees within the forced  
23 migration paradigm (Hathaway 2007) while others reflect on these limitations  
24 given the numbers of IDPs (Cohen 2007) or the need for an approach more  
25 focused on human rights (de Wind 2007). These debates reflect the legal  
26 definitions and clear-cut categories versus the more messy realities of lived  
27 experiences that are captured by sociologists and anthropologists (see Zetter  
28 2019 for an overview). Regardless of positioning in this debate, most  
29 displaced people are not refugees and are outside of the protections offered  
30 by refugee status.  
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### 33 **The development of theory and concepts**

34 Attempts to theorise refugee migration are relatively recent. In contrast, there  
35 is a long history of theoretical work on migration, dating back to the late 19<sup>th</sup>  
36 century and emerging from different academic disciplines. The early theories  
37 focused on economic drivers, including the needs of capitalism, but have  
38 become more complex. Migration is analysed in relation to the global systems  
39 and networks that have developed as a consequence of migration, that  
40 facilitate more migration and create linkages in a globalized world. Massey et  
41 al. (1998) argue that migration research is a set of disjointed and uneven  
42 theories. Different theories may have some explanatory value but there are  
43 too many limitations for any one theory to be generalizable (Arango 2002).  
44 Although theories of migration incorporate some factors that are relevant for  
45 refugee migration, they do not highlight the experiences of refugees in the  
46 wider analysis of migration. These experiences will include both similarities  
47 and differences but need to be considered at every stage of the process  
48 beginning with the decision to migrate (Erdal and Oeppen 2018).  
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53 The early attempts to theorise refugee migration focused on the specificity of  
54 the refugee experience. Kunz (1973; 1981) proposed a kinetic model of  
55 refugee migration positing that the lack of a positive reason for migration is  
56 the factor that distinguished refugees from other migrants. Kunz theorised the  
57 relationship between the reasons for refugee flight, the circumstances of  
58 refugee flight (whether it was an acute situation or anticipatory), whether the  
59 refugee person might be able to or want to return to the country from which  
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3 they have fled and what the relationship might be between these factors and  
4 settlement. Refugee movements should not be viewed as individual and  
5 distinctly different occurrences but as reoccurring phenomena, with  
6 identifiable and often similar causes, which shape patterns of mobility. Though  
7 not tested empirically and criticised for its simplicity, an important contribution  
8 of Kunz's model was that it paved the way for more complex attempts at  
9 theorization. These more nuanced approaches incorporated not only refugees  
10 but other groups that are also persecuted or potentially vulnerable that  
11 characterise the wider and more extensive category of forced migration.  
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15 Theoretically it was the work by Richmond (1993) that began to grapple with a  
16 more complex analysis of forced migration with less clearly defined lines of  
17 cause and effect; push and pull; voluntary and involuntary effectively  
18 challenging the dichotomies that dominated the field. Critiquing the idea that  
19 refugees were involuntary and other migrants voluntary, Richmond (1993)  
20 argued instead that the majority of population movements are a complex mix  
21 of political, economic, environmental and social determinants that meld  
22 together in different combinations and interact with structural constraints to  
23 migration – such as visa requirements - or structural facilitators that enable  
24 migration to occur. Therefore the idea that voluntary migrants are entirely free  
25 and autonomous while involuntary migrants have no room to exercise choice  
26 is replaced with the notion that there is a continuum between proactive and  
27 reactive migration, where reactive migration is more associated with forced  
28 migration.  
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32 Also challenging binaries is Van Hear's (1998) work on mixed motives for  
33 migration that demonstrates the ways in which migration is rarely either  
34 voluntary or forced. Instead, almost all migration involves some compulsion  
35 and some choice though of course some people have more choices than  
36 others and some decide or are compelled not to move (Van Hear, Brubaker  
37 and Bessa 2009). Among those that do migrate, different stages of the  
38 migratory process may also include varying degrees of compulsion. For  
39 example the initial movement may be forced but onward mobility from transit  
40 countries may be motivated by factors that include economic opportunities  
41 and family ties so become associated more with choice than force (Van Hear,  
42 Brubaker and Bessa 2009). Mixed motives have been further complicated by  
43 mixed migrant flows where asylum seekers move alongside other migrants.  
44 Mixed flows can make it hard to distinguish between those who are entitled to  
45 protection, under the 1951 Geneva Convention, and those who are not and  
46 therefore easier for wealthier states to label migrants as illegal. Mixed  
47 migration flows as a concept was developed under the description 'migration-  
48 asylum nexus' to highlight fluidity as opposed to rigid binaries throughout all  
49 stages of the migration process creating differences between policy makers,  
50 including UNHCR, who emphasized the dichotomies and academics who  
51 focused on complexities and fluidity (Castles 2007; Scheel and and Ratfisch  
52 2014).  
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57 Van Hear, Bakewell, and Long (2018) focus on migration drivers as an  
58 advance on the traditional push-pull model of migration. Drivers are  
59 delineated into: predisposing, proximate, precipitating and mediating.  
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3 Predisposing factors reflect the context and include structural circumstances  
4 that might result in migration. Proximate drivers reflect the conditions in both  
5 countries and regions of origin and destination. Precipitating drivers lead to  
6 migration or the decision not to migrate. These are normally linked to an event  
7 or events and can include the factors that are normally associated with  
8 refugee migration including civil war, war or military invasion and/or  
9 persecution. Mediating factors will be the conditions that facilitate or constrain  
10 migration such as economic resources, social networks and migration  
11 regimes. The role of structure highlights how migration is one possibility but  
12 mobility can and is prevented by sending, transit and receiving countries  
13 where state imposed structural barriers in the form of borders and bordering  
14 practices prevent movement. The tensions between structure and agency are  
15 necessary for understanding forced migration (Bakewell 2010). These  
16 mediating factors are important in explaining why the world's poorest do not  
17 migrate (Castles 2003). Migration drivers work together, rather than in  
18 isolation, to produce the 'driver complexes' that shape migration (Van Hear,  
19 Bakewell and Long 2018, 934).  
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24 Refugee flows, like other population movements, can be viewed as events  
25 that result from broad historical processes including the effects of the post-  
26 colonial era. Any meaningful analysis needs to locate the contemporary within  
27 the historic. Mass displacement has and does shape the modern world  
28 (Marfleet 2013) although historians have written relatively little about refugees  
29 in this context (Gatrell 2017). Refugee studies as a field of study, with some  
30 exceptions, rarely engages with historical contexts partly because each  
31 refugee-producing situation is regarded as unique and so the lessons learned  
32 from the past are rarely applied or reflected on (Marfleet 2007). Of course the  
33 reality is very different, history is central to refugees and visa versa. Gatrell  
34 (2017) highlights the role that history has in migration routes. For instance,  
35 migrant labour destinations have paved the way for future refugee movements  
36 such as Bosnian refugees going to Germany, Austria, Sweden and  
37 Switzerland (Valenta and Strabac 2013) and where refugee patterns of  
38 migration are linked to historic ties including former colonial connections  
39 (Havinga and Böcker 1999).  
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44 Indeed, Banerjee and Samaddar (2019) argue that what is required is a  
45 critical post-colonial approach that integrates history with an understanding of  
46 the specific aspects of the post-colonial political and social structures. While  
47 critical scholars increasingly engage with colonial legacies and the on-going  
48 post-colonial racialization of migrants, the organisations that fund research  
49 continue to see each refugee 'crisis' as a unique event that requires a policy  
50 analysis and a policy intervention to solve the problem. Policy makers stifle  
51 theoretical development partly through their use of categories and labels  
52 (Bakewell 2008). Moving away from a state centred approach and instead  
53 towards lived realities, Erdal and Oeppen (2018) argue that a complete  
54 rethink of migration decisions is necessary placing volition – that depends on  
55 the range and nature of available alternatives - at the centre. The objective  
56 would be to focus on 'voluntariness, choice and alternatives' rather than a  
57 dichotomy between voluntary and forced (Erdal and Oeppen 2018, 982).  
58 Reframing the field of study to include otherwise excluded groups in the  
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3 analysis and those who do not move would offer greater opportunities for  
4 theorization (Lubkemann 2008). Refugee studies is more theoretically useful  
5 as part of a large inter-disciplinary project alliances which are essential in  
6 order to advance the field (Vannini et al. 2019).  
7

### 9 **The focus on policy**

10 Refugee studies, as an area of scholarship has been orientated towards  
11 policy driven research (Gatrell 2017). The focus on policy interventions can  
12 create an uncomfortable relationship between research agendas, the purpose  
13 of research and the target audiences. The knowledge produced can be based  
14 on research funders' institutional ideas of what has policy relevance (Bakewell  
15 2008). Moreover, research is generally funded and carried out by institutions  
16 in the richer countries and this maintains the power of the hegemonic state  
17 within the post-colonial world order (Chimini 2009). The richer countries  
18 dominant the international agenda where policies are designed to contain  
19 forced migrants, often in the region of origin, and is part of what Chimini  
20 (2009, 20) describes as the western project of global dominance. The links  
21 between knowledge production and power and the voices that are heard and  
22 listened can be tainted by post-colonial racisms (Chimini 2009).  
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26 Policy and politics can rarely be separated from the research carried out by  
27 academics that has become enmeshed in competing and conflicting priorities.  
28 Tensions include a moral and ethical positioning about the value of research  
29 and importantly who benefits. While these concerns are not restricted to  
30 research in the field of refugee studies, Turton argues that it is hard to justify  
31 research into 'situations of extreme human suffering' (1996, 96) where  
32 positive change does not form an explicit part of the research agenda. In fact  
33 Mackenzie, McDowell, and Pittaway maintain that research can only be  
34 ethical where it results in 'reciprocal benefits for refugee participants and/or  
35 communities' (2007, 301), which means facilitating agency and capacity  
36 building. Moreover, the 'dual imperative' placed on academics to carry out  
37 research in refugee studies that is academically and methodologically  
38 rigorous while at the same producing knowledge that protects refugees and  
39 influences policy (Jacobsen and Landau 2003) can limit the type of research  
40 that is carried out and the categories and analysis applied.  
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45 The construction and analysis of research using categories defined by policy  
46 interests, argues Bakewell (2008), limits possibilities for engagement with  
47 social processes and as noted above, inhibits the development of theory.  
48 Although categories are bureaucratically useful, they are also constraining  
49 (Zetter 1991; 2007). Certainly the legal definition of a refugee has shaped but  
50 also restricted the conceptualisation of the field. Who is applying the label and  
51 'what the discursive work of those labels entails' (Erdal and Oppen 2018, 993)  
52 must be critically interrogated. These labels map onto categories such as  
53 refugee, asylum seeker, irregular migrant, and are 'not merely an issue of  
54 semantics. Categories have consequences' (Crawley and Skleparis 2018,12).  
55 Most obvious are the rights and protections afforded to refugees at one end of  
56 the forced migration spectrum and the vulnerability and deportability of  
57 undocumented migrants and refused asylum seekers at the other end.  
58 Categories are also malleable; a refugee in one place might be an  
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3 undocumented migrant somewhere else (Fitzgerald and Aran 2018).  
4 Moreover, not everyone who might meet the 1951 Geneva Convention  
5 definition of a refugee will apply for and/or acquire refugee status. Decisions  
6 and strategies are made for complex reasons and often ones that are  
7 expedient (Bloch and McKay 2016). There is mobility between the categories  
8 and statuses that dominant policy and political discourse (Bloch, Sigona and  
9 Zetter 2014). The status applied by states and institutions expose the  
10 disjuncture between state categories and perceptions of self (see Zetter  
11 2019).  
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15 Crawley and Skleparis (2018, 60) call for engagement with the 'politics of  
16 bounding', which are the ways in which categories are constructed, the  
17 reasons and the effects. By analysing politics, power and process it may be  
18 possible to challenge the application and impact of categories and to include  
19 the excluded (Crawley and Skleparis 2018). Of course there is a case to  
20 remove categories and the power that states have by using them but this  
21 would require a complete overhaul of international protection and the role of  
22 the nation state in determining asylum which in the present climate would  
23 doubtless result in less rather than more protection. Unless there is a radical  
24 approach of global open borders and the upholding of human rights  
25 everywhere the danger would be greater exclusion not inclusion. There is a  
26 strong case to be made for more critical analysis, outside the confines of the  
27 institutional and legal frameworks that can and do impact on research and  
28 scholarship.  
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### 32 **Research and scholarship going forward**

33 The paper, so far, has considered some key aspects in the development of  
34 refugee studies as an area of scholarship. The rest of the paper focuses on  
35 substantive areas that are, in my view, central to the research field going  
36 forward. These areas are: durable solutions, borders and bordering practices  
37 and the experiences of second-generation people from refugee backgrounds.  
38 Others will have selected different areas depending on a number of factors  
39 including their disciplinary backgrounds, their substantive research areas and  
40 interests and the geographical areas that they work in. In selecting these  
41 three areas I am highlighting what I see as some of the key challenges for the  
42 field: first on- going failures and a rigidity in approach (durable solutions),  
43 secondly the ways in which a pre-occupation with controlling immigration has  
44 relevance far beyond the physical space of the borders (borders and  
45 bordering) and thirdly the need to take a longer term perspective by  
46 considering, not only the immediate crisis, but the extended impacts of  
47 refugee backgrounds (generations) and their intersections with transnational  
48 and diaspora studies. For social scientists these three areas are of interest  
49 and importance because collectively they offer insights into different levels of  
50 analysis (macro, meso and micro), expose the tensions between structure  
51 and agency, power and resistance and the world order, and place emphasis  
52 on everyday lived experiences. These everyday experiences so often become  
53 subsumed by the focus on the ways in which policy and practice responds to  
54 crisis.  
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### 60 *Durable solutions*

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3 Global forced migration and displacement is constantly changing. However,  
4 the concepts used and the solutions proposed remain largely unchanged.  
5 Durable solutions have been a central part of UNHCR's mandate since its  
6 inception with the focus on resettlement to third countries, repatriation and the  
7 local integration of refugees in countries of first asylum. Scholars have  
8 repeatedly highlighted the failings of these 'solutions', devised for refugees in  
9 Europe post-WWII and not fit for purpose in the contemporary world of  
10 growing numbers, IDPs and protracted displacement. The reluctance of states  
11 to participate meaningfully in resettlement and/or local integration and the  
12 sometimes devastating consequences of repatriation all points to systemic  
13 failures (Chimni 2004; Majidi and Schuster 2019).  
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17 More and more people are living in protracted refugee situations. A protracted  
18 situation refers to those who have been in exile for more than five years and  
19 where there is no prospect of a durable solution (Crisp 2002). Around two-  
20 thirds of the world's refugees live in protracted situations of extended exile;  
21 current solutions are not in fact solutions (Hyndman and Giles 2019). At the  
22 end of 2016, 11.6 million refugees were in protracted situations of which 4.1  
23 million had been in this situation for at least 20 years. Afghan refugees in  
24 Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran has involved more than 2 million  
25 people and has been going on for more than 30 years. These are hardly  
26 exceptional situations - in fact they are arguably the norm. These protracted  
27 situations are accompanied by a reduction in the numbers of refugees  
28 resettled. Globally just over 100,000 refugees were resettled in 2017 clearly  
29 highlighting the deficit between need and response. This deficit illuminates the  
30 failures of the system where the wealthiest states continue to resist  
31 responsibilities. It also exposes the multi-level selection within the system  
32 where UNHCR put forward cases for resettlement and nation states may  
33 decide who to resettle based on their preferences which might be country of  
34 origin or perceived capacity for integration through measures such as  
35 language skills (Beirens and Fratzke 2017).  
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40 Historically voluntary return was posited as the ideal solution for refugees as  
41 long as it was safe, consensual and practiced with dignity. It was used  
42 throughout the 1960s and 1970s when refugees returned to newly  
43 independent states in Africa after successful liberation struggles (Crisp and  
44 Long 2016). During the 1990s repatriation was presented as the best solution  
45 with more than 10 million people repatriated though this was not always  
46 voluntary. The example of Rwandan refugees rounded up and forced to return  
47 from Tanzania in 1996 even though they were returning to detention and  
48 killings highlights an ostensible solution that is failing refugees and the lack of  
49 attention to safety (Crisp and Long 2016). In 2015 just over half a million  
50 people were returned to their country of origin while in 2016 the numbers was  
51 667,400 (UNHCR 2018). However, success or failure cannot simply be  
52 measured in numbers; what is significant is whether the return is voluntary or  
53 forced and whether it is safe and sustainable.  
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57 Return or repatriation has traditionally been seen as the end of the refugee  
58 cycle. It is the moment when responsibility is returned from the receiving state  
59 to the country of origin. Return assumes that the right place for a refugee, and  
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3 their children, is the country of origin. Where refugee situations are protracted  
4 return could be to a country that is unfamiliar, such as the children of Afghan  
5 refugees who were born and lived only in Iran or in Pakistan. Little is known  
6 about what happens to refused asylum seekers post-deportation. As states  
7 make the decision to deport, and it is therefore forced, it is part of the anti-  
8 immigration arsenal of weapons used globally and can also result in *non-*  
9 *refoulement*, where states return someone to a place where his or her life or  
10 freedom would be threatened (Coutin 2015; Schuster 2018). The very limited  
11 scholarship on post-deportation points to the stigma experienced by  
12 deportees and the lack of viable return in the form of economic and social  
13 realities (Schuster 2011). Deportation is not the end of the refugee cycle,  
14 particularly when return is neither voluntary nor sustainable. Deportation can  
15 instead be the beginning of new plans to migrate be it in Asia, Africa, the  
16 Americas or Europe (Galvin 2015; Schuster and Majidi 2015; Majidi and  
17 Schuster 2019).  
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21 The failings of durable solutions are evident in the regular efforts to repackage  
22 them. This has included a focus on the root causes of refugee flows, refugee  
23 aid and development, Convention Plus, the Framework for Durable Solutions  
24 and most recently the Global Compact on Refugees. The Global Compact  
25 includes, as its objectives, these durable solutions that continue to fail  
26 refugees. Significantly, it does not contain concrete commitments from states  
27 to resettle larger numbers of refugees, to ensure routes to seek asylum and  
28 gain protection are accessible, or to effectively work with refugees in  
29 protracted situations. Hathaway (2019) argues that the Global Compact  
30 maintains the status quo, perpetuates the misallocation of resources away  
31 from the poorest regions that host the majority of the world's refugees and  
32 does nothing to address the lack of global responsibility. This is partly  
33 because it relies on states being willing to resettle and to share responsibility  
34 in an era when security, borders and restrictions are the norm.  
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39 Hathaway (2019) proposes a five-stage model, an alternative to the Global  
40 Compact, where refugees have 'access' to protection for the first five years,  
41 often in region and where mobility and employment in the country of  
42 protection is not restricted. If after five years local integration or repatriation  
43 were not possible then resettlement would take place outside of the region.  
44 Although the model would limit the numbers of refugees in protracted  
45 situations and in camps it is not a panacea. First, it requires wealthier states  
46 to completely change ingrained and politically expedient policies by taking  
47 responsibility both financially and in terms of the numbers resettled. Second  
48 the focus is on refugees who are a minority of those in need of protection and  
49 in so doing excludes the majority. Thirdly, the five year model of initial  
50 protection before local integration, repatriation or resettlement creates a  
51 number of problems that were exposed by the Bosnian temporary protection  
52 programme in the early 1990s and offers another example of the need to look  
53 backwards to learn from the past but also the advantages of cross disciplinary  
54 engagement. First is the detrimental impact of uncertainty. Second, it was  
55 expected that repatriation would be the end of the refugee cycle but ultimately  
56 most were offered permanent residence on humanitarian grounds in the  
57 country where temporary protection was given (Bastiki 2018). While protection  
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3 is necessary, refugees also need to have choices and to be involved in  
4 decision-making at every stage of the process instead of being treated as  
5 undesirable objects to be distributed (Crisp and Long 2016)  
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8 Alternatives to durable solutions have been posited with varying responses  
9 including territorially based solutions such as 'Refugia' – a self-governing  
10 region where refugees live and work (Cohen and Van Hear 2017). A criticism  
11 of Refugia and other alternatives to durable solutions has been their  
12 formulation in the richest states without meaningful engagement with  
13 academics and others in the regions that host the majority of the worlds  
14 displaced people (Crawley 2018). There is scope for social scientists to study  
15 and evaluate other solutions, including refugee centred approaches, and to try  
16 and find ways of moving away from a system that clearly does not work.  
17 Proper engagement at the micro level with individuals and the macro level  
18 with states and international organisations to facilitate dialogue and better  
19 outcomes would be a useful starting point. There is much ethnographic work  
20 that could be carried out to better understand the processes of policy  
21 formation, the consequences in relation to practice and individual  
22 experiences, at the nation state and supra national levels and within  
23 organisations.  
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### 26 27 *Borders and bordering practices*

28 Borders and bordering practices dominate national and international agendas.  
29 Border studies has its origins in political science and international relations  
30 where the focus was on borders as dividing lines between territories  
31 demarcating the boundaries of nation states (Bramillia 2015). However, in the  
32 last 30 years, as a consequence of major geo-political changes including the  
33 collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the field has  
34 expanded in terms of what is studied, the academic disciplines involved and  
35 the concepts used to understand the fluidity of borders. Refugee studies  
36 scholars are coming to the table relatively recently but it is an important area  
37 of work because borders link to mobility, the labels and categories used to  
38 describe and classify those on the move and on the right to seek asylum.  
39 Moreover, it is never far from the political debate including state sovereignty  
40 but also integration, assimilation and resources. Borders are fluid and mobile,  
41 traversing socio-political spaces like the people who try and navigate their  
42 way across them. They now extend beyond the nation state and mark out  
43 'hosts and guests across state, regional, racial and other symbolic  
44 boundaries' (Bramilla 2015,19).  
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49 Border control is high on the policy agendas of most nation states. In the  
50 wealthiest countries borders and border controls are technologically  
51 sophisticated, tightly managed and well resourced and effectively shut out  
52 those seeking refuge (Fitzgerald 2019). Controls include external pre-entry  
53 controls such as visas, document checks, surveillance and in Europe shared  
54 databases. Borders are also managed through physical barriers – walls,  
55 fences and surveillance – and through inspections, patrols and the use of  
56 biometric data. Borders are also internal and so even post-entry the threat of  
57 document checks, raids, detention and deportation are still present. Borders  
58 and bordering practices are everywhere and can prevent access to the  
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3 asylum system. For those who access asylum systems the culture of disbelief  
4 influenced by, 'a political context that constructs asylum seekers as liars and  
5 cheats, and of asylum destinations as besieged' (Schuster 2018,13)  
6 contributes to large numbers of asylum refusals, deportation and ultimately  
7 *non-refoulement*.  
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10 External borders are part of the way in which nation states keep out the  
11 unwanted and uninvited. They demarcate who is allowed into the state and  
12 who is not, who is subjected to suspicion and who is privileged and mobile.  
13 Increasingly cross-border surveillance has become an integral part of global  
14 governance where the control of crime and migration are inter-twined as  
15 'crimmigration control' (Aas 2011, 332). The EU is an example of regional  
16 border co-operation. Measures include Eurodac – the database that stores  
17 and shares the fingerprints of asylum seekers for the operation of the Dublin  
18 Regulation - and the European Border Surveillance System (Eurosur) that  
19 focuses on the external EU borders. According to the European Commission  
20 Eurosur aims to, 'increase reaction capability at external borders...to prevent  
21 cross-border crime and irregular migration'<sup>ii</sup>. The statement clearly shows the  
22 conflation of crime and migration. However what policy makers fail to address  
23 is the correlation between bordering practices that limit regular migration  
24 routes and the need for asylum seekers to make irregular and clandestine  
25 journeys. It is this that effectively turns refugees into irregular migrants and  
26 leads to their criminalization (Schuster 2011).  
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30 One of the most visible, contentious and symbolic types of bordering practice  
31 is the physical border wall and fences found in every continent. These walls  
32 and fences separate the wanted from the unwanted. New walls and fences or  
33 extensions to existing ones spring up in response to the movement of people.  
34 The summer of 2015 saw Hungary build walls on their borders with Serbia  
35 and Croatia while the UK and France have jointly financed a border fence in  
36 Calais. As new fences are erected refugees become stuck in a spatial limbo  
37 unable to move on, trapped in makeshift encampments, stuck in transit,  
38 constrained and contained by fences and security and abandoned in abject  
39 conditions. This is a political strategy where those subjected to such  
40 conditions are 'kept alive but in a state of injury' (Mbembe 2003, 21). Humans  
41 are reduced to bare life, stripped of rights (Agamben 1998) living in  
42 'deathworlds' in conditions of 'the living dead' (Mbembe 2003, 40).  
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47 However, states do more than keep people alive in a state of injury, they also  
48 kill. The sovereign right to kill, an aspect of state power in modernity, links the  
49 politics of race to necropolitics. As Mbembe notes drawing on slavery and the  
50 Holocaust to illustrate,  
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52 ...race has been the ever present shadow in Western political thought  
53 and practice, especially when it comes to imagining the inhumanity of,  
54 or rule over, foreign peoples...In the economy of biopower, the function  
55 of racism is to regulate the distribution of death and to make possible  
56 the murderous functions of the state (2003,17).  
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58 States also expose people to death through inaction (Mbembe 2003; Davies,  
59 Isakjee, and Dhesi 2017). A contemporary example is death in the  
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3 Mediterranean where states ignore the risks to refugees and permit death in  
4 the name of deterrent (Voutira 2019). The cessation of the Italian-led Mare  
5 Nostrum search and rescue operation at the end of 2014 has not been  
6 replaced adequately by the NGOs trying to plug the gaps or the EU border  
7 agency Frontex operation Triton, which is mainly concerned with border  
8 control meaning that there is a massive shortfall in terms of replacing Mare  
9 Nostrum. States have moral and ethical responsibility to provide search and  
10 rescue (Cusumano and Pattison 2018) but it is negligently inadequate. Italy  
11 and Malta have closed their ports to ships transporting refugees (Cusumano  
12 and Gombeer 2018). The humanitarian consequences of refusing to allow  
13 boats to dock and passengers to disembark is indicative of the internal battles  
14 in Europe and one which highlights the disjuncture between national  
15 sovereignty and regional co-operation.  
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19 It is not just European ports that are closing or European countries that try  
20 and prevent people reaching their domestic jurisdictions through the  
21 externalization of borders (Campesi 2018). Australia has externalized borders  
22 with a presence in sending country ports but also under the guise of  
23 Operation Sovereign Borders intercepts, tows back and returns people to their  
24 point of origin or removes them to off shore island detention centres where  
25 they are incarcerated in closed and unmonitored institutions and denied any  
26 access to the Australian asylum system (Nethery and Holman 2016).  
27 Detention is on the rise globally – more than 1 million people pass through  
28 detention centres each year (Fiske 2016). Island detention forms part of the  
29 hidden global detention estate and so those who work on the islands – civil  
30 servants, lawyers, advocates, health providers - are not sufficiently included in  
31 either public debates or academic literature (Mountz 2011). Nissology is an  
32 important but understudied area among refugee studies scholars raising  
33 contemporary questions about legal ambiguity, sovereignty, power and  
34 enforcement and their intersections with asylum seeking (Mountz 2011).  
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39 Detention is also an important aspect of internal border controls and acts not  
40 only to exclude and separate but also to hold and to expel the unwanted  
41 through deportation. In the UK the Home Office encourages and facilitates the  
42 reporting of those suspected as being undocumented migrants through  
43 everyday bordering practices. However, the extension of bordering to civil  
44 society actors do not just impact on those trying to stay hidden but they can  
45 affect everyone and are often applied in a racialised way that ruptures trust  
46 and community cohesion (Bloch and McKay 2016; Vaughan-Williams 2008;  
47 Yuval-Davis, Wemyss, and Cassidy 2018).  
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51 Borders have become political, symbolic and are doubtless blockers to  
52 migration but the strategies of forced migrants and of the smugglers and  
53 agents who they pay to make their journeys are responsive to changing  
54 bordering practices (Mainwaring 2016). The journey itself, as Benezet and  
55 Zetter observe, can be 'a profoundly formative and transformative experience'  
56 (2014: 302). Journeys have become signifiers of agency as well as sites of  
57 resilience and resistance. Journeys are not linear; they can be circuitous,  
58 fragmented and can involve long periods of immobility. In fact the journey  
59 itself can lead to agency and ethnic solidarity and result in 'ingenious tactics'  
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3 and can lead to 'a transformative space in which migrants realise their  
4 potential' (Mainwaring and Brigden 2016, 255-256).  
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7 Borders and bordering practices are entwined with the experiences of those  
8 who are deciding whether to move, those on the move and those who have  
9 moved. Social scientists researching borders – and the associated range of  
10 substantive areas that link to borders, including journeys, the right to seek  
11 asylum, deportation, detention, including on islands, can offer important  
12 insights that traverse not only a whole range of possible substantive areas but  
13 also actors and different levels of analysis. Bringing the micro, meso and  
14 macro into dialogue will illuminate the struggles that exist between structure  
15 and agency and between power and resistance. Moreover, the ethical and  
16 moral impacts of policy-making and policy enactment offer opportunities for  
17 refugee studies scholars to contribute a critical voice.  
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### 20 21 *Second generation – the longer term impacts of refugee migration*

22 The final area to be highlighted is the generational effect of displacement  
23 where generation is being used as a marker of kinship descent (Loizos 2007).  
24 In refugee studies the vast majority of research is with the refugee generation  
25 but the impacts can be inter-generational. There is of course research that  
26 includes refugee children in different physical and geographical contexts such  
27 as camps, in transit and as unaccompanied minors. This research covers a  
28 number of substantive areas such as humanitarian conditions and  
29 interventions, human rights, the lack of access to resources such as  
30 education and economic opportunities, food security, gender relations and  
31 physical and mental health. However, there is a paucity of research that  
32 focuses on the lives of those born in the context of refugee families  
33 particularly those who have been resettled or have become refugees in  
34 wealthier states.  
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38 Making generations a central facet of research in refugee studies will highlight  
39 the longer-term consequences of refugee migration. For the most part the  
40 children of refugees, growing up the context of their birth families, have been  
41 subsumed into the wider scholarship on the experiences of second generation  
42 people from migrant backgrounds or within the broader analyses of ethnic  
43 minority people. As a consequence, little attention has been given to the  
44 possible specificities of refugee backgrounds shaping their lives. This will  
45 include both the integration context and their family relationships where story  
46 telling, memory and community will shape identity, belonging as well as  
47 transnational engagement and diasporic linkages.  
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51 Second generation people from refugee backgrounds grow up in an  
52 integration context that is not only affected by the asylum and refugee policies  
53 that their parents will have been subjected to but also by the wider social  
54 policy environment. This means that existing theoretical paradigms fail to offer  
55 the insights needed to understand some of the specificities of refugee  
56 backgrounds in the lives of second generation people while social policy  
57 frameworks fail to account for their diversity within service provision. A shift  
58 away from grand theories towards a more micro approach based on histories  
59 and biographies incorporating a more intersectional approach should be  
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3 central to any analysis (Bloch, 2018).  
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6 The limited research suggests that the children of refugees can face greater  
7 disadvantage than second-generation children from non-refugee backgrounds  
8 due to their parents' pre- and post-migration experiences (Chimienti et al.  
9 2019). This may include pre-migration trauma, experiences of loss as well as  
10 post-migration status uncertainty and limbo due to bureaucratic procedures  
11 associated with an asylum system that is sometimes protracted. The  
12 exclusions associated with poverty and isolation can also be prevalent.  
13 Experiences are varied and will depend on the integration context that  
14 exposes different outcomes across localities (Crul and Schneider 2010) as  
15 well as family circumstances and individual experiences. My own collaborative  
16 research with second generation people from refugee backgrounds in the UK,  
17 France and Switzerland focused on the experiences of those who were born  
18 and grew up in their parent's country of resettlement or country of asylum and  
19 found that the asylum policies of the destination country are an important part  
20 of the integration context because it affects the institutional arrangements and  
21 the systems in place for key services and opportunities such as education,  
22 health and employment (Bloch et al. 2015).  
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26 In some European countries a central component of asylum policy is  
27 compulsory dispersal where asylum seekers are sent to geographical  
28 locations around the country for the duration of their asylum case on a no-  
29 choice basis. Dispersal is used in a number of countries including the UK,  
30 Ireland, Germany, Norway and the Netherlands and it can result in asylum  
31 seekers being placed in areas without pre-existing co-ethnic or even multi-  
32 ethnic communities. Presented as a way to ensure integration, by avoiding  
33 ethnic clustering, the reality for asylum seekers can be isolation and a lack of  
34 access to appropriate services and employment opportunities (Hynes 2011;  
35 Fasani, Frattini, and Minale 2017). Little is known about the impact of dispersal  
36 on second-generation people although dispersal to areas with high levels of  
37 deprivation mean that some grow up in extreme poverty. Moreover,  
38 throughout Europe, the prevalence of anti-asylum public discourses that spill  
39 over into narratives about security and terror also impact on second  
40 generation people who may experience racism and hostility, especially in  
41 some dispersal areas where there is little diversity (Hirsch 2018).  
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46 Our research in Paris, London and Geneva also highlights the impact of the  
47 country, city and local context in shaping experiences and outcomes amongst  
48 second generation people. These include the colonial and migration histories  
49 of the countries, community formation and networks, social policy and social  
50 services and asylum policies. Second generation people from Vietnamese  
51 heritages offer insights into the impact of class but also on colonial  
52 connections. In France the refugee generation were from educated  
53 professional families who had arrived as students and then stayed as  
54 refugees after the fall of Saigon in 1975. This was in contrast to those from  
55 Vietnamese backgrounds in the UK who were largely from the north, had little  
56 or no education and had been resettled from camps in Hong Kong. Their  
57 parents were either not working or were working in low paid jobs with long and  
58 unsocial hours often in restaurants or take-away shops where English was not  
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3 required for kitchen work. Some of those from the second generation in the  
4 UK recalled the isolation in dispersal areas but also the rupturing experienced  
5 by secondary migration to urban centres to be nearer others from the same  
6 community and to facilitate access to the labour market in co-ethnically owned  
7 restaurants for their parents (Bloch and Hirsch 2017; Hirsch 2018).  
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10 Socio-economic backgrounds impact on transnational and diasporic  
11 engagement because they affect the maintenance of social networks and the  
12 capacity for the return visits that are part of identity formation among the  
13 second generation from refugee backgrounds (Valentine, Sporton, and  
14 Nielsen 2009). The refugee histories of families and the sharing of memories  
15 are also important determinants of identity formation and belonging and these  
16 can be developed through return visits to the ancestral homeland where plural  
17 belongings and formative social and cultural understandings and connections  
18 can develop (Bloch and Hirsch 2018). Moreover, the stories told on return  
19 visits are an important way through which the second generation people from  
20 refugee backgrounds make sense of histories and help them to connect with  
21 their extended families, their parents and with their ancestral homeland (Bloch  
22 2018). However visits are complex and for some they can lead to sense of  
23 alienation (Blachnicka-Ciacek 2018; Chimienti, Counilh, and Oppipow 2019).  
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27 Identity, home and belonging amongst second generation people, and the  
28 ways in which these are transmitted and shaped by refugee backgrounds, are  
29 areas where social science research would have much more to contribute.  
30 Refugee studies scholars can draw on and develop theoretical ideas within  
31 social science disciplines and sub-disciplines including transnational and  
32 diaspora studies. In addition much more research is required in order to  
33 understand the inter-generational impacts of refugee migration and how the  
34 past is transmitted within families and communities through stories, memories  
35 and silences. There is also scope to explore how the experiences of second  
36 generation people are shaped by the integration context including the anti-  
37 asylum / refugee discourse and everyday experiences of racism, insecurities  
38 of status as well as access to community networks and resources. The  
39 experiences of the second and subsequent generations should become much  
40 more central to the field of study. It allows for comparative approaches, inter-  
41 disciplinary perspectives and multi-level analyses.  
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## 46 **Conclusion**

47 This paper has presented an overview of the development of the field of  
48 refugee studies and the role of social science disciplines in contributing to  
49 knowledge. It exposes the limitations of theory and the constraints of  
50 international policy, often funded and formulated with the agendas of the  
51 wealthier states taking precedence over the realities of contemporary  
52 displacement. The paper suggests three crucial areas for social science  
53 research in refugee studies going forward. Each substantive area could offer  
54 greater insights into international and state-centred responses and their  
55 intersections with the everyday. The multi-level analyses that these areas lend  
56 themselves to would offer a better understanding of the tensions between  
57 different actors and the inter-play of politics, power and agency.  
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3 The first area, durable solutions, continues to fail with every 'new' initiative  
4 exposing the on-going limitations that are woefully inadequate in addressing  
5 the realities of displacement. Policy has been stuck partly because funding is  
6 often clustered in elite institutions in the wealthier countries that can serve  
7 their needs of those states and therefore perpetuates the existing status quo  
8 (Chimni 2009; Zetter 2019). The second substantive area, borders and  
9 bordering practices, highlights the interplay between state power and  
10 individual agency but also the racist ideologies formulated during the colonial  
11 era, that legitimise restrictive, racialised and exclusionary measures (de  
12 Genova 2018). It also exposes the impact of policy and politics – from the  
13 local to the global. The spectacle of power is publically enacted but the human  
14 cost is un-measurable and the public are increasingly anesthetized to images  
15 of overcrowded and unseaworthy boats or the border fences that are now part  
16 of landscapes. These borders sweep up everyone but for refugee studies  
17 scholars is raises questions about the right to seek asylum, about refugee  
18 protection and the fuzziness and fluidity of categories. The third area going  
19 forward, the inter-generational aspect of refugee migration, lends itself to a  
20 multi-level analysis where integration context – national and local - interacts  
21 with families and individuals. New theoretical insights into the specificity of  
22 those from refugee backgrounds would enable a critique of the wider literature  
23 on assimilation, integration and cohesion. Inter-disciplinary work that would  
24 include transnational and diaspora studies that highlight identity and  
25 belonging and family memory and story telling would advance discipline  
26 based theoretical work. Certainly post-genocide scholarship highlights the  
27 need to understand much more about the inter-generational affects of trauma  
28 (see for example Hirsch 2008; Kidron 2009).  
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34 Regardless of the substantive areas that are researched and developed it is  
35 clear that history and interdisciplinary perspectives must inform research and  
36 scholarship to ensure the field advances and that the status quo is  
37 challenged. Looking forward, refugee studies scholars must be attentive to  
38 ways in which knowledge is produced and used. Critical post-colonial scholars  
39 (see for example Chimni 2004; 2009 and Samaddar 2016) as well as feminist  
40 scholars (see for example Harding 2004; Campbell 2018) argue that  
41 epistemic accountability and responsibility should be at heart of all research  
42 and scholarship and that an acknowledgment of differing power relations in  
43 the production of and use of knowledge is fundamental. These approaches  
44 place emphasis on the need for an explicit and reflexive engagement with  
45 values in our process of research problem selection and concept building,  
46 explicit engagement with the position of researcher and researched in  
47 hierarchical power relations, the explicit acceptance of responsibility to those  
48 researched and to social justice, and the evaluation of epistemic standards in  
49 terms of the transformative values of social justice. For those working within  
50 refugee studies from any social science discipline, there is an on-going call for  
51 research that incorporates meaningful collaborations with displaced people,  
52 scholars, practitioners and policy makers in the regions where the majority of  
53 refugees and other forcibly displaced people live so that their expertise frames  
54 debates, interventions and theoretical advances.  
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