



REFUGEES,
SELF-RELIANCE,
DEVELOPMENT

A CRITICAL HISTORY

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Introduction: Why Refugee Self-Reliance?

Their labour is often all that refugees have to sell.¹

I often start discussions on refugee self-reliance with an example of success. Have you heard, I ask, about the successful settlement of 15,000 refugees, mostly farmers, in 15 villages? They were given tools, seeds, and livestock for their first year; schools and hospitals were built in the area which locals could also use. Different cottage industries were started for those uninterested in farming. They were provided emergency rations until the harvest. After their first year, most of the refugees were entirely self-reliant.

Where, you might ask, did this take place? It hadn't come across your inbox recently, although it does sound similar to a lot of development programming for refugees today.

Oh, I explain, this was done in the 1920s in Greece. And it was not the United Nations that undertook this work, it was the League of Nations.

Indeed, despite the near century-long gap in between programming, there are striking likenesses in work conducted by the League of Nations and other organizations to foster refugee self-reliance (what I term here *refugee self-reliance assistance*) and that being undertaken today. A 2018 evaluation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) livelihoods strategies and approaches from 2014–2018 found, for example, that the most common interventions were vocational training, agricultural interventions, and artisan livelihoods opportunities – shockingly similar to the farming and cottage industries of embroidery work and carpet weaving documented in League of Nations reports on refugee assistance from the 1920s and 1930s. Yet the long history of refugee self-reliance assistance is often obscured by an emphasis on current challenges or by the promises of new solutions to protracted displacement.

¹ Chambers, R. (1979) 'Rural refugees: what the eye does not see'. Paper for the African Studies Association Symposium on Refugees. London, 13–14 September 1979.

That said, a heightened focus on refugee self-reliance is clearly present. Since the beginning of the 21st century, UNHCR and other humanitarian and development actors have increasingly promoted self-reliance as a desirable goal for both individual refugees and their communities. In 2018, UNHCR had livelihoods programming for 75 countries with a budget of over \$70 million USD.² As a Women's Refugee Commission report reads, 'Everyone, from local community-based organizations to international non-governmental organizations to policy makers and donors, wants to support, fund and implement more effective programs to support the self-reliance of the displaced'.³ Its importance in contemporary policy efforts to support refugees is evident: 'enhance refugee self-reliance' is one of the four core objectives of the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees, a widely heralded international commitment to promote refugee responsibility-sharing, which UNHCR's 2019–2023 Global Strategy Concept Note on Refugee Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion builds on.⁴ However, as these chapters will go on to show, this centrality in the international refugee regime is much more of a resurgence than an innovation.

This introduction lays the groundwork for the following chapters through an overview of the contemporary discourse on refugee self-reliance and a sampling of the literature on the topic. It then turns to the primary focus of this book, an exploration of self-reliance and refugees as economic subjects in the 20th and 21st century. Over many years now, the persistent financial focus in current rhetoric on refugee self-reliance has engendered both my criticism about how it is viewed today, and my curiosity about which practices were undertaken to foster it in the past. Today's economic focus on the topic equates refugee self-reliance with jobs and livelihoods, on one hand, and assistance to foster it with a reduction of aid tied to funding shortfalls, on the other. Thus, the topic of refugee self-reliance retains a focus on money when it could instead be associated with so many other aspects of life, such as political freedom, community self-determination, or sustainable and sovereign food production. Why is this so? And has this always been the case? Such questions led me to the writing of this book, a reading of history focused on linkages between refugee self-reliance assistance and material interests and influences. Ultimately, my focus on the economic side of refugee self-reliance is not to promote but rather to problematize it, with the hope that doing so can elevate its many other existing and potential components.

² UNHCR (2018) 'Evaluation of UNHCR's Livelihoods Strategies and Approaches (2014–2018) – Global Report'. December 2018. Geneva: UNHCR.

³ WRC (Women's Refugee Commission) (2009) *Building Livelihoods: A field manual for practitioners in humanitarian settings*. New York: WRC.

⁴ UNHCR (n.d.) Refugee Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion: 2019–2023 Global Strategy Concept Note. Geneva: UNHCR.

Discussions of refugee self-reliance today

The importance of self-reliance has arguably only increased with the COVID-19 pandemic. Countries have redirected humanitarian and development funding and closed their borders, restricting two of the three so-called durable solutions of resettlement and repatriation. Only the third, local integration into host countries – which by many accounts requires refugee self-reliance – remains within reach, albeit still elusive. With shrinking donor budgets for humanitarian and development work, refugees living without humanitarian aid become ever more appealing for agencies and donors alike. Indeed, some might go so far as to posit that the objective of refugee self-reliance has de facto replaced that of the durable solution of local integration. This of course raises a slew of protection (and ethical) concerns. But, really, in a world where one out of every 95 people is displaced, how can helping people live independently from limited humanitarian assistance be anything but good?

Yet current policy and practitioner rhetoric around refugee self-reliance is vague. The most common definition of refugee self-reliance comes from UNHCR:

Self-reliance is the social and economic ability of an individual, a household or a community to meet essential needs (including protection, food, water, shelter, personal safety, health and education) in a sustainable manner and with dignity. Self-reliance, as a programme approach, refers to developing and strengthening livelihoods of persons of concern, and reducing their vulnerability and long-term reliance on humanitarian/external assistance.⁵

Despite the multiple components of this definition, much of the recent discourse and programming has an individual, economic focus.

And despite its prominence in the Global Compact on Refugees, the definition generally goes unchallenged, with self-reliance presented as a positive widespread goal and even a panacea to the seemingly perennial ‘refugee problem’. In a 2015 policy brief, for example, former UN Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees Alexander Aleinikoff advocates moving ‘from dependence to self-reliance’ and thus ‘changing the paradigm in protracted refugee situations’.⁶ The World Bank also explains why fostering self-reliance is important: ‘Refugees are vulnerable, having lost their assets and livelihoods, and without the ability to plan their lives. They need help

⁵ UNHCR (2005) Handbook for Self-Reliance. Geneva: UNHCR.

⁶ Aleinikoff, A. (2015) *From Dependence to Self-Reliance: Changing the paradigm in protracted refugee situations*. Policy Brief, Transatlantic Council on Migration. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.

regaining their voice, becoming self-reliant and rebuilding their lives.⁷ Nowhere in texts such as these is there an explanation of what self-reliance actually is. Livelihoods creation is presented in current discourse as a main way for refugees to attain self-reliance; thus refugee self-reliance and livelihoods are often presented in tandem, with livelihoods as a vehicle to ‘reach’ self-reliance.

Alongside the humanitarian and development focus on refugee self-reliance has come the engagement of the private sector. The IKEA Foundation has donated over 198 million dollars to UNHCR in a variety of key areas, including livelihoods.⁸ In 2016, the billionaire George Soros stated his intention to invest 500 million dollars in start-ups, social enterprises, and businesses founded by migrants and refugees.⁹ The founder of Chobani yoghurt began hiring refugees, and started a non-profit grant-making organization known as the Tent Foundation to bring together the private sector to fund innovative solutions to displacement. Richard Branson, the CEO of Virgin, has supported refugees and advocated for the role of the private sector in refugee assistance, stating: ‘[B]usiness has enormous opportunities to put refugees on a pathway to economic self-sufficiency, not simply through employment, but also through the integration of refugee-led businesses into supply chains.’¹⁰ The involvement of such actors in refugee assistance demonstrates today’s market-based fixation on how best to foster refugee self-reliance and achieve other ‘solutions’, although the success of such endeavours by the private sector remains to be seen.

Accompanying this emphasis on self-reliance for refugees has been an outpouring of publications and policy papers on the topic. Some recommend self-reliance for refugees as an alternative to the failing ‘care and maintenance’ model used in protracted refugee settings.¹¹ Others view the concept as valuable, but consider it as a false panacea for refugees living in camps or constrained environments.¹² For others, the promotion of self-reliance is inherently flawed as an ultimately ‘self-serving’ strategy for donors ‘focused on the reduction of

⁷ Bousquet, F. (2018) ‘Doing things differently to help refugees and their host communities’. *Voices: Perspectives on Development*. Washington, DC: World Bank Group.

⁸ UNHCR (2018) IKEA Foundation. Webpage. Available at: www.unhcr.org/uk/ikea-foundation.html (accessed 18 August 2018).

⁹ Soros, G. (2016) ‘Why I’m investing \$500 million in migrants’. *Wall Street Journal*, 20 September. Available at: www.wsj.com/articles/why-im-investing-500-million-in-migrants-1474344001 (accessed 1 August 2018).

¹⁰ Branson, R. (2018) How Business Can Make a Difference for Refugees. Webpage (18 July). Available at: www.virgin.com/richard-branson/how-business-can-make-difference-refugees (accessed 18 August 2018).

¹¹ Crisp, J. (2010) ‘Forced displacement in Africa: dimensions, difficulties, and policy directions’. *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 29(3): 1–27. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1083/rsq/hdq031> (accessed 25 June 2018).

¹² Omata, N. (2017) *The Myth of Self-Reliance: Economic lives inside a Liberian refugee camp*. Oxford: Berghahn; Easton-Calabria, E. and Omata, N. (2018) Panacea for the refugee crisis? Rethinking the promotion of ‘self-reliance’ for refugees. *Third World Quarterly* 39(8): 1458–1474.

material assistance' due to budgetary concerns.¹³ Proponents of this view point out that a focus on self-reliance has increased as assistance programmes for long-term refugee situations became increasingly deprived of adequate funding, and a recognition by UNHCR that it is unable to ensure meeting essential needs for all prolonged refugee populations.¹⁴ The rhetoric and practice of refugee self-reliance is thus perceived by different actors as fulfilling dichotomous functions, including either actualizing or neglecting protection and assistance.

Yet despite the widespread interest in achieving refugee self-reliance, the history of assistance to foster it remains largely unexplored, meaning that little is known of how and with which results these practices have changed over time. It is therefore difficult to speak convincingly of new or innovative practices toward refugees regarding self-reliance while there remains a significant gap in historical knowledge and institutional memory, particularly prior to the 1980s. This also means that important lessons may go unheard and unheeded.

Given all this, a critical question remains: what is refugee self-reliance – and is it actually anything new?

'Solving' refugees' lack of self-reliance

In the early 1980s, political scientist Robert Cox famously discussed the useful distinction between problem-solving and critical theory.¹⁵ Problem-solving theory views the world in its current structure, focusing on solving the issues present within it without questioning the social and power relationships and systems they exist within.¹⁶ Critical theory, on the other hand, 'is directed towards an appraisal of the very framework for action, or problematic, which problem-solving theory accepts as its parameters'.¹⁷

Until recently the majority of literature on refugee self-reliance has been technocratic and policy-oriented.¹⁸ Existing critical engagement often focuses on

¹³ Hunter, M. (2009) 'The failure of self-reliance in refugee settlements'. *Polis Journal* 2: 1–46, p 1.

¹⁴ Jamal, A. (2000) *Minimum Standards and Essential Needs in a Protracted Refugee Situation: A review of the UNHCR programme in Kakuma, Kenya*. Geneva: Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit, UNHCR.

¹⁵ Cox, R. (1981) 'Social forces, states and world orders: beyond international relations theory'. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 10: 126–155.

¹⁶ Cox, 'Social forces, states and world orders'.

¹⁷ Cox, 'Social forces, states and world orders', p 129.

¹⁸ IFAD (1987) 'International consultation on strengthening national agricultural research systems: wheat and rice research and training'. 26–28 January. Rome: International Fund for Agricultural Development; Gorman, R. (1993) *Refugee Aid and Development: Theory and practice*. Westport, CT: Greenwood; Jacobsen, K. (2005) *The Economic Life of Refugees*. Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, Inc; Betts, A., Bloom, L., Kaplan, J. D., and Omata, N. (2014) *Refugee Economies: Rethinking popular assumptions*. University of Oxford, Refugee Studies Centre (pp 1–44).

refugee self-reliance programmes in practice¹⁹ and tends to be implicitly liberal, presenting refugee self-reliance and livelihoods creation as development ‘solutions’ upholding refugees’ human dignity and respecting their right to work.²⁰ While a small body of literature on refugee self-reliance has cited a ‘disconnect’ between benefactors and beneficiaries, and stated and intended aims and outcomes,²¹ many of these studies nonetheless fall within a problem-solving paradigm. Similarly scarce in discussions on refugee self-reliance are critical examinations of its politico-economic history and its relationship to larger structures such as economic systems. This obscures, however, linkages between Western domestic social and economic norms and international development policy, reflected in turn by changing refugee assistance policies, programming, and terminology.

This book fits within a growing body of literature in the English-speaking world offering a critical rather than problem-solving lens on refugee self-reliance (loosely defined here as the ability to live independently from humanitarian assistance but questioned throughout). While much of the work on refugee self-reliance is contemporary, the focus here is on historical case studies documenting ‘model’ practices to foster refugee self-reliance at different points in time. Through both archival and contemporary research, it is my intention for this work to challenge current thinking on assistance to foster refugee self-reliance, and in turn to contribute to a more critical examination of rhetoric, policy, and practice today.

In so doing, this work fits alongside other critical voices on the implementation and outcomes of refugee self-reliance assistance. In the mid-2000s, for example, Kaiser and Meyer explored refugee livelihoods in Uganda within the ambit of the country’s self-reliance strategy (SRS), finding notable disconnects between the stated aims of the strategy and its outcomes.²² Strongly echoed in Meyer’s findings as well, Kaiser writes,

[T]he handover of services from UNHCR and its implementing partners to the district authorities represents *a mechanism for the reduction of services*

¹⁹ Daley, P. (1989) ‘Refugees and Underdevelopment in Africa: The case of Barundi refugees in Tanzania’. DPhil Thesis. Oxford: University of Oxford (p 133); Meyer, S. (2006) ‘The “refugee aid and development” approach in Uganda: Empowerment and self-reliance of refugees in practice’. UNHCR Working Paper Series No. 131. Geneva: UNHCR.

²⁰ See for example: UNHCR (2005) *Handbook for Implementing and Planning: Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR) Programmes*. Geneva: UNHCR. Available at: www.unhcr.org/44c484902.pdf.

²¹ Kaiser, T. (2006) ‘Between a camp and a hard place: rights, livelihood and experiences of the local settlement system for long-term refugees in Uganda’. *Journal of Modern African Studies* 44(4): 597–621; Meyer, ‘The “refugee aid and development” approach’. As overviewed in the introduction, Omata’s (2017) work is an important critical exception to this trend.

²² Kaiser, ‘Between a camp and a hard place’; Meyer, ‘The “refugee aid and development” approach in Uganda’.

*for refugees and a cost-saving strategy. The SRS is commonly perceived as designed to support the development of Uganda's refugee hosting areas, rather than the refugees themselves.*²³ [emphasis added]

More recent academic work interrogates the aims and methods of fostering refugee self-reliance today, finding a similar trend of its employment as a cost-effective exit strategy.²⁴ Omata's monograph on 'self-reliant' Liberian refugees in Ghana's Buduburam refugee camp questions whether the camp's high level of economic commerce resulted in high levels of economic well-being, and examines the role of UNHCR's withdrawal of self-reliance assistance.²⁵ He reveals that the central economic driver of the camp was access to overseas remittances, which was unrelated to UNHCR initiatives to increase self-reliance through aid withdrawal. While refugees who received remittances were able to satisfy their basic day-to-day needs, those who had no connections to the diaspora remained deeply impoverished. Similar to other refugee-hosting countries in developing regions, Ghana virtually excluded refugees from formal labour markets and limited their engagement in commercial activities outside the camp. With little access to meaningful economic opportunities, refugees survived by relying on mutual support networks with other refugees. This example alarmingly demonstrates how the concept – or 'myth' as Omata terms it – of self-reliance can enable aid agencies to fail to protect vulnerable refugee groups living in desperate conditions.

Other literature questions common suppositions about self-reliance, such as it being a fixed state once attained and largely enacted at an individual level. Barbelet and Wake reveal, for example, that refugees often fare better in the direct aftermath of displacement due to the prevalence of assets and prior social networks, and struggle more in later months and years – at a time when they are paradoxically assumed to be self-reliant.²⁶ The authors explain:

[T]here is a strong case for early support to livelihoods, especially geared towards the protection of assets and the prevention of indebtedness. In Cameroon, for example, by the time aid agencies started thinking about livelihoods many refugees had exhausted the assets they had brought with them, and the small-scale livelihoods support they received – which was not designed with their input – failed to create sustainable livelihoods opportunities.²⁷

²³ Kaiser, 'Between a camp and a hard place', p 613.

²⁴ Easton-Calabria and Omata, 'Panacea for the refugee crisis?'

²⁵ Omata, *The Myth of Self-reliance*.

²⁶ Barbelet, V. and Wake, C. (2017) *Livelihoods in Displacement: From refugee perspectives to aid agency response*. Humanitarian Policy Group Report, September. London: ODI.

²⁷ Barbelet and Wake, *Livelihoods in Displacement*, pp 23–24.

Similarly refuting current rhetoric, Field et al's work on refugee self-reliance in Delhi finds that rather than existing at the individual level, refugee self-reliance is achieved at the household and communal level, though this often remains unacknowledged by humanitarian actors.²⁸ A range of other work problematizes the notion of self-reliance as individually and economically based and in so doing begins to reconceive understandings of appropriate support to foster it.²⁹

While these accounts provide detailed technical and critical analyses of refugees' economic lives both within and beyond camps, the historical evolution of approaches to foster refugee self-reliance is rarely broached in Anglophone scholarship. The emergency nature of many refugee crises has encouraged forward-thinking and contemporary research instead of in-depth archival analysis.³⁰ This has, in turn, obscured the reality of refugees' historical involvement in development as well as recognition of longer trends and changes in refugee assistance. In this way, the lack of history on refugee self-reliance assistance also reflects a larger lacuna in historical literature within Refugee Studies.³¹ Yet as Barnett (2011) reflects on humanitarianism, its history can only be understood when placed in global context. Why should the history of humanitarian and development efforts to foster refugee self-reliance be any different?

Refugees as economic subjects

Since the Second World War, refugees have most commonly been considered as humanitarian subjects, with the dominant perception being that of hungry people awaiting hand-outs in camps instead of productive employees or entrepreneurs. The history in this book presents a different story. In fact, the unemployment of refugees has been tackled throughout the history of the international refugee regime. This assistance has generally occurred in one or more of the following ways: rural agricultural settlement (farming), micro-finance loans (to start or stimulate businesses), employment-matching (placing refugees into employment), public works projects (to 'develop' land or infrastructure), and vocational training (training to become employable or

²⁸ Field, J., Tiwari, A., and Mookherjee, Y. (2017) 'Urban refugees in Delhi: identity, entitlements and well-being'. IIED Working Paper, October, p 54.

²⁹ Easton-Calabria, E. and Skran, C. (eds) (2020) 'Special issue: Rethinking refugee self-reliance'. *Journal of Refugee Studies*; Easton-Calabria, E. (ed) (2017) 'Rethinking refugee self-reliance: moving beyond the marketplace'. RSC Research in Brief, No. 7. Oxford: RSC.

³⁰ Crisp, J. (2003) 'No solution in sight: the problem of protracted refugee situations in Africa'. Center for Comparative Immigration Studies (CCIS) Working Paper No. 68. CCIS: San Diego, p 223.

³¹ Crisp, 'No solution in sight'.

to foster entrepreneurship).³² Notably, each of these practices targets refugees not just as beneficiaries but as people capable of regaining or developing livelihoods. In other words, refugee self-reliance assistance itself treats refugees as *workers*. Indeed, I argue that refugees have been considered economic subjects since the inception of the first international refugee regime which began with the League of Nations in 1919.

This focus on refugees' economic capabilities and rights is also present within the guiding document of the current international refugee regime, the 1951 Convention Relating to the Rights of Refugees (the '1951 Convention'). Article 17 stipulates that refugees should be provided the same treatment as nationals in relation to the 'right to engage in wage-earning employment'.³³ The article goes on to state that 'restrictive measures imposed on aliens or the employment of aliens for the protection of the national labour market' should not apply to refugees. Article 18 of the Convention concerns refugees' self-employment, and proposes that refugees be provided 'the right to engage on his [*sic*] own account in agriculture, industry, handicrafts and commerce and to establish commercial and industrial companies'.³⁴ Together, these articles and Article 19 on liberal professions demonstrate the labour rights of refugees, and a desire for them to be given the means to engage in labour markets in host countries. Although written in 1951, these articles draw on interwar year recommendations and arrangements, including one concerning wage-earning employment for Russian and Armenian refugees and refugees' exemption from national labour market restrictions in the 1933 and 1938 Conventions.³⁵ These articles are significant in that they demonstrate the historical recognition of refugees as holding the right to work.

Main arguments and themes

As the Refugee Studies scholar and activist Barbara Harrell-Bond once wrote, '[A]s relief is a gift, it is not expected that any (most especially the recipients) should examine the quality, or quantity, of what is given.'³⁶ Examining the quality and quantity and, furthermore, the intent and result of the 'gift' of refugee self-reliance assistance enables an understanding of refugees' implicit

³² Easton-Calabria, E. (2015) 'From bottom-up to top-down: the "pre-history" of refugee livelihoods assistance from 1919 to 1979'. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 28(3): 412–436.

³³ UNHCR (1951) 'Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees', Article 17. Geneva: UNHCR. Available at: www.unhcr.org/uk/3b66c2aa10 (accessed 1 August 2017).

³⁴ UNHCR (1951) 'Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees', Article 18.

³⁵ Labman, S. (2010) 'Looking back, moving forward: the history and future of refugee protection'. *Chicago-Kent Journal of International and Comparative Law* 10(1): 2.

³⁶ Harrell-Bond, B. E. (1986) *Imposing Aid: Emergency assistance to refugees*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

and explicit links to the modern capitalist economic system, where both economic thought and events such as recessions play a role in shaping refugee assistance. In this sense, I follow Pierson's proclamation that 'the conditions that are placed on state [welfare] benefits ... are often orientated not to the meeting of recipient's needs but rather to the requirement not to undermine the dynamics of the labour market'.³⁷

Questions driving this research include: How has the practice of refugee self-reliance assistance changed over time? How are practices of refugee self-reliance assistance situated within wider historical eras? Whose interests shape the practices of self-reliance assistance? And, crucially, what are the outcomes of these practices for refugees?

In five empirical chapters spanning three regions of the world in the 20th and 21st centuries, this book explores how long-term refugee assistance has sought to foster the self-reliance of refugees. Case studies ranging from refugees in Greece in the 1920s, post-colonial Tanzania in the 1960s, Pakistan in the 1980s, Uganda in 2015, and, more recently, in Egypt and beyond (2020) demonstrate that this has largely occurred through development projects that have treated refugees as workers in need of employment – or in cases as vulnerable subjects coerced into filling employment needs. This has largely occurred in the cases I cover through development projects targeting refugees and sometimes also locals and even entire regions. This self-reliance assistance has been a main feature of refugee assistance yet has rarely been explored in scholarship.

This book uses archival and contemporary evidence to examine continuities and changes in institutional assistance to foster refugee self-reliance. It draws upon programme and evaluation reports of the League of Nations, UNHCR, and other main refugee assistance actors, as well as contemporary qualitative research with refugees and international humanitarian and development agencies, to document the shifting aims and conceptualizations of refugee self-reliance over time.

In each of the case studies, I explain how refugee self-reliance has become an instrument that alternately serves and exemplifies changes in social, political, and economic structures. Indeed, the rhetoric surrounding refugee self-reliance reveals main interests at different times, which can be elucidated by examinations of both practice and rhetoric, such as whether refugee self-reliance is espoused as an economic imperative, a protection instrument, or a human right. The identification of these linkages has implications for understanding the conditions under which refugee self-reliance is 'fostered', for analysing the means through which it is intended to be attained, and its explicit and implicit outcomes. Based on the case studies examined here, refugee self-reliance is revealed as an end in itself, as well as a malleable instrument to achieve other ends.

³⁷ Pierson, C. (1991) *Beyond the Welfare State? The new political economy of welfare*. Cambridge: Polity, p 53.

The three overarching arguments of this book are as follows. First, fostering refugee self-reliance has been an ongoing aim of the international refugee regime. Second, efforts toward refugee self-reliance have mainly been sought through the involvement of refugees in host country development projects, thereby demonstrating that refugees have always been development as well as humanitarian subjects; however, the development aims of many countries in the Global South are also driven by international (Western) development interests and economic trends, which refugee self-reliance assistance also becomes embedded within. Third, refugee self-reliance has not always been attempted solely for its own sake – instead, in many cases outside interests have converged to influence the types and amount of self-reliance assistance offered to refugees (including whether it is offered at all).

This convergence of interests around a particular aim (here, fostering refugee self-reliance) is often referred to as issue linkages,³⁸ which I expand on here through the analytical concept of instrumentalization. Drawing on critical development theory, I use the term ‘instrumentalization’ to discuss benefits that particular actors receive through the concept and outcomes of refugee self-reliance. I identify types of instrumentalization in the archives through following the core functions of the modern capitalist state – processes of accumulation, reproduction, and legitimation/repression³⁹ – that different assistance projects upheld. I then examine how these aspects of projects provided benefits to different actors. This also leads me to analyse different programmes and projects through dissecting the function of assistance in relationship to capitalism by ‘following the money’ and asking ‘who benefits?’ from refugee self-reliance.

I argue that self-reliance assistance plays a crucial role in mediating refugees’ engagement with and integration into local and national economies and the international and global economy. Crucially, the types of self-reliance assistance provided are not neutral or dictated solely by the needs of refugees, but instead influenced by economic, social, and political trends at different times. As the needs and the shape of the capitalist system change, so does the labour necessitated – in response, self-reliance assistance has changed to meet those demands. In this way, refugee self-reliance becomes instrumentalized.

As overviewed in Table 1.1, when examining the history of refugee self-reliance assistance, three main observations cut across the case studies presented here. First, refugee self-reliance assistance has shifted emphasis from rural agricultural production to urban vocational training and entrepreneurship. This

³⁸ Haas, E. B. (1980) ‘Why collaborate? Issue-linkage and international regimes’. *World Politics* 32(3): 357–405.

³⁹ Gough, I. (1980) ‘Thatcherism and the welfare state: Britain is experiencing the most far-reaching experiment in “new right” politics in the western world’. *Marxism Today*, pp 7–12 (p 9). Note: Gough draws on James O’Connor’s analysis of welfare and capitalism: O’Connor, J. (1973) *The Fiscal Crisis of the State*. London: St James Press.

Table 1.1: Historical overview of refugee self-reliance assistance

	Main type of self-reliance assistance	Labour practices	Economy supported by labour practices	Ideological aims of refugee self-reliance	Economy supported by ideological aims promoted	Historical trends
1919–1945 (Case Study 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural settlement • Employment-matching • Public works 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural labour • Participation in national development (for example, public works) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National and international economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upholding nation-state system • Promoting peace • Preventing social unrest/rise of Communism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Political:</i> Nation-state dominance • <i>Social:</i> Nascent welfare state • <i>Economic:</i> Great Depression, attempts to return to international economy
1945–1979 (Case Study 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural settlement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural labour • Participation in national development (for example, cash crops, building infrastructure) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National and international economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributing to the ‘development project’ • Preventing social unrest/spread of Communism • Tanzania national self-reliance agenda 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National and Western international economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Political:</i> Nation-state dominance • <i>Social:</i> Rise of welfare state, modernization (development) • <i>Economic:</i> Keynesian economics, international economic expansion
1979–1995 (Case Study 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Livelihoods training • Public works 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small-scale entrepreneurs • Involvement in Structural Adjustment Programmes (for example, World Bank) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal national economy/global economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political pawns of capitalism (fighting Communism) • Development aid to host countries • Structural adjustment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Political:</i> Cold War • <i>Social:</i> ‘Decline’ of the welfare state, shift from collective to individual welfare • <i>Economic:</i> Rise of neoliberalism

(Continued)

Table 1.1: Historical overview of refugee self-reliance assistance (continued)

	Main type of self-reliance assistance	Labour practices	Economy supported by labour practices	Ideological aims of refugee self-reliance	Economy supported by ideological aims promoted	Historical trends
1999–2015 (Case Study 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Livelihoods training • Micro-finance loans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small-scale entrepreneurs (informal sector) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal national economy/global economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting peace • Building democracy • Exclusion from economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Political:</i> Private sector dominance • <i>Social:</i> Individual welfare • <i>Economic:</i> 'Triumph' of capitalism, informalization, neoliberalism, globalization
2015–2020 (Case study 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Livelihoods training • Digital remote work training, including ICT and freelancer skills • Micro-finance loans/Graduation Approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small-scale entrepreneurs (informal sector) • Digital entrepreneurs (online work platforms) • Gig workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal national economy/global economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dignity through work • Market-based protection • Exclusion from economy • Global outsourcing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Political:</i> Private sector, isolationism/restrictionism • <i>Social:</i> Individual welfare • <i>Economic:</i> Neoliberalism, growing informalization, globalization, 'gig economy'

coincides with host countries' changing approaches to development as well as the rise of urbanization and globalization. Second, in the last century refugee self-reliance appears to have changed from constituting largely agricultural subsistence (and in some cases surplus) in rural areas to a wage-based market dependency in urban areas; since the 1980s refugees have increasingly been incorporated into the informal working urban poor. And now, with the advent of digital remote work for refugees, this role has extended into the digital gig economy. This has important implications for refugee protection.

Last, and more broadly, this history suggests that, as development has shifted from being considered an outcome created through state action to an outcome of market forces, refugee-serving agencies have shifted from working with the state to foster refugee self-reliance to supporting populations in a host state's absence. They have thereby increased the emphasis on integrating refugees into economies rather than state systems as a means of assistance and in this way continue to be important but problematic arbiters in the relationship between refugees and work. This is evident through the emerging transition to promoting remote, digital livelihoods as a means to support refugees who may lack the right to work and to social protection in restrictive host countries with high levels of unemployment.

Why historicize refugee self-reliance?

One question I asked myself throughout this project was a simple one: Why historicize? More specifically, why was it important for me to historicize refugee self-reliance assistance? By historicize I mean here to recontextualize with historical information and, as Fraser writes, to reread texts 'in light of categories and problems not available to their authors'.⁴⁰ I sought to bring a materialist historical reading to the topic of refugee self-reliance with the objective of seeking to better understand different actors' interests, namely assistance agencies and governments, as they undertook self-reliance programmes. I also undertook this particular reading of history in order to better identify the relationship between capital and refugee self-reliance assistance; I attempted to do this through identifying and analysing material interactions, interests, and influences such as wider economic phenomena. At the same time I accounted for the role of political and social interactions and events, which I analysed as part of the broader historical contexts I presented in each case study.

However, history is of course written and read from the perspective of a variety of intellectual disciplines, with their different methodologies and definitions of evidence. Comparative history, intellectual history, cultural history, and social history are only a few of the many different

⁴⁰ Fraser, N. (2003) 'From discipline to flexibilization? Rereading Foucault in the shadow of globalization'. *Constellations* 10(2): 160–171.

schools of historiography.⁴¹ I chose a materialist reading of history as it enabled an opportunity to bring a new perspective to current discussions on refugee self-reliance and corresponding assistance, particularly as much of the contemporary rhetoric and academic research on this subject is economically focused.

In so doing, I provide three main contributions to knowledge. The first is a history of development assistance for refugees, as current literature on this topic rarely precedes the 1980s, meaning that refugees' historical involvement in development has not been visible. Through this history I seek to provide empirical evidence to challenge the longstanding perception that refugees' primary needs lie in humanitarian rather than also development support. Second, I seek to write a history of refugees as *workers*, and examine how refugees' economic participation is enabled through self-reliance assistance – itself shaped by and fulfilling functions necessitated by markets. This contributes toward a small body of literature that treats refugees not as humanitarian but as economic subjects.⁴² Last, I explore the ways in which refugee self-reliance assistance has been intimately bound up with larger economic, social, and political trends and events, demonstrating how refugee self-reliance is a dynamic concept that reveals power relations and predominant modes of thoughts at different points in time. In so doing I contribute a critical perspective on refugee self-reliance to a field that has largely treated the concept as technical and ahistorical.⁴³

This book also sheds light on a troubling facet of refugee assistance: the conflation of livelihoods and protection through humanitarian and development actors' focus on fostering refugee self-reliance. As the following chapters demonstrate, the concept of refugee self-reliance has shifted definitions over decades yet assistance to foster it has largely maintained the same practices for almost a century, thus revealing both change and marked continuity within the refugee regime. This evidence-based argument, which a historical approach enables, has enormous potential to contribute to conversations on how best to support refugee self-reliance today.

Situating the story: academic disciplines and theoretical approaches

This book is situated within the fields of Refugees Studies, Development Studies, and History. It draws on critical development theory and historical methods to contribute new theory and history to Refugee Studies. The

⁴¹ Cannadine, D. (ed) (2002) *Introduction: What is history now?* Basingstoke: Palgrave, p 37.

⁴² Rolfe, C. and Harper, M. (1987) *Refugee Enterprise: It can be done*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications; Jacobsen, *The Economic Lives of Refugees*; Betts et al, *Refugee Economies*.

⁴³ IFAD, 'International consultation on strengthening national agricultural research systems'; UNHCR, *Handbook for Implementing and Planning*; WRC, *Building Livelihoods*.

chapters here offer an alternative to a liberal approach in reading self-reliance, placing an emphasis not on *how* refugee self-reliance can be achieved within social and economic structures but on interrogating the larger structures it is promoted within, *why* it continues to be promoted at all, and for whom and for which ultimate ends. In so doing, it examines the integration of refugees into the international global economy and self-reliance as part of a wider set of ideals and practices linked to the capitalist system. As mentioned previously, refugees are considered not solely as humanitarian subjects but also as economic actors whose economic participation is enabled through self-reliance assistance.

Examining refugees and work also raises the topic of development, and indeed, much of the literature on refugee self-reliance and livelihoods involves explicit or implicit discussions of it. However, while Refugee Studies scholars have engaged with many of the underlying concepts in Development Studies, the discipline has largely ignored Development Studies tools of critical analysis. This is evident in the modern boom in literature on refugees and development, which lacks critical theoretical engagement with refugees' relation to systemic causes of 'underdevelopment', dominant actors' aims in involving refugees in development, and even critical discussion of development terms, including 'self-reliance' and 'development' itself. Within Development Studies, however, these issues are well-theorized and have been examined both historically⁴⁴ and in contemporary settings.⁴⁵

The relevance of themes of power, inequality, and economic interests for refugees in a development context suggests many unexplored parallels between Refugee Studies and Development Studies. Indeed, examining the relationship between refugees and development necessitates extending analyses of power beyond just refugees and assistance agents, and instead encompassing national development goals in host countries, Western influences in setting development agendas and terms, and the ultimate aims of development. All of these issues are connected to capital on national and global levels, which refugees become inherently entwined with as soon as assistance aims include 'putting refugees on the development agenda'.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Frank, A. G. (1966) *The Development of Underdevelopment*. Boston, MA: New England Free Press; Wallerstein, I. (1974) 'Dependence in an interdependent world: the limited possibilities of transformation within the capitalist world economy'. *African Studies Review* 17(1): 1–26; Arrighi 1971, 1978.

⁴⁵ Escobar, A. (1995) *Encountering Development: The making and unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton studies in culture/power/history). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Cowen, M. and Shenton, R. (1996) *Doctrines of Development*. London; New York: Routledge; Sachs, W. (ed) (1997) *The Development Dictionary: A guide to knowledge as power*. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan.

⁴⁶ UNHCR (2005) 'Putting refugees on the development agenda: how refugees and returnees can contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals'. High Commissioner's Forum. FORUM/2005/4. 18 May.

In addition to providing a means to analyse linkages between macro and micro phenomena, critical development theory also offers Refugee Studies the opportunity to consider central development topics from a historical perspective, refugee self-reliance among them. Regarding critical theory in Development Studies, Schuurman states that, among other characteristics, it ‘attempts to uncover historic processes which link the various elements of a particular social reality without falling into the trap of reductionism’ [emphasis in text].⁴⁷ He goes on to characterize critical development research as:

1) an object of research which concerns the lack of emancipation of large groups of people, the structural causes thereof and attempts to do something about it; 2) an explanatory framework using the inner (but globalising) logic of the capitalist system in terms of production, market and consumption; and 3) challenging accepted ideas, ideologies and policies (... the ‘subversive’ side of critical theory).⁴⁸

Critical development theory provides one way to examine refugee issues not only from the framework of the nation-state, as is commonly the case, but from that of the capitalist system. Indeed, this book takes as its starting point that since the creation of refugees as well as responses to them do not occur within the boundary of a single state, understandings of refugee issues must therefore come from an understanding of larger global systems, including the expansion and shifting forms of capitalism across the world.⁴⁹ Such a perspective offers new angles for analysis that can transcend borders and nationalities and instead delve into systemic issues related to capital at a variety of scales, including but in no way limited to local and global class systems and the transnational money flows of the so-called industrial humanitarian complex.

This work sits alongside that of a small handful of scholars in Refugee Studies who have broached discussions of the role of capital in refugee affairs. B. S. Chimni and Stephen Castles are two notable and widely valued contributors to the topic, whose structural examinations of capitalism and causes of migration flows, including refugees, demonstrate important connections between Refugee, Migration, and Development Studies.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Schuurman, F. J. (2009) ‘Critical Development Theory: moving out of the twilight zone’. *Third World Quarterly* 30(5): 831–848 (p 836).

⁴⁸ Schuurman, ‘Critical Development Theory’.

⁴⁹ Daley, ‘Refugees and Underdevelopment in Africa’, p 133, p 2.

⁵⁰ Chimni, B. S. (2004) ‘From resettlement to involuntary repatriation: towards a critical history of durable solutions to refugee problems’. *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 23(3): 55–73; Castles, S. (1998) ‘Globalization and migration: some pressing contradictions’. *International Social Science Journal* 50(156): 179–186; Castles, S. (2000) *Ethnicity and Globalization*. London: Sage.

Castles, for instance, has analysed the systemic role of capitalism in broader international migration,⁵¹ and its effect on citizenry,⁵² arguing that we cannot understand modern movement without taking economic factors into account. However, Castles' political economy work on migration generally discusses refugees as one type of migrant, mentioning them in relation to other migrants yet failing to acknowledge and theorize the particularities of refugeedom as related to political economy.

Chimni compellingly addresses the relationship between Refugee Studies and humanitarian practice to broader economic and social trends, including colonialism, geopolitics, transnational capital, and the needs and interest of hegemonic (Western) states.⁵³ However, his work generally utilizes a political economy framework that analyses these important linkages without breaking down the specific mechanisms through which grand concepts such as 'humanitarianism' and 'imperialism' operate in tandem.

Although focusing more broadly on aid and development, Mark Duffield contributes a similarly valuable critical perspective to the theme of capital, including its role in policies that promote the containment of populations in the Global South which might otherwise migrate to Northern countries to seek both jobs and welfare benefits.⁵⁴ He also directly addresses the topic of self-reliance, such as through his conceptualization of sustainable development as a bio-political technology for containing 'non-insured populations' which are required to improve their resilience and strengthen self-reliance within their given conditions.⁵⁵ However, Duffield's work is often not grounded in case studies or empirics, making it difficult to unearth the specific mechanisms and contextualized outcomes of the societal shifts he critiques.

Together, these and other scholars offer an important critical foundation for analysing refugee self-reliance assistance yet also provide considerable

⁵¹ See among other work: Castles, S. (2012) 'Cosmopolitanism and freedom? Lessons of the global economic crisis'. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35(11): 1843–1852; Castles, S. (2013) 'The forces driving global migration'. *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 34(2): 122–140.

⁵² Castles, S. (2005) 'Nation and empire: hierarchies of citizenship in the new global order'. *International Politics* 42(2): 203–224.

⁵³ Chimni, B. S. (1998) 'The geopolitics of refugee studies: a view from the South'. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 11(4): 350–374; Chimni, B. S. (2000) 'Globalization, humanitarianism and the erosion of refugee protection'. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 13(3): 243–263; Chimni, B. S. (2009) 'The birth of a "discipline": from refugee to forced migration studies'. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 22(1): 11–29.

⁵⁴ Duffield, M. (2008) 'Global civil war: the non-insured, international containment and post-interventionary society'. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21(2): 145–165; Duffield, M. (2002) 'Social reconstruction and the radicalization of development: aid as a relation of global liberal governance'. *Development and Change* 33(5): 1049–1071.

⁵⁵ Duffield, M. (2006) 'Racism, migration and development: the foundations of planetary order'. *Progress in Development Studies* 6(1): 68–79.

scope for more detailed critical analyses of refugees' specific relationship to capital as well as linkages between refugee assistance, development, and capitalism. Indeed, with these authors as important exceptions, the role of capital remains under-theorized in Refugee Studies, including in discussions regarding the formation of the international refugee regime, 'root causes' of refugees, and contemporary drivers of refugee self-reliance and livelihoods.

The geography of refugee self-reliance

The geographic focus of this book shifts from interwar and post-war Europe to early post-colonial East Africa, the Middle East, and contemporary East Africa. The history I present does not trace one country or case across time but instead captures cases of refugee self-reliance assistance in different countries based both on content availability and the geographic movement of the international refugee regime. By focusing on model assistance programmes and by examining the wider trends and dominant thought on refugee self-reliance in different eras, I seek to capture the broad arc of changes and continuities in refugee self-reliance assistance throughout the history of the international refugee regime. Given this, this book cannot by any means be considered a complete global history of refugee self-reliance. For example, I do not explore the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in fostering refugee self-reliance, despite its long history and successful endeavours in livelihoods assistance such as micro-finance.⁵⁶

The idea that important information could be gleaned through examining continuity and change in self-reliance assistance in different parts of the world influenced the selection of cases. I also sought to find case studies through which I could discuss important contemporaneous social, economic, and political events and trends. I decided for example that, given their effect on wider refugee assistance, including cases which discussed decolonization and the Cold War in relation to refugee self-reliance assistance was important. It is also noteworthy that each case deals with different refugee populations (including some such as ethnic Greek refugees in Greece, who might be considered forced migrants today), meaning that the cases are not necessarily comparable. The thread that links them are the practices of assistance actors and the international refugee regime itself. While the time periods selected are not always comparable in length of time, they focus as comprehensively as possible on the self-reliance programming examined, which in each case varied in length.

⁵⁶ Hanafi, S., Hilal, L., and Takkenberg, L. (eds) (2014) *From Relief and Works to Human Development: UNRWA and Palestinian refugees after 60 years*. London: Routledge.

Where does the story come from? Sources and methods

I employ archival and ethnographic methods in this book.⁵⁷ I view these as parallel methods of different time periods, in that each seeks to illuminate both specific behaviours and the broader context in which they take place. I supplemented archival research with several key informant interviews of former humanitarian aid workers working in, respectively, East Africa in the 1970s and 1980s and Afghanistan and Pakistan in the 1980s and 1990s; however, this often served as background information for myself rather than explicit material for chapter. The combination of methods I employed is highly valuable in offering researchers the ability to examine objects of enquiry from both present and past perspectives and is increasingly used in fields such as anthropology.⁵⁸ My decision to undertake both historical and contemporary fieldwork arose out of my aim to write ‘the history of the present’⁵⁹ in regard to efforts to foster refugee self-reliance I observed while living in Kampala, Uganda, in 2011, and in subsequent trips. While primarily historical (case studies 1–3), this book extends to 2020 through contemporary qualitative fieldwork (case studies 4 and 5). This choice of case study also necessitated contemporary rather than historical methods, as many archives such as UNHCR’s have a 20-year time limit on material, meaning that no documents produced prior to 1995 were available when I first began this work.

A note on terminology

As we all well know, the words we choose in conversations matter. Yet what does a discussion on self-reliance mean when the word doesn’t exist in some refugees’ own languages? And when the very concept changes from culture to culture? And when most written work on the subject is not written by refugees themselves? At the end of the day, self-reliance is just – significantly – an English word. But refugees span the world.

These reflections were important for me during my research and are also important to mention here due to the decisions and caveats they reveal. First, my archival research was limited to English-language texts. While this was rarely a problem due to my predominant focus on international

⁵⁷ For a longer discussion of my methods, see Annex 1.

⁵⁸ Merry, S. (2002) ‘Ethnography in the Archives’, in J. Starr and M. Goodale (eds) *Practicing Ethnography in Law: New dialogues, enduring methods*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan; Scheppele, K. L. (2004) ‘Constitutional ethnography: an introduction’. *Law & Society Review* 38(3): 389–406.

⁵⁹ Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison*. New York: Pantheon, p 31.

institutions and agencies, and English-speaking assistance actors, it of course influences the type of story I am able to tell. I sought to examine refugee self-reliance assistance from global to individual levels through my selection of archives and informants, but each of my case studies would surely have been enriched by local and national archives, and other data-collection methods.

Second, I chose as far as possible to retain the language of the eras that I found in archival documents and during contemporary research. Thus ‘self-sufficiency’ and ‘population transfer’ (rather than ‘forced migration’) emerge in Chapter 2 on refugee self-reliance in Greece, while ‘self-reliance’ and ‘empowerment’ are present in Chapter 4 on Afghan refugees in Pakistan, with an additional focus on ‘livelihoods’ in Chapter 5 on Congolese and other refugees in Uganda in the mid-2000s. This decision around terminology was an attempt to be faithful to the archives and my informants and provide the reader with a stronger sense of historical context; this flexing terminology ultimately also acted as a powerful unit of discursive analysis, which I compared and contrasted with the actual practices described in different places and time periods.

As I will go on to discuss, my research identifies many of the ‘core’ practices to foster refugee self-reliance by international institutions and agencies over the last century, which have (alarming)ly changed little. These practices as well as others seeking to achieve the same goal of refugees’ ‘independence’ from institutional assistance, are what I have chosen to refer to as the – admittedly bulky – phrase ‘refugee self-reliance assistance’, sometimes replaced in this book with the equally unwieldy ‘institutionally fostered refugee self-reliance’. While many of the other words surrounding refugee self-reliance in forthcoming chapters are directly from documents and interviews, these phrases are my own. Rarely used by other academics, practitioners, and policymakers, some of their focus, however, is encompassed by contemporary terminology such as ‘self-reliance programming’, ‘livelihoods support’, ‘economic inclusion’, and even ‘development assistance’. It is my best attempt to clearly separate the efforts of refugees themselves to foster their own self-reliance from that of external actors, who often imposed their own understandings, objectives, and interests into self-reliance assistance to refugees of whom they often knew little. It is this latter story – fascinating and deeply problematic – that this book seeks to tell.

Chapter overview

Chapter 2: Self-sufficiency out of necessity: refugee self-reliance assistance in interwar Greece

This chapter presents the first international response to refugees led by the League of Nations through a case study of ethnic Greek refugees in Greece

in the 1920s. It highlights the dominant self-reliance assistance practices undertaken at the time by the Greek Refugee Settlement Commission, created to assist the 1.5 million ethnic Greek refugees from Asia Minor forced to relocate to Greece between 1922 and 1924. The population exchange exemplifies the upholding of the post-First World War new 'world order', the creation of nation-states after the collapse and break-up of multi-ethnic European empires, and a corresponding attempt to return to the successful international economy of the pre-First World War world. This case study highlights the primacy of states at this point in time and examines the ways refugee development assistance explicitly targeted state needs (in this case, Greece's) through the dominant mode of production – agriculture. The population exchanges of the interwar years, of which the Greek-Turkish exchange was only one, and the focus on returning displaced people to their countries in order to 'reconstruct' economies and 'restore' peace demonstrates an economic motive of instrumentalizing refugees for both peace and labour through development.

Empirical material: League of Nations Archive (UN, Geneva); International Labour Organization Archive (Geneva); Ruth A. Palmeree Private Papers (Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University); Brainerd P. Salmon Private Papers (Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University).

Chapter 3: Socialism and self-reliance: refugee assistance in post-colonial East Africa

This chapter examines the nature of refugee self-reliance assistance within the post-war 'development project' in Tanzania following the wars of decolonization in the 1960s. I link the promotion of many East African refugee self-reliance settlements through mono-crop cultivation for national export to wider development policies at the time; these focused on domestic production and international economic participation as a means to achieve mass well-being. Refugees' economic value therefore came in the form of growing cash crops for both subsistence and export, supported by international actors such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Bank. Thus, refugees contributed to the so-called 'development project' through participating in programmes premised on modernization. In this way I demonstrate the ulterior aims of this assistance as related to the international economy and refugees' role as labourers according to exogenously determined dictates.

Empirical material: UNHCR Archives (Geneva); T. F. Betts Collection (RSC, University of Oxford); Neldner Collection (RSC, University of Oxford); Brainerd P. Salmon Private Papers (Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University).

Chapter 4: Warriors of self-reliance: refugee self-reliance in Cold War Pakistan

UNHCR's biggest operation at the time, assisting Afghan refugees in Pakistan between 1979 and 1995, was largely focused on self-reliance and livelihoods. Contributing (at least in theory) to host country development, refugees served as 'development pawns' for Pakistan and donor countries alike, illustrating a broader trend of host countries seeking development and aid funding due to hosting refugees, and donor countries utilizing funding for refugees as a means to fight Communism and incentivize the restructuring of Southern economies. I present four phases of self-reliance assistance for Afghan refugees, which correspond to shifts in broader economic trends from Keynesian economics to neoliberalism. The practice of self-reliance assistance promoted large-scale employment, individual income generation, and ultimately acted as a protective mechanism for vulnerable populations unable to succeed in the market-based economy. These stages of self-reliance assistance encompass periods of humanitarian focus on so-called 'refugee dependency syndrome' and self-reliance as psychosocial support. This chapter demonstrates the dynamism of self-reliance as both a concept and a practice.

Empirical material: UNHCR Archives (Geneva); T. F. Betts Collection (RSC, University of Oxford); RSC Grey Literature Collection (RSC, University of Oxford); P. and M. Centlivres Afghanistan Collection (Geneva Institute); Digital archive of the Afghanistan Center at Kabul University.

Chapter 5: Dignity in informality? Urban refugee self-reliance assistance in Kampala, Uganda

This chapter presents a case study of urban refugee livelihoods trainings in Kampala, Uganda, in 2015. Here I explore how the contemporary global discourse of refugee self-reliance is transposed on to a local context. I examine livelihoods trainings offered by national and international organizations, including by interviewing and 'following' refugee informants through their post-training livelihoods creation. In so doing I present the impact of trainings on refugee self-reliance as well as the local constraints refugees face in achieving self-reliance in Kampala, including lack of access to capital and markets. This chapter also focuses on the impact of neoliberal tenets embedded within contemporary refugee assistance and the related impacts of urbanization and informalization.

Empirical material: UNHCR Policy Documents (contemporary, digitally accessed); primary qualitative research with refugees and livelihoods trainers, members of UNHCR and other national and international organizations.

Chapter 6: Livelihoods 2.0? Refugee self-reliance and the digital gig economy

The final chapter brings the history of refugee self-reliance assistance up to the pre-COVID-19 present through a focus on the emerging topic of digital livelihoods and refugees, set against the backdrop of the so-called European refugee crisis and the Global Compact on Refugees. Although the main research for this chapter was conducted pre-COVID-19, it also touches on some lessons for self-reliance and livelihoods programming that have emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. Current scholarship, policy, and practice on refugee self-reliance rarely focus on the global emerging phenomenon of the changing nature of work, which include gig economies and innovations in technology, AI, and robotics. This chapter offers an original perspective on how refugees are involved in the so-called ‘future of work’ through a review of over 100 initiatives to help refugees and other migrants access digital work, and a case study of a Syrian refugee named Alaa in Cairo, Egypt, who created a website that helped him survive. In this way, the chapter highlights refugees who successfully engage with the emerging digital economy as well as those who are unable to do so. In particular, the chapter discusses the protection issues raised by humanitarian agencies acting as intermediaries between refugees and largely unregulated work in the global gig economy, with a broader examination of NGOs seeking to use technological means to foster refugee self-reliance.

Empirical material: Qualitative research with refugees and digital livelihoods trainers, as well as members of UNHCR; key informant interviews with experts in digital work and members of the private sector hiring remote workers; UNHCR publications; NGO and INGO publications.

Conclusion

As Nigerian author Emman Ikoku once wrote, ‘[S]elf-reliance is the oldest idea. It is the story of normal human existence.’⁶⁰ Examining this story more closely, and in particular the intent and result of the ‘idea’ of refugee self-reliance assistance enables an understanding of refugees’ implicit and explicit links to the modern economic system, where both economic thought and events such as recessions play a role in shaping refugee assistance. A main aim of this project is to increase understanding of refugee self-reliance and the history of assistance that has both promoted and stifled it. The ability to become self-reliant in even the most disadvantaged of circumstances is worthy of respect and illumination. Understanding which forms of assistance support or hinder these endeavours – and how and why these practices arose – is worthy of the same.

⁶⁰ Ikoku, E. (1980) *Self-Reliance: Africa's survival*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers.

“In this excellent book, Evan Easton-Calabria shows that refugee self-reliance has a century-long and deeply political history. Drawing upon exemplary archival research, she unveils the array of external interests and power relations that have shaped livelihoods programmes for displaced people. This is essential reading for anyone concerned to think critically and constructively about the past, present, and future of refugee policy.”

Alexander Betts, University of Oxford

“Two things stand out about this book: the clear, jargon-free language, and the historical insights into the widely promoted humanitarian goal of self-reliance with its focus on earning income. Evan brings a critical but fair perspective, and a wealth of experience.”

Karen Jacobsen, Tufts University

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Evan Easton-Calabria’s critical history of refugee self-reliance assistance brings new dimensions to refugee and international development studies.

The promotion of refugee self-reliance is evident today, yet its history remains largely unexplored, with good practices and longstanding issues often missed. Through archival and contemporary evidence, this book documents a century of little-known efforts to foster refugee self-reliance, including the economic, political, and social motives driving this assistance.

With five case studies from Greece, Tanzania, Pakistan, Uganda, and Egypt, the book tracks refugee self-reliance as a malleable concept used to pursue ulterior interests. It reshapes understandings of refugee self-reliance and delivers important messages for contemporary policy making.



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