



Refugees in a Global Era

Daphne Engel 

PhD Student, Leiden University, the Netherlands,
d.engel@hum.leidenuniv.nl



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Marfleet's 2006 book *Refugees in a Global Era* is still a goldmine for understanding the current refugee situation, which is increasingly framed by right-wing politics in the Global North as a 'migration crisis.' By diving into Marfleet's work, we quickly unravel deeper root issues that are often even caused by the Global North, leading to movements toward refugeehood and disaster in the Global South. This is driven by the global economic system, where the hunt for open markets creates purposely weak economic and financial bases in Global South countries. These economic ties then affect social and environmental degradation more widely, which in turn facilitates urges toward migration. Marfleet correctly identifies the role of the financial institution IMF within this context: "who for years worked closely with the architects of neoliberal reform, also believes that there is a clear pattern, arguing that the IMF imposes models likely to stimulate both local crises and systemic problems at a global level" (p. 54).

In Chapter 2, "Crisis and the State", the case of Somalia is analyzed in the context of crisis and mass displacement. Marfleet effectively summarizes the contemporary history of (post-) colonial Somalia, illustrating how the country was embroiled in power struggles involving Ethiopia, Britain, France, and Italy (p. 48). Marfleet emphasizes the earlier absence of economic exploitation in Somalia, noting that colonial powers instead exploited its geographical location for strategic purposes (p. 49). This led to excessive political domination by these powers, which, in turn, prevented clan-affiliated groups from establishing legitimate power bases. In 1969, a coup led by Barre took place, followed by calls for the establishment of various local power structures (p. 50). As Somalia's internal powers increasingly disintegrated, external influences continued to exert pressure on the country's power dynamics, particularly through newly established financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank. These external forces soon drove Somalia into economic malaise by pressuring the country to (1) devalue its national currency, (2) become import-dependent, (3) cut government budgets, and (4) rely on Western loans. Consequently, Somalia became heavily dependent on food aid for survival.

Despite these challenges, the World Bank paradoxically described Somalia's economic position as having improved. Approximately two decades later, both the IMF and the World Bank cancelled the loans they had previously pushed upon Somalia (p. 50). By that time, Somalia's central state apparatus had already disintegrated under the influence of these financial institutions. Simultaneously, Somalia's strategic geographical importance diminished with the end of the Cold War, leading to further instability. Aid and arms trade between Barre's regime and external powers ceased, further

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dismantling Somalia's economic geography and resulting in the starvation of a quarter million Somalis. The collapse of Barre's government left a power vacuum, leading to Somalia being described as 'stateless.' In response, the UN authorized the U.S.-led "Operation Restore Hope" in 1993, backed by Western states. During that decade, over one million Somalis, out of a population of six million, became refugees (p. 51). The case of Somalia's mass displacement serves as a harrowing yet crucial example of how continued Western influence over African territories led to catastrophic circumstances and widespread refugeehood.

Later on, the book delves into a highly valuable section on the historiography of refugeehood. Chapter 5, "Rights and Refugees", covers the fleeing Huguenots of the end of the seventeenth century as pivotal moment in refugee rights-making. In this chapter, Huguenots are stated to be the quintessential example of *réfugiés* as they were forced to flee from France's absolutist rule that left no room for their set of progressive characteristics (e.g., open-mindedness and logic), making them the epiphany of finding sanctuary (pp.102-3). However, it was rather their 'usefulness' to their host societies as productive laborers within mercantilist principles that led them to be deemed 'the perfect refugees,' and it was on this basis that host societies in Northwestern Europe accepted them (p. 104). The Huguenots were economic assets, which led to them being encouraged to embark on commercial ventures upon their arrival. That same entrepreneurial mindset imposed on refugees is reflected in modern developments within refugee camps in the Global South, where refugees are primarily prepped for business-making endeavors. Furthermore, the Huguenots belonged to these nations – such as Ireland, Britain, The Netherlands and Switzerland – because of their culturally suited characteristic: they were Protestant.

These North-Western European countries thus provided sanctuary to the Huguenots and accepted them as their so-called *réfugiés*. "The idea of sanctuary/asylum has an ancient lineage: the idea of the refugee is, however, a modern notion. It is intimately linked to the ideas about rights and to the concept of the nation-state" (p.98). The notion of belonging to a certain nation, and the associated 'Othering' of outsiders from that nations and nationality, arose around 1950 (p.120). This is an important historical development that Marfleet covers, sketching a full picture of the now normalized context wherein refugees and migrants are viewed as an 'outsider race' to the much-protected nation-state. The development is connected to European race pseudoscience that supported such ideas with theories and 'evidence'. It is truly insightful of Marfleet to connect current connotations of refugeehood to the history of racial discrimination, as it was then and there that this so-called science became intertwined with national politics, as it "was infused with ideas about national belonging and with fear of the alien" (p.120).

The book then continues with the "Age of Exclusion", wherein the latter development got systematized by the arrival of the passport-market that was established in order "to regulate emigration (minimizing loss of labor, skills and military personnel) and to identify citizen and Others" (p.124). Extreme cultural nation-state rivalry came to be depicted in treaties as well, wherein the characteristics of nation- or state citizens got drafted carefully, leading to massive migration movements. Because people looked for their own piece of soil on which they did feel these ethnic ties, that sense of belonging.

And, likewise nowadays, migrants who were encapsulated as minorities, or "'exceptions'— 'misfits' [...] quickly became scapegoats" (p. 126) during political and economic unstable times at the start of the twentieth century. Forced migration movements from Eastern Europe were not welcomed, as European states ventured on aggressive exclusion campaigns (p.127). This then led to well-known disasters arriving from "such policies – narrow nationalisms[,] which sought to deflect onto migrants the responsibility for systemic crises" (p.127). It does not seem that lessons have been learned from this catastrophic phase in history, as nationalistic anti-migrant views in the Global North today appear

not to deviate from those discussed in the historical analysis of refugeehood in Europe in Chapter 6: "Towards Disaster".

Meanwhile, 'solutions' offered for refugee movements from the Global South have become fixated on aid, as politicians in the Global North did not want to address the deeper root causes, as mentioned earlier in this book review. In the 1990s, the E.U. focused on the main migration donor countries, such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia "despite a strong formal commitment to tackle mass emigration by addressing interventions had been ineffectual" (p. 55). On the other hand, there exists a clear need in the Global North for (in)formal labourers from the Global South, as depicted in Chapter 8. In this sense, migration movements are dragged in as both the EU as well as North America face a demographic deficit (p.184). This means that there is an insufficient workforce population to support the exponentially growing aging population. As it stands, "even the informal [migration labour] networks have not been able to meet demands for labour" as the E.U. foresaw thirteen million migrants being needed to support its aging population (p.185).

However, the book often relies on Eurocentric, saviour-like expressions, such as 'sustainable economic growth', and 'human rights'. It becomes evident from recent global conflicts and critical situations during migration routes that human rights are often solely extended to populations from the Global North/West. Additionally, the term 'sustainable economic growth' needs to be further dissected: Economic growth for whom? Sustainable for the local community, or the local ecology? Or sustainable for migration host states in the Global North? Although the book is rich in content, and Marfleet is a prominent expert in refugee and migration studies, it sometimes lacks critical perspectives on newly established Western solutions and expressions regarding refugeehood in the Global South. Historical analysis of the arrival of sustainable (economic) development practices could be a guide for us to foresee the meaning of these implemented actions in fruition.