The Space that Refuge Makes: Rethinking Displacements and Protection

Romola Sanyal ID*

ABSTRACT

Space is foundational to questions of refuge and asylum, but this space is one of conditional hospitality, extended to those deemed worthy of protection by virtue of their victimhood, while physically and discursively excluding others who share similar life circumstances but are deemed unworthy. Space here is understood to be mutually constituted with the social. Hence, refuge is constituted through bodies that are cast out of national belonging, and refugees and asylum-seekers are simultaneously defined through the 'protection space' of the refuge and asylum. But in an age of displacement, how do refuge and asylum seek to construct a specific group of people that are distinct from the poor, and how is this distinction problematic? This article sets out to unpack part of this puzzle through an urban lens. Using urban research around shelter and housing, I demonstrate how that is used to separate communities. I argue that refuge and asylum promise safe spaces but strip people of mobility and futures, while poor citizens are denied the promise of secure land and housing, exploited for their labour, and compelled to live a life of constant displacement. This article demonstrates how these differences, shaped against each other, are relational, and asks if we can reimagine the city as a protection space for all.

KEYWORDS: Refuge, poverty, space, urban

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2006, I sat down to interview a local politician about his role in the resettlement of refugees from the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. Specifically, I wanted to understand his involvement in their resettlement on the urban fringes of the city of Kolkata in the 1950s. His family members had themselves come as refugees and settled in Kolkata at this time, and he had later been an important figure in local urban politics. He himself came from a lower middle-class, like many of his constituents, whilst others came from poorer communities. I asked him about his thoughts on contemporary rural–urban migrants, many of whom were living in informal settlements in and around the city.

His response to that was revealing as he noted that whilst the refugees who were resettled in the 1950s were forced migrants seeking refuge from violence and persecution, rural–urban

migrants were not. Theirs was a matter of choice and as such, they could go back, whilst refugees simply put, could not. It was necessary to extend hospitality and rights to the refugees, but not to the migrants. This argument was put forward despite the fact that these migrants often came/come as a result of distress migration, and often from landless communities. Unable to eke out a living in rural areas, living on the fringes of the city, and being erased from poverty alleviation programmes for being migrants, was part of the crushing reality of their lives, as was the possibility of being subject to brutal evictions.[1] He was presumably aware of these conditions, being a prominent member of the city's government, but that did not change his view of those whom he saw as being voiceless victims versus those whom he saw as being opportunists. I would argue that such sentiments that distinguish between forced migrants – defined as those fleeing violence, persecution, or some form of episodic disaster – versus those quietly leaving due to structural and endemic reasons, are not uncommon. More recently, at a conference in Vienna, I was once again confronted in a public event by discussions in which refugees were seen as a unique category of displaced people who deserved special attention and were fundamentally different from other communities subject to the violence of poverty, climate change, and landlessness.

I open with these encounters to highlight a puzzle that haunts the very heart of contemporary humanitarian responses – given the long history of displacement that underpins industrialisation and development, the ongoing urbanisation of displaced people, and fundamentally, the workings of capital – how do we come to distinguish between those who are big 'D' displaced versus little 'd' displaced. I refer to Big 'D' displaced as those considered specific forms of forced migrants – often categorised as refugees, IDPs, asylum-seekers versus the little 'd' displaced – those moving into urban areas due to rural urban migration (itself driven by displacement logics) and living in and often being evicted from informal settlements. Expanding on the work of others,[2] I argue that the idea of refuge is a fundamentally spatial question. In line with other geographers, I note that the spatial and the social are mutually co-constituted.[3] Thus, refuge and asylum – both temporary spaces provided for protection and with hospitality – define those who come to inhabit the space and avail of its protection – as being guests and victims of unique forms of violence. In this sense then, refuge and refugee, asylum and asylum-seeker both reflect and reinforce each other. This spatial understanding of a specific forced migrant subject seeks to separate the deserving from the undeserving victims. It offers a safe space for those deemed worthy of such hospitality and largesse whilst deeming the suffering of other displaceable subjects[4] to be of a lesser consequence. In turn however, other and different forms of violence are inflicted on each community to highlight each other's differences and divide them. In contemporary politics, this takes many forms, but here, I take up a fundamental spatial concern – that of shelter and housing to demonstrate how that is used to separate communities. I show how "shelter", even in an abstract sense, is given to those who are refugees and seen to be displaced, but in turn they are denied the right to mobility or employment. For citizens who constitute the urban poor, they are denied the right to secure housing and shelter. Displacement thus is also an organising logic of their lives as they form part of the surplus labour of countries and cities. This allows them to move and earn a living under highly exploitative terms. Yet, this

[1] A. Roy, *City Requiem, Calcutta: Gender and the Politics of Poverty*, vol. 10, U of Minnesota Press, 2003.

[2] R. Zetter, "Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity'" *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 4(1), 1991, 39–62, https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/4.1.39; L. B. Landau, "Displacement and the Pursuit of Urban Protection: Forced Migration, Fluidity and Global Cities", in A. Bloch and G. Dona (eds.), *Forced Migation: Current Issues and Debates*, Routledge, 2018, 106–25.

[3] D. Delaney, "The Space that Race Makes", *The professional geographer*, 54(1) 2002, 6–14.

[4] For a discussion on the question of displaceability see O. Yiftachel, "From Displacement to Displaceability: A Southeastern Perspective on the New Metropolis", *City*, 24(1–2), 2020, 151–165.

endemic displacement that is central to development, and urbanisation, is often overlooked by forced migration scholars who thus fail to account for the ways in which scarcity, insecurity, and precarity shape conditions of welcome and hospitality.

I begin with a discussion of how refuge and asylum are defined as spatial terms that signal both protection and enclosure. I show how spaces of exclusion and hospitality also categorise people in specific ways, and how that feeds into contemporary legal debates and practices on giving people refuge. From here, I move to the urban issue – looking at forms of displacement, including those that are quotidian and endemic for the poor. Through this, I question the choice/compulsion binary. I then return to the problem of separating the poor and the displaced in superficial ways, using questions of shelter to demonstrate how that is used to separate communities before concluding.

2. SPATIALISING REFUGE

A refugee has come to be understood as "a person who has been forced to leave their country or home, because there is a war or for political, religious or social reasons".[5] Merriam Webster makes an interesting note that "The *re-* in *refuge* means essentially 'back' or 'backward' rather than 'again'; thus, a *refugee* is someone who is 'fleeing backward'- presumably from fear and violence into a safe space."[6] A parallel term, asylum, has similar connotations as it generally indicates the safe space for refuge, is "the protection granted by a state to someone who has left their native country as a political refugee, or shelter or protection from danger".[7] The word is originally from Middle English and has its roots in the Greek *asulon* or refuge from *asulos* "inviolable" (a –"without" and sulon or right of seizure). The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that another connotation of the word is that of "a sanctuary or inviolable place of refuge and protection for criminals and debtors, from which they cannot be forcibly removed without sacrilege".[8]

I raise these definitions to highlight the fundamentally spatial nature of refuge and asylum and how they are constructed as safe spaces, but also ones that function outside the space of society. Though much attention has been given to the legal aspects of these terms, it is important to note that the legality itself rests on a spatial understanding of who people are (rightless victims), where people are (without safety), which, in turn, defines how they live (in sanctuary spaces).

The history of asylum and refuge highlights this space of protection and the hospitality that accompanied it as spatially and temporally bounded. Sanctuary thus functioned in a prison-like manner, and safety was only guaranteed in the space where it was sought and given, and not outside. This operated at many scales, from that of the city to that of a dwelling space. Urban refuge provided through the six cities of refuge in the Judeo-Christian tradition operated thus. As Ignatius Bau notes, the refugee was not free to leave the city until the death of the high priest, nor allowed to engage in trades which may result in interaction with the blood avenger.[9] Thus, mobility became circumscribed in exchange for life. In the Christian tradition, the Theodosian Code notes that eligibility for asylum depended upon the nature of the crime and the character of the accused. Thus, many people were excluded

---

[5] https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/refugee

[6] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/refuge

[7] *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary Eleventh edition revised* s.v. "asylum *n.*" (ed. Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson), Oxford University Press, 2006. *Oxford Reference Online.* http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t23.e3181 (accessed October 20, 2007).

[8] Another usage of the term is for mental asylums which is also a fascinating and parallel discussion to this, but for another paper and talk.

[9] I. Bau, *This Ground Is Holy: Church Sanctuary and Central American Refugees*, 1st edn, Paulist Press, 1985.

from asylum. The code also went on to note that fugitives could be fed and cared for in the church premises but not inside the actual church itself, revealing an unresolved tension between the sacred space of the church and the perceived profanity of the refugee.[10] In Arab and Islamic traditions, Hindu traditions, and Greek and Roman histories, the protection extended comes bound with a duty towards providing hospitality, but is also geographically (and sometimes temporally) bound, precluding the refugee/asylum-seeker from being able to leave, resume life, become independent and so forth because the protector can only extend their protection across a certain space, and sometimes, only over a certain period of time. In every tradition too, there are those to whom hospitality is extended because they were seen to be deserving or came asking for it, and there are those who were unaccounted for those who did not actively seek out sanctuary space and therefore their poverty and suffering could be overlooked. Scholars working on hospitality have long noted how the idea holds within it a tension between hostility and welcome, the simultaneous appearance of generosity and cosmopolitanism, that hides behind it the practices of hostility and exclusion for those deemed unworthy.[11]

Of course, we have seen how these traditions of hospitality have come to inform contemporary legal discourses and practices around asylum and the rights of refugees. Along with the guarantees of sanctuary space comes the sifting of people – some are worthy of this protection and others are not. This is codified through legal documents and terms such as definitions of who is a legitimate refugee under the 1951 Refugee Convention, or even other regional agreements. In turn, these legal instruments extend protections to those who qualify under the refugee definition. Others are discarded, often brutally, by the very countries that have authored these legal scripts. Refusal to allow the rescue of asylum seekers at sea, imprisoning or fining those who do so, and in effect letting people die, is perhaps one of the most heinous forms of such radical abandonment that goes against the very heart of what it is to be human and to be hospitable.

Even for those who are able to avail themselves of some form of protection, the future often remains bleak, as they are held in detention centres, often indefinitely, or returned forcibly. A small but fortunate few are able to resettle and recraft new lives. For those who are held in detention spaces such as refugee camps or in detention centres awaiting the outcome of their claims, this forms a brutal form of conditional hospitality. Such sites ultimately function are threshold spaces – prisons to those who inhabit them, and a form of reluctant and expensive hospitality to those who provide them. The argument about hotels being used for asylum-seekers occupies a particularly troubling aspect of this 'debate.' Caustic discussions take place about the costs of providing such 'luxury' to unworthy asylum-seekers, with little regard for the fact that these hotels are neither luxury, nor is the idea of living in them for months or even years, often with families, whilst awaiting decisions comfortable by any stretch of the imagination.[12]

Refugee camps form one such version of detention and are particularly pervasive within the landscape of the Global South. Here, refugees are kept sequestered for years, sometimes decades and generations, their futures stolen, and often with little possibility of a resolution to their plight. Many of us have argued against seeing the camp and refugees as being devoid

---

[10]   Bau, p. 131.
[11]   J. Darling, "From Hospitality to Presence", *Peace Review* 26 (2), 2014, 162 69, https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2014.906872; J. Pitt-Rivers, "The Law of Hospitality", *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 2(1), 2012, 501–17, https://doi.org/10.14318/hau2.1.022; J. Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, Routledge, 2003, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203165713.
[12]   https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14168223/Inside-luxury-hotel-housing-migrants-THREE-YEARS-beautiful-16th-century-manor-four-poster-beds-lake-views-used-asylum-seekers.html; https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/34632139/hotel-asylum-seekers-immigration-migrants/

of politics or futures, but such arguments should also not detract from the fact that camps themselves are ultimately symbols and technologies of control and containment, upheld through a fickle system of aid. Even humanitarian relief provided within their bounds is a daily reminder of dependency and of geopolitical impasse. As one interviewee had noted to me in a Palestinian camp in Lebanon back in 2005 – *no one wants to be a refugee*.

Durable solutions are envisioned by the UN, aid agencies, and by scholars as part of a broader effort to protect the rights of refugees and other forced migrants in such circumstances and end the permanent temporariness of exile. These include return, resettlement, and integration. Whilst Brown et al (2024) note that return and resettlement are becoming increasingly impossible[13] (for well-known geopolitical reasons), integration is increasingly being pushed as an option. Under this scenario, rights and entitlements of refugees and other forced migrants are increasingly extended in their host countries and societies. As Jeff Crisp notes, it is a legal, social and economic process, and argues that from a legal position: "Under the terms of the 1951 Refugee Convention, these include, for example, the right to seek employment, to engage in other income-generating activities, to own and dispose of property, to enjoy freedom of movement and to have access to public services such as education. The process whereby refugees gain and accumulate rights may lead to the acquisition of permanent residence rights and ultimately to the acquisition of citizenship in the country of asylum."[14] Maple notes African states from the 1960s through to the 1980s were open to the integration of refugees and then switched over to encampment as political reasons for displacement became more complex, as did economic conditions in the countries themselves.[15] In many other countries, integration is a thorny issue, and there is often limited protection for those who are registered refugees.

It becomes necessary here to probe the reasons as to why countries have chosen not to integrate people, and what the politics of that lack of integration entail. Geopolitical issues such as the Cold War, the Debt Crisis, and structural adjustment in the 1980s, together with incomplete or patchy land redistribution in many postcolonial nations, have exacerbated poverty and conflict. Political and economic inequalities continue to shape global futures, including extractive processes from the Global South to the Global North. More recent urban regeneration practices in many cities in the majority world have also exacerbated dispossessions in them. In other words, vast swathes of humanity are rendered displaceable. Promises of a better future for many previously colonised and oppressed nations thus remain distant dreams for them, and this in turn fans the flames of xenophobic violence and exclusion, particularly when migrants arrive.[16] It is no surprise, then, that integration has taken a back seat in this contemporary moment.

3. THE URBAN PROBLEM

While the problems of refuge themselves continue to be riddled with antagonisms, other problems have also come to be enmeshed in it. Displacement has long been part of development and has driven urbanisation. However, as the world has grown more unequal, conflicts have become more complex, and climate and other forms of disasters have become more ubiquitous. This

[13]   A. Brown, P. Mackie, & P. G. Amado, "The Displacement Economies Framework", *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 2024, 1–18, https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2024.2379380.

[14]   J. Crisp, "The Local Integration and Local Settlement of Refugees: A Conceptual and Historical Analysis", Working Paper, NEW ISSUES IN REFUGEE RESEARCH (Geneva: UNHCR Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit, April 2004), https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/407d3b762.pdf, pg 1.

[15]   N. Maple, *Refugee Reception in Southern Africa : National and Local Policies in Zambia and South Africa*, University of London Press, 2024, https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/92997.

[16]   J. P. Misago and L. B. Landau, "'Running Them Out of Time:" Xenophobia, Violence, and Co-Authoring Spatiotemporal Exclusion in South Africa", *Geopolitics*, 8 August 2023, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14650045.2022.2078707.

makes the disentanglement of different forms of migration and persecution more vexatious. It is a form of oppression to refuse to acknowledge that migration is a complex process that emerges from displacement logics too, and weaves together opportunity and compulsion in ways that cannot be easily unpicked. So those being pushed off their land due to climate change or land grabs, or crushing poverty, or a combination thereof, blur the boundaries between what is considered a choice and what is considered force. Many of these people end up in cities or in other parts of the world where they are subject to further forms of precariousness and evictions. They have no recourse to protection, and their rights remain unrealised.

Cities themselves, including in the Global South, are themselves not "welcoming" or "protection spaces" even if most people come to them seeking refuge from poverty. Instead, the poor are left to fend for themselves in many instances, living in informal settlements as countries are either unwilling and/or unable to invest in adequate, affordable housing, or even fair labour practices that would enable a better, more dignified quality of life for the poor. Informal settlements are often the only spaces that offer affordable housing for the poor, but these are often inadequate, overcrowded spaces, with limited or no tenure security. Many, by extension, also provide limited services, including water, sanitation, health, and so forth. In many countries in the majority world that have become middle-income, the growing inequalities between the rich and the poor have significant implications for the latter. City authorities and urban planners either ignore the poor or worse, deliberately remove them to peripheral areas in an effort to beautify cities to become more world class.[17] Evictions are violent, marking the lack of rights the poor have over land, and the precarious hold they have in the urban economy. They mark the fate of many informal settlements in different countries and inhabitants, who lack tenure security, are not always guaranteed resettlement, which means they are forced to squat again and face the possibility of yet more evictions. Displacement for many of the urban poor is not just a continuous and intergenerational process, but also a fact of life, subjecting many to cycles of poverty and precarity.[18] As the opening vignette suggests, there is little attention paid to these forms of displacements by politicians and other local officials in urban areas, who view them as byproducts of *choice* and not a *compulsion*. Inhabitants of informal settlements are not seen as worthy of "protection". Rather, in many country contexts they are seen as "encroachers" and a "nuisance" and their needs – that of housing, employment, healthcare, education, and a dignified life more generally are ignored. Thus, while the labour of the poor is needed to make cities work, their wellbeing is often overlooked. Yet these informal settlements offer people a toehold in the urban economy, an ability to access work, to remit money home, and to craft a future that is meaningful to them.

Of course, it is problematic to homogenise urbanisation processes across the majority world, as there are significant differences between them. It is, however, even worse to ignore the fact that many people of the countries that are responsible for hosting the majority of refugees – Pakistan, Lebanon, Tanzania, Turkey, to name a few, themselves face many of these issues around inequality, poverty, and inadequate services for their own citizens. Rectifying material deprivation and past injustice, and disadvantage remains an ongoing and incomplete process, often leading to growing tensions between citizens and migrants.[19] And yet, there remains a stubborn inattention by many scholars studying forced migration to the implications of displacement on local communities, or economies in these places of already existing scarcities. At worst, some

[17]   D. A. Ghertner, "Rule by Aesthetics: World-Class City Making in Delhi", in A. Roy and A. Ong (eds.), *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*", 1st ed. (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2011), 279–306, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444346800; V. Watson, "'The Planned City Sweeps the Poor Away … ': Urban Planning and 21st Century Urbanisation", *Progress in Planning, The planned city sweeps the poor away … : Urban planning and 21st century urbanisation.*, 72(3) 2009, 151–93, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.progress.2009.06.002.

[18]   A. Baviskar, "Breaking Homes, Making Cities. Class and Gender in the Politics of Urban Displacement", in L. Mehta (ed.), *Displaced by Development Confronting Marginalisation and Gender Injustice*, SAGE Publications Ltd, 2009, 59–81.

[19]   Misago and Landau, "'Running Them Out of Time:"..

scholarship romanticises practices of hospitality amongst local communities without accounting for the tensions that have grown amongst people,[20] not considering where land for resettlement would be coming from, and failing to account for shifting geopolitical realities. In the Middle East, for example, tensions between refugees and locals were well documented by scholars and NGOs. When doing fieldwork in Lebanon and Jordan between 2014 and 2023, it was put to me emphatically that *the refugees must go back to Syria*. Any discussions of how the Syrian crisis within the countries would be managed were met with a deep sense of frustration that this was going to be a protracted crisis and the Lebanese, for example, would be stuck with this for some time. This was particularly troubling for local governments due to the scale of the crisis and the impacts on their local areas. It was not that people did not want to be generous, and in fact, there was a deep sense of understanding that people had left under quite difficult circumstances, that they were kin and had also extended hospitality to them in their own time of need. However, there was also growing frustration amongst families who themselves struggled with meagre resources. How were they to share their homes, food, resources, space, infrastructure, and limited job opportunities with so many who had been displaced due to war? For many of my interlocutors, there was no doubt in their minds that in the end, Syrians were not welcome to stay.

4. SEPARATING POVERTY AND REFUGE

It is in this context that I return to my argument that refuge and asylum continue to form a powerful spatial container for a very particular group of disenfranchised people. Worse yet, the concept of refuge, as owed to a specific group of people by virtue of their particular form of victimhood, leads to not only problematic provision of spaces of conditional hospitality, but in fact offers a discursive method of separating from others who would share similar life circumstances yet are deemed unworthy. The provision of refuge through the camp and the detention centre for poorer refugees marks a spatial distinction between those who belong to a sanctified and supposedly protective space and those who do not. Refugees are given the right to live in a particular space and access to minimum goods and services, including food, health, and education. Their displacement becomes a form of permanent temporariness, anchored within a particular demarcated space. I acknowledge here that the provision of these is often inadequate and extremely problematic, and that refugee camps are also sometimes threatened with dissolution; however, most camps have remained emplaced within the spaces which had been established initially. Perniciously, of course, this safe space is provided by the host state and propped up through the aid machinery. In exchange, refugees are compelled to give up the right to mobility outside the camp, and often the right to work in non-camp spaces. A superficial world is produced in which futures are truncated, and lives are liminal. The camps become spaces through which, as Ruben Andersson so eloquently notes, we see the colonisation of migrant (here refugee) time, with the only possible future being one that is offered through the infrastructures of survival.[21] This spatial containment is also symbolic of the displaced as also being the undesirable.[22]

The poor, on the other hand, in many parts of the world are displaceable and by virtue of being so, face insecurities over land and housing. Rural–urban migration is driven through these logics of displaceability, as are continuous rounds of evictions of urban informal settlements into which the landless and asset-poor arrive. Especially in places where land values are increasing,

[20] D. Chatty, "The Duty to Be Generous (Karam): Alternatives to Rights-Based Asylum in the Middle East", *Journal of the British Academy*, 5, 2017, 177–99, https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/005.177.

[21] R. Andersson, "Time and the Migrant Other: European Border Controls and the Temporal Economics of Illegality", *American Anthropologist*, 116(4), 2014, 795–809, https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.12148.

[22] M. Agier, *Managing the Undesirables*, 1st edn., Polity Press, 2010). In fact we can query the limits of aid in humanitarian settings through the lens of capital. How are the non-labouring bodies punished through abandonment or through hyper exploitation?

where there are growing practices of land speculation and neoliberal urban development, and where people lack de facto or de jure land tenure, urban dwellers are prone to evictions and housing insecurity. They may find themselves facing multiple cycles of displacements both within and between urban spaces.[23] Each displacement forms a rupture from places of care, worship, work, communities, and networks of trust. These ruptures form new and expanding webs of poverty, insecurity, and inequality. In other words, these are not just forms of material dispossession wrought through displacements, but social dispossessions too. As noted earlier, development and urbanisation are contingent on the ability to displace people and cast those who are asset-poor as surplus labour. There is a promise of prosperity through the labour that is given, but this prosperity is also theoretical, much like the safety of refugee camps. But there is less possibility to claim the right to space that becomes ever more expensive and limited in cities. Thus, displacement too, or the spectre of it, looms over the lives of the urban poor. Like the refugees, the poor are daily reminded of their position as the unwanted, and their marginalisation is spatialised through informal settlements.

The right to safe shelter and the right to work and mobility are placed in opposition to each other. Each is theoretical, promising its claimants different futures of safety or prosperity, but these are illusions. Each possibility is unachievable by the other group, and each creates its own oppressive forms of control and coercion, its own markers of inclusion and exclusion.

5. THE SPACE THAT REFUGE MAKES

If anything, the idea of refuge should give us pause. How do we come to determine who is worthy of refuge, and what does that space of refuge promise and deny? We must recognise that this refuge is a promise of a safe "roof over one's head", a space in which they are protected. But that protection comes at a price. That price is the inability to participate in life outside of the 'shelter'. Rather than seeing refuge merely as a form of protection, we need to acknowledge that the space of protection has always not only been imprisoning but also exclusionary. It determines who is eligible for hospitality – the reception of the guest, but also the exclusion of others deemed unworthy of the same. In other words, through categories that are themselves spatially contingent, they divide people. This has significant contemporary implications as the question of what constitutes a victim of persecution becomes increasingly difficult to answer. How do we distinguish between the refugee who has fled conflict and is trying to rebuild a life in a new place, and those who have left due to grinding poverty, climate change, and other forms of structural violence and have also come to a place which is new and alien? How do we separate between two sets of people who both experience displacements that are etched into their histories and their lives, but claim that one is worthy of protection and the other is not? Is death by conflict unbearable, but death by disease of hunger not? These questions point to the fundamental issue at the heart of contemporary life today – that displacement has been and continues to be at the heart of development and urbanisation. This displacement comes in many forms, from the violence of poverty to the violence of climate change and conflicts that push people off the land. They are all byproducts of industrialisation, development, and urbanisation. These displacements need to be seen as being entangled to understand how capital comes to shape our world today. This leads to a radical approach to bring forced migration and urban studies together and consider how we can take the idea of 'protection' and use it for a wider group of people. Can we take the humanity and rights-based approach that lies at the heart of forced migration scholarship (and some practice) to demand a different, more socially just contract between citizens and the state? Can we finally reimagine cities being protective?

---

[23] Baviskar, "Breaking Homes, Making Cities".