

CHAPTER 1

Patriation

Conceptualizing Migration after Empire

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Where and how do concepts and categories originate, derive their power and resonance, and develop over time? Such a broad question has provoked many types of answers, ranging from the philosophical to the cognitive to the historical. In this chapter, I address the question in much more concrete terms, offering an account of an intellectual journey centered on specific classifications—those of the displaced—rather than any sort of theory of concepts. I examine how the refugee label came into existence through a narrowing of eligibility criteria for humanitarian care and relief and a series of systematic exclusions. In the critical period between the end of World War II and the promulgation of the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees, these exclusions from the international refugee category included not only most non-European displaced persons (notably those from former European empires) but also those European populations who became classified as “national refugees.”

This chapter explores such exclusions through a telling of my own scholarly efforts to reconstruct the making of the legal category of the (international) refugee and its consolidation after 1945. In focusing my research on the experiences of individuals who migrated to the Italian peninsula from the Italian possessions lost after fascism’s defeat, I continually came up against the inadequacy—in legal, political, or conceptual terms—of the “refugee” label to capture their status and condition. Such dilemmas remain salient, as many individuals today displaced by environmental, economic, and political forces do not acquire the label of official refugee.

When confronted with the challenges of offering an alternative term to capture the processes of displacement experienced after World War II by so-called

national refugees, I finally settled upon the notion of “patriation.” The story I recount here of these conceptual struggles illustrates how scholars often produce theory in multilayered and extended conversations with other scholars, as well as policymakers and the subjects of theory themselves (in this case, displaced persons). The conceptual impasses that blocked me at different moments in this journey reflected how accounts of the international regime of refugee relief that arose after World War II relied upon problematic compartmentalization of the global North and global South, as well as of empire and nation. As my account here reveals, the complex history of refugee migrants to the Italian peninsula from its lost empire complicates any such easy distinctions.

I aim here to highlight the kinds of conversations that inform all scholarly work and that necessarily reflect the historical and cultural contexts in which they take place. This reminds students that when they read and write about issues such as refugees, they likewise participate in those conversations and debates. Readers of this volume do so in a charged moment in which there predominates what sociologist Lucy Mayblin has deemed a “myth of difference” distinguishing “genuine” refugees from the global North from those from the global South, with many of the latter coming from former European colonial spaces. As Mayblin and the contributors to this volume demonstrate, this myth of difference “discredits non-Western asylum seekers through both a blurring and reinforcing of the boundaries between economic migration and forced migration.”¹

By restoring the history of key definitional debates that established this boundary, I build upon the extensive critique of the 1951 convention’s Eurocentric nature, given the temporal and geographic limits put upon the original refugee definition in Article 1 that effectively restricted refugees to Europeans displaced before 1 January 1951. Yet the Italian case also underscores just how particularistic this refugee regime was even within a European context, given that the convention’s refugee definition also excluded many European displaced persons from recognition. Ignoring refugees produced by decolonization like the Italians I have studied helped perpetuate a false division between the postwar “European” refugee problem associated with World War II and its aftermath, on the one hand, and the globalization of the refugee question with decolonization, on the other.² Such pernicious distinctions became mapped spatially (North/South) and temporally (1945–60/1960–present). In light of the enduring consequences of the refugee as legal category, it took me many years to see beyond the blind spots created by much of the scholarship around the refugee.

A Series of Puzzles

In 2020, I published *The World Refugees Made*, a study of Italian decolonization after World War II and the migrations to the metropole it generated, in

particular those of former settlers and/or Italian nationals.³ In the 1940s and the 1950s, many of these individuals came to bear the designation of “national refugees.” These migrants came from a wide range of territories with distinct statuses that included formal colonies (Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia, fused together as *Africa Orientale Italiana*), departments or “possessions” (Libya, the Dodecanese Islands), and protectorates (Albania). Also included in this group and subject to the same juridical status were an estimated 180,000–200,000 persons migrating out of the former Adriatic lands that had been integral parts of the Italian state and were ceded to Yugoslavia between 1947 and 1954. This diverse and varied population of national refugees stood in contrast to international or bona fide refugees recognized for eligibility under the emerging refugee regime centered around the United Nations and its intergovernmental agencies.

The differentiation between national and international refugees and the critical question of who would provide for their care and maintenance reflected the consolidation of the belief that “national” refugees were merely returning to their home country and thus did not require the humanitarian protection of the UN, as their home states should and would provide for them. This rested on a fiction that in “going home,” such migrants had not crossed an international border, one of several key criteria for refugee status according to Article 1 of the 1951 convention.⁴ As Cabeiri Robinson notes, “The idea that refugees are ‘deprived of their nationality’ had the effect of excluding displaced people who could be argued to have multiple claims of nationality [and *home*]—effectively, people displaced by post-war decolonization.”⁵ Today such an idea appears so commonplace and obvious as to have become naturalized, enshrined in more recent vocabularies that differentiate refugees from internally displaced persons, or IDPs, as well as from voluntary or economic migrants.

In the Italian case, this walling off of supposedly distinct types of migrants was heightened by the ways in which the experiences of Italian nationals displaced from the colonies and overseas possessions had been kept apart and distinct from the histories of those who migrated out of the Adriatic territories severed from the Italian state between 1947 and 1954. Thus, in the Italian case at least, even the very category of national refugees remained poorly defined beyond a legal standpoint and had received little scholarly attention as a classification.

My initial interest in these intertwined migration histories developed out of anthropological research I conducted in the mid-1990s with self-styled *esuli*, or exiles, individuals who had left Italy’s Istrian and Dalmatian territories when they passed under Yugoslav control after World War II. On the one hand, the voluminous body of memoirs, poetry, and journals produced by these migrants either stressed the uniqueness of their experience or located it within a logic of “ethnic cleansing” supposedly inherent to the Balkans and wider Eastern Europe.⁶ On the other hand, in casual conversations and oral histories I collected,

individuals sometimes mentioned living in refugee camps in Italy alongside Italians who had come from other lost territories, such as Libya or Eritrea. Sometimes, these Italian exiles from the eastern Adriatic had also shared camps with “foreign” refugees, mostly from Central and Eastern Europe. How to account for the lack of discussion in these groups’ commemorative practices or the silence in historical work about such shared experiences?

As I began to conduct initial research in the archives of intergovernmental bodies such as the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and the International Refugee Organization (IRO), as well as in various Italian state repositories, I encountered skepticism over my plan to write a broad history of Italian national refugees embedded within an account of the making of the postwar international refugee order. Fellow scholars in Italy and my exile interlocutors alike cautioned me about putting together “apples and oranges,” warning of the dangers of seeing Italians displaced out of a formerly integral part of the Italian state like Istria through the same prism as those coming from a colony like Italian East Africa. Given that the Yugoslav socialist regime under Tito had deemed Italians “colonizers,” thereby erasing a centuries-long history of Venetian administration, settlement, and culture along the Adriatic coast, most exiles were not eager to be lumped together with former Italian settlers repatriated from colonies like Somalia or Ethiopia. These *esuli* insisted upon their deep roots in the Adriatic territories, indeed their autochthony or “nativeness,” in contrast to Italian settlers who could boast at most a few generations in the former colonies. The very premise of Italian claims to territories like Istria, Trentino, and Alto Adige (all of which became part of the Italian state after World War I) was that these were historically and ethnically Italian lands, artificially separated from the motherland and in desperate need of “redemption.” Hence the birth of the term *irredentism* to describe the political claim for the “return” of territories to the motherland.

Yet the postwar history of assistance by the Italian state to its own “national” refugees—who shared common experiences upon coming to Italy as displacees, even if their histories *within* the territories lost by Italy after the war often differed dramatically—also revealed to me the all too real political stakes at work in disentangling the histories of Italy’s colonial and irredentist lands. In making claims upon the state based on their losses, Italian refugees during the 1940s and 1950s had established a hierarchy (albeit a contested one) among themselves. As some of the former colonial repatriates I interviewed noted with bitterness, the Adriatic refugees had managed to prioritize their claims and suffering. This became even more pronounced in the 1990s, when the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the introduction of the term “ethnic cleansing” provided exiles with a narrative that worked to distance the fate of the eastern Adriatic territories from the brutality of fascist rule. At that point, a presumed “Balkan”

tendency toward ethnic cleansing made exile claims that they had paid for the “sole crime of being Italian” compelling and persuasive.

Beyond the Italian context, I encountered skepticism from other scholars about the logic of putting national and international refugees in the same frame. At one presentation, a colleague who works on the Adriatic region asked a pointed question about the title of my book. *The World Refugees Made* alluded to the work of several different authors, including migration scholar Peter Gatrell, and to Eugene Genovese’s pioneering 1974 study *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*.⁷ One of Genovese’s signal contributions lay in how he restored agency and humanity to enslaved African Americans by demonstrating their creativity and resilience in resisting oppression. In referencing Genovese’s landmark study in my title, I sought to underscore how the refugee regime was produced through asymmetric negotiations between those who administered and classified the displaced and the displaced themselves. Though structurally disadvantaged, the displaced possessed agency and exercised it at various points, particularly when their condition of displacement did not receive “official” recognition. Yet my colleague rightly reminded me that in the Italian context I was studying, many of those who became “national refugees” had enjoyed positions of relative privilege and authority in relation to local populations in the colonies or non-Italian ethnic groups in the former irredentist lands. Indeed, the type of paternalism that convinced slave owners in the American South that their slaves would not rise up against them similarly worked to blind some Italian settlers to the inherent violence of colonialism and irredentism. How to square the fact that these settlers and repatriates had been privileged in one setting and disadvantaged in another, thereby working against common notions of refugees as (merely) dispossessed victims?

Similar questions arose in other discussions with colleagues. At another presentation I gave, an audience member pressed me, assuming that by talking about these two types of displacees together I was arguing that they should be seen as synonymous. I rather lamely replied that my point was that legal categories should not constrain or delimit the categories that scholars employ. But, at that point, I *was* struggling to articulate my own position on where I thought the national refugees belonged in the frame of what Peter Gatrell has called “refugeedom.”⁸

In this, my own puzzlement mirrored the historical picture in the 1940s and 1950s, when questions about the eligibility of Italians displaced from former Italian territories for forms of international refugee assistance were persistent. The question of how to classify these migrants preoccupied not only UN personnel but also officials in the Vatican, the British Military Administrations that temporarily governed former Italian possessions in Africa and the Aegean, the Italian government, and the Intergovernmental Committee on European Migration, among other actors.

As I researched my book over more than a decade, I heeded the suggestion of legal specialists like James Hathaway to take both historical and “real account” of the context in which the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees coalesced. For Hathaway, this entailed exploring debates among the convention’s framers alongside “evidence of contemporary factual challenges to the treaty’s effectiveness.”⁹ As a historian, my method and my understanding of context operated differently. Rather than focus on the intentions of the architects of the convention, I toggled between classifications on paper and in practice and their implications in the realm of actual humanitarian relief. This meant moving between the debates over eligibility within the UN agencies that preceded and informed the convention debates and that took place in an often ad hoc manner and among the displaced themselves. These displaced often challenged the categorizations applied to them as they navigated emerging worlds of relief and rights. Some of those considered national refugees requested that they be considered international refugees, for example. Furthermore, the very idea of national refugees as *repatriates* merely engaging in a “return” migration thus prompted a whole series of questions about what homeland and belonging meant for these migrants, a knot of questions that I only began to untangle in *The World Refugees Made*.

After the book came out, I gave another series of presentations, most of them in virtual formats due to the pandemic. While discussing the book with colleagues from Ohio State University, my host historian Theodora Dragostinova pressed me on my critique of the inadequacies of the term “repatriation.” Professor Dragostinova has grappled with similar questions in her research on ethnically Greek migrants from Bulgaria who moved to Greece in a series of supposedly voluntary population exchanges.¹⁰ The presence of “Greeks” (a term that indexed both language and religion) in what became the Bulgarian state after 1878 reflected the deep histories of imperial formations in Southeastern Europe—those of the Ottomans, Habsburgs, and Romanovs—characterized by multilinguistic, multiconfessional, and multiethnic populations. The series of ethnic unmixings that transformed the region in the period stretching from between the Balkan Wars through the Cold War rested on fictions of moving back to a homeland not dissimilar to those operating in the case of Italian decolonization. And in these varied instances, these fictions were employed not only by state authorities and national activists but also by agents of humanitarianism who often, whether unwittingly or wittingly, contributed to the reinforcement of nation-state logics.

My own research highlighted how the idea of a “return” or a “reverse” migration obscured the complexities of such flows and of the identities of residents in the former Italian possessions. I asked just what exactly constituted home for migrants said to be making a return to their *patria* with the advent of de-

colonization? And what, in turn, did their “Italianness” consist in? Some of the migrants who became recognized as national refugees had been born in the Italian possessions and had never been to the Italian peninsula prior to decolonization. A subset of these came from families of diasporic “Italians” living in the territories of other European colonial powers, notably French Tunisia and Algeria or British Egypt, who subsequently moved to the Italian possessions. Another subset had lived in territories such as Libya or the Dodecanese Islands prior to Italian rule and had acquired protection as Italian protégés under the system of extraterritorial citizenship that existed for “Europeans” within the Ottoman Empire. The ties of such protégés with Italy—including their linguistic affiliations—were often tenuous at best. At times, this ambiguity was mirrored in the juridical statuses held by these former protégés within the former Ottoman lands now under Italian control, as some individuals received a kind of demi citizenship (such as the *cittadinanza egea* in the Dodecanese Islands) in contrast to those who became (or remained) Italian in juridical terms.

Yet even for those who had merely engaged in a migration back to the Italian peninsula after a relatively short period of time in the possessions and whose citizenship never came into question, such returns often proved anything but straightforward or simple. Indeed, I have characterized the migrations involved in Italian decolonization as multidirectional since some individuals displaced during the war pressed the relevant authorities, notably the British who temporarily administered the former Italian possessions in Africa and the Aegean, for permission to repatriate *back* to Libya or Rhodes or Asmara after 1945. When denied the possibility, some turned to clandestine migration. This became a particular point of contention for the British Military Administration governing Libya, which sometimes deported Italians intercepted at drop-off points along the Libyan coastline where they had been smuggled on small fishing boats from Sicily. Such stories underscore how, in affective terms, home for many of these migrants was not Italy proper but the place in Africa or the Balkans that they called *casa*. This sense of home is reflected in the memoirs of such former settlers, who often refer nostalgically to the scents, sounds, and flavors of the places they considered home.

Some such “Italians” did not view a distant metropole as either welcoming or homey, choosing instead to migrate directly from the former possessions to traditional destinations of Italian immigration. And some, in turn, took the path of migration after a period spent in the Italian peninsula, often living in a refugee camp. Given these many wrinkles and complexities, I elaborated at length in *The World Refugees Made* on why the vocabulary of repatriation—together with an associated set of “re” prefixes (return, reverse, reflux, regurgitate)—proved inadequate at the level of either description or conceptualization.¹¹ What, however, to put in its place?

Toward a New Concept

In merely critiquing the notion of repatriation, I had failed to replace it with a constructive category that better captured and expressed its complexities. I had thus committed a classic error of failing to practice what I preach, given that I always remind my students that it is much easier to deconstruct and critique than to offer something fresh, and consistently urge them to aim for the latter. When Professor Dragostinova first posed her query, I replied that the most accurate term was likely that of “nationalization.” By this, I meant to refer to a process by which these migrants were fashioned into proper national (that is, Italian) subjects. A nagging voice in my head reminded me of the problems with this term. In places like Italy’s lost territories on the eastern Adriatic, nationalization had been a popular term during the 1940s to decry the factors prompting migration out of Istria, Kvarner, and Dalmatia. “Nationalization” in these contexts often signified heavy-handed policies of ethnic engineering, standing in for what would later be deemed *genocide* after the term’s introduction by Raphael Lemkin in 1948 or *ethnic cleansing* after it became part of the lexicon in the 1990s. Even in its more benign usages, nationalization implied highly directed projects of identity building. Usually spearheaded by state authorities, these nationalization processes aimed at turning the proverbial peasants into Frenchmen, that is, homogenizing languages and cultures in the name of the nation.¹²

In the weeks that followed the OSU seminar, I came to realize that a more suitable term to describe the complicated, ambivalent, and often incomplete processes of migration and integration after decolonization was that of *patriation*. This left in place the notion of the *patria*, an Italian term that simultaneously indexes and elides home, homeland, and country. The word *paese* similarly can signify home, town, or country in Italian. Conversely, the Italian term *spaesato* signifies a feeling of being lost or disoriented, that is, of literally not feeling at home in the world. Patriation, to my mind, captured the ways in which migrating to a supposed homeland actually required a complex process of *becoming* Italian, both in terms of self-ascription and external ascription. And, paradoxically, the process of patriation continually marked out the difference of these Italians who had come from outside the peninsula by making them visible objects of state-sponsored forms of humanitarianism (housing, subsidies, compensation for losses).

With its prefixal *patri-*, patriation also gestured toward the patrilineal bias in Italian citizenship, a largely consanguineal notion designed from almost the beginning of Italian statehood to facilitate the retention or easy reacquisition of Italian citizenship by members of the diaspora. Though in some instances there existed debate or ambiguity around their legal status, most of the national refugees were citizens of the country to which they migrated (Italy), and this—

above all else—distinguished them from international refugees recognized by the 1951 convention. The process of migration out of the former colonies also embedded an implicit association of whiteness with Italianness, excluding most former colonial subjects from Italian territories from either citizenship or assistance from the postwar Italian state. Nor was this experience unique to Italy, as seen in the case of the *retornados* or colonial settlers in Portugal who came to the metropole from Africa, Goa, and East Timor in the mid-1970s.¹³ Portugal's 1975 Nationality Law actually instated the principle of *jus sanguinis* or belonging through descent/blood, replacing a nearly centuries-long tradition of citizenship based on *jus soli* or birthright citizenship. A 1981 law further entrenched this form of citizenship, facilitating the “return” to the metropole of persons of Portuguese descent while tightening the possibilities for migration to or metropolitan citizenship by former Portuguese subjects.¹⁴

In the Italian case, by contrast, the citizenship regime had rested on the principle of blood and descent from almost the beginning of Italian statehood, a reality that reflected not only an oft-cited “protective” impulse toward members of the expansive Italian diaspora abroad but also the politics of colonial expansion and racial exclusivity. While the end of empire ushered in profound transformations in citizenship in Italy, it happened mostly through very particular legal processes rather than a complete overhaul of the citizenship law, which marked the Portuguese case. The citizenship “option” in Article 19 of the 1947 Peace Treaty with Italy, for example, laid out the terms under which individuals in the areas of Venezia Giulia ceded to Yugoslavia and the Dodecanese Islands awarded to Greece could either retain their Italian citizenship or acquire that of the respective new states. Retaining or (re)acquiring Italian citizenship rested on several key criteria, notably domicile in the ceded territories on or before 10 June 1940 (the date of Italy's entry into World War II) and “language of customary use.” Interpreting what the latter meant in practice created a host of complications, raising pointed questions about language and its capacity to signify formal belonging or reinforce feelings of homeliness or, conversely, alienation. The notion of Italian as a *madrelingua* or “mother tongue” connecting members of the far-flung diaspora to the *patria* or fatherland also underscores how visions of home and homecoming become shot through with understandings of gender, domesticity, and rootedness.

Although the vocabulary of the citizenship option in the peace treaty suggests that individuals could simply “choose” their citizenship according to their preferences, in practice Italian authorities saw such procedures as tools through which to sharpen the state's newly redrawn boundaries of both territory and citizenship. Throughout the Cold War, for example, authorities within Italy argued that the fragile new democracy—confronted by the challenges of its own national refugees and continued problems of surplus population—could not become a permanent home for foreign or international refugees. This

included non-Italian migrants from Italy's former colonies, with the exception of a small population of mixed-race children who had been recognized by their Italian fathers and could thus make claims to Italian citizenship. Addressing the humanitarian concerns of "national refugees" and drawing boundaries around who could be the recognized object of such patriation thus became an important means by which an Italian state shored up its still fragile sovereignty in the transition out of empire, war, and fascism.

The Paradoxes and Limits of Patriation

What critical work does the notion of "patriation" do? While scholars are often accused of loving jargon and "theory for theory's sake," concepts serve to illuminate broader patterns. And a theory, by definition, merely provides an explanation of some sort. What patterns or processes does patriation help us see? In addition to bringing out the complexities of Italian identity and belonging among migrants themselves and the central role of citizenship/statelessness in understandings of refugees, it highlights the efforts required of states like Italy to "patriate" their repatriated citizens. For individuals who "come home" to their putative ethno-national state (even if for the first time), patriation also must act as a counterweight against powerful sentiments of nostalgia for the places they have left behind and sometimes for the previous state formations (colonialism, fascism) that made life in such lost homes possible. Such nostalgia operates in tandem with more future-oriented understandings that may nourish dreams of an eventual return to the place from which they migrated.

In the case of the Italian empire, patriation competed with dreams of returning to the lost colonial homeland and older dreams of "returning" to the irredentist territories. The fascist regime sponsored such dreams until its bloody end in 1945. Despite having lost military control over East Africa by 1942 and Libya by 1943, for example, the regime nourished unrealistic hopes, as given expression in this 1943 propaganda poster promising Italians, "We will return." (see figure 1.1). Tellingly, the colonial settlers looking longingly toward Africa pictured here are a small boy and his grandfather (the father presumably off fighting the war), highlighting the patrilineal and *patriarchal* biases of fascist citizenship.

The previous regime worked hard to convince those displaced settlers that their move was a temporary one and that they would return to Africa after eventual Italian victory in the war. The democratic Italian Republic reestablished on the rubble of fascism had to convince these Italians that their true home lay in the Italian peninsula and the democratic state. But this only came after a decade of diplomatic wrangling over the fate of the African colonies and proposals for some form of continued Italian control. In the case of So-



Figure 1.1. • “Torneremo,” 1943. Photo by David Almeida and designed by Giulio Bertolotti; published by Studio Tecnico Editoriale Italiano, Rome; and printed by Ind. Grafiche N. Moneta, Milan. Display card, “Io so, io sento che milioni e milioni di Italiani soffrono di un indefinibile male che si chiama il male d’Africa. Per guarirne non c’è che un mezzo: tornare. E torneremo” (I know, I feel that millions and millions of Italians suffer from an indefinable malady, known as the Africa sickness. There is only one means of recovering: to return. And we will return), 1943. Published with the permission of the Wolfsonian-Florida International University (Miami, Florida).¹⁵

malia, Italy would administer a UN trusteeship over its former colony for a decade (1950–60). This marked the formal end of Italian decolonization and the extinguishing of any realistic hopes for hanging on to colonial possessions. Yet this reminds us that there may exist many versions or understandings of “return” and *patria* that may directly conflict with one another.

In going beyond the Italian case to search for broader trends, we find other state-directed projects of patriation. For example, anthropologist Andrea Smith’s research on repatriates of Maltese origin who left Algeria for France reveals a case marked by a high degree of success in the French colonial project to nationalize settlers, first in the colony and then through the process of decolonization and repatriation. These individuals of Maltese background numbered among the estimated one million *pieds-noirs* (the term used to denote European settlers in Algeria) who departed Algeria for France en masse in 1962 with Algerian independence. Malta never entered the migrants’ minds as a potential destination upon their departure. Indeed, most *pieds-noirs* of Maltese origin had no memories of Malta and rarely spoke of life in this “homeland.”¹⁶ Born and raised in what became a department of France in 1848, these *colons* or colonists possessed French citizenship and had been educated in a system that stressed speaking French.¹⁷ As Smith puts it, for these former colonial settlers, “There is no question in their minds about their French nationality: they speak French, sometimes only that language, and certainly not Maltese. They attended French schools, and most of the men served several long years in the French army during World War II. To them, their ‘Frenchness’ is unquestioned and unquestionable.”¹⁸

The French language thus became a powerful engine of assimilation for Maltese, whose native language—a Semitic variant mutually intelligible with Arabic—had placed them close to the bottom of the European hierarchy within Algeria.¹⁹ Before repatriation, this hierarchy put limits on assimilation by keeping ethnic and racial markers in place that demonstrated Maltese difference from other Europeans. The act of migrating to France helped obviate such distinctions, given that despite their differences, all *pieds-noirs* were “labeled by French state officials *rapatriés* and the migrations *rapatriements*, or repatriations, terms that are still used today.”²⁰ Yet the process of successful patriation eliminated neither the suspicions of some metropolitan French about the genuine Frenchness of the *pieds-noirs*—indeed, the very term “black feet” indexed a sense of alterity and inferiority—nor the sense among some Maltese *pieds-noirs* that they possessed multiple homelands.

In the 1990s, some of these very Frenchified *pieds-noirs* nonetheless became interested in their ancestral homeland, making journeys of discovery to Malta. Trips to Malta by Maltese Algerian clubs, however, triggered memories of another *patrie*—Algeria, as sights (the built environment, plants such as prickly pear cactus), sounds (the Maltese language, which resembles Arabic), and

smells (the cooking of grilled sardines) temporarily emplaced these *pieds-noirs* in a specific landscape that they had never before experienced.²¹ In this re-emplacement, the *pieds-noirs* no longer sat at the bottom of the colonial settler hierarchy nor were viewed suspiciously by their fellow citizens of France. Rather, “Malta became Algeria and the Maltese themselves [i.e., those encountered by the former settlers] stood in place of indigenous Algerians.”²² This example underscores the complex routings of home and homeliness together with the limits of patriation as a totalizing or monopolistic project. It also hints at the utility of patriation of a concept beyond the Italian case I have studied.

Conclusion: The Power of Categories and Concepts

This chapter has charted my thinking about how displaced persons become sorted into particular categories and my progressive understanding that the conceptual walling off of types of migrants from one another—economic versus political, voluntary versus forced, national versus international refugees—developed out of the processes by which persons displaced in the 1940s were classified and by which responsibility for humanitarian assistance was divvied up. In practice, migrations display aspects of both voluntary and forced movement, thereby blurring categorical boundaries. Such ambiguities suggest it is more productive to talk about the migration processes in which individuals participate and through which they move; that is, it is more useful to think of the act of migration as a verb (to migrate) than of migrants as a noun. Nonetheless, the 1951 Refugee Convention with which we still contend today continues to define refugees as fixed subjects rather than as actors moving through varied processes of displacement, and this results in a whole host of definitional and operational problems.

Scholars have the luxury, however, of not being constrained by legal taxonomies, and the histories I have detailed here point to alternative understandings of the refugee. Indeed, the chapters collected in this volume highlight the multiplicity of understandings of what it means to be a refugee and what assistance entails. Yet, even as they offer suggestions for thinking about potential future legal meanings of displacement, the fact that most such understandings never became normative at the level of international law serve as poignant reminders of the asymmetries of power that privilege some legal regimes over others, then and now. Exploring histories like those of post-1945 national refugees also remind us that exclusions made in the 1940s and 1950s—particularly the exclusion of decolonization refugees and *non-European* displaced persons—entailed deliberate and conscious choices and were not mere oversights or compromises. These exclusions reflected the ongoing salience of colonialism, as anticolonial activists and representatives from states like India and Pakistan

pointed out at the time.²³ Such exclusions continue to reverberate despite the formal end of colonialism.

Italians displaced with the loss of empire, together with those advocating for their inclusion within the emerging international refugee regime, critiqued from *within* what was essentially a European refugee regime that became normative at the international level. For the most part, though, these Italian critics did not question the colonial order of things, reminding us of my colleague's trenchant observation about the *relative* privilege of these colonial displaces. Rather, these national refugees questioned the marginality of a postcolonial Italy within the emerging postwar international order, one in which the "myth of difference" between political refugees from the global North and economic migrants from the global South would only sharpen over ensuing decades. Italy, in particular, has become a front line in Europe's ongoing migration "emergencies." Yet since the very beginning of its statehood, Italy has figured as a place that sits uneasily at the intersection of North ("Europe") and South ("Mediterranean," "Oriental"), rendering it a valuable observatory post from which to question a whole series of categorical boundaries around displacement. The story of Italy's own national refugees thus offers the possibility to rethink our own conceptualizations and vocabularies in service to changing the conversation.

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Notes

1. Mayblin, *Asylum after Empire*, 31.
2. According to this problematic periodization, decolonization and the rise of the global refugee then necessitated universal instruments of protection. See Gallagher, "Evolution of the International Refugee System," 583.
3. Ballinger, *World Refugees Made*.
4. For a discussion of how Partition refugees were considered as not having lost the protection of their home states, giving rise to a regional refugee regime distinct from that of the UN, see Robinson, "Too Much Nationality," 345–46.
5. Robinson, "Too Much Nationality," 346.
6. For details, see Ballinger, *History in Exile*.
7. Gatrell directs attention to "the world that refugees made, not just the world that has been made for them." Gatrell, "Refugees," 179; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*.

8. Gatrell's concept of refugeedom highlights a "specific category of humanity" together with "the changing manifestations of a 'refugee regime,' taken to mean the principles, rules and practices adopted by government officials and others to manage refugees, and the protection gaps in the system." Gatrell, "Refugees," 178.
9. Hathaway, *Rights of Refugees*, 74.
10. Dragostinova, *Between Two Motherlands*.
11. The "re" prefix rehearses many of the same issues inherent in the classification "post" and its implications of having moved beyond a particular condition or state; see Chari and Verdery, "Thinking between the Posts."
12. On the classic formulation, see Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*.
13. On this and for a comparative perspective: Buettner, *Europe after Empire*. The volume *L'Europe Retrouvée* represents an early and pioneering work on colonial repatriations "back" to Europe. Miège and Dubois eds, *L'Europe Retrouvée*.
14. Kalter, *Postcolonial People*, 52–53.
15. The Mitchell Wolfson Jr. Collection, XB1992.2392. The original poster is 13-3/8 x 9 inches (34 x 23 centimeters).
16. Smith, "Place Replaced," 336–37.
17. This resulted from the citizenship law of 1889, which provided for mass naturalization of European settlers not of ethnic French origin on the grounds of *jus soli*. Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe*, 106–7.
18. Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe*, 18.
19. Smith, "Place Replaced," 337–38.
20. Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe*, 163.
21. Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe*, 167; Smith, "Place Replaced," 344–45.
22. Smith, "Place Replaced," 350.
23. Mayblin, *Asylum after Empire*; see also Robinson, "Too Much Nationality," 346.

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