
What Becomes a Refugee Camp? Making Camps for European Refugees in North Africa and the Middle East, 1943–46

KATHERINE MACKINNON 

School of Humanities (History), University of Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8QQ, UK

BENJAMIN THOMAS WHITE 

School of Humanities (History), University of Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8QQ, UK
benjaminthomas.white@glasgow.ac.uk

MS received October 2022; revised MS received April 2023

Refugees have often been housed in camps made by ‘adaptive reuse’ of a wide range of existing sites. We argue that any given refugee camp’s previous uses shape the experiences of its residents and may indicate how that displaced population is viewed by the responsible authorities. We test this argument on three historical case studies drawn from an important but under-researched episode in the history of the refugee camp: the far-flung network of camps established by the Allies in North Africa and the Middle East in the 1940s for European refugees from Fascism. They range from a former hotel housing under 50 people to a vast tented encampment housing over 20,000, adapted from an army ‘rear camp’. We argue that research on any given camp should include analysis of the site’s architectural origins. This is a step towards a more fully articulated methodological approach to researching refugee camps, the ‘site biography’.

Keywords: refugee camps, European refugees, Middle East and North Africa, adaptive reuse, site biography

Introduction

The common conception of a refugee camp is of a large encampment, built from nothing by someone else to accommodate a large number of displaced people. Although scholarly research recognizes that sites of encampment are rather more varied (Malkki 1995a; Herz 2012; Turner 2016; Scott-Smith and Breeze 2020; Katz 2022), this conception is firmly rooted in public discourse, reinforced by the widely disseminated visual trope of the aerial view of a sprawling but clearly defined camp (White 2016). Such camps certainly exist. Contemporary examples are numerous, from Zaatari and Azraq in Jordan (opened 2012 and 2014) to Kutupalong and Bhashan Char in Bangladesh (opened 2018 and 2020). But camps like this have

existed for over a century, ever since the modern refugee camp—a place where someone else puts refugees, rather than a place where refugees make shelter for themselves (Black 1998)—emerged in the years around the first world war. As early as 1918, camps of this sort existed that were large enough and sophisticated enough to accommodate tens of thousands of displaced people over months and years in conditions of improving rather than deteriorating health (White 2023). The camp at Baquba near Baghdad, for example, set up by the British military in summer 1918, housed nearly 50,000 people at its height. Millions of people have since been accommodated in camps like it.

But the purpose-built encampment is only one kind of refugee camp. Over the same period, millions of other people have been accommodated in other kinds of camp—frequently, by what architects and archaeologists refer to as ‘adaptive reuse’ of a site previously used for other purposes. In 1914, the Earl’s Court showground in London was transformed into a camp to accommodate Belgian refugees fleeing German invasion: an exhibition entitled ‘Sunny Spain’ closed to visitors on the evening of 13 October, and by midnight of the following day 1,387 refugees had already arrived (Powell 1919: 14). Over the next 5 years, just under a hundred thousand people passed through the Earl’s Court camp, most staying for only a short time. In the century since then, sites of many kinds have been turned into refugee camps. Other types of camp are prominent among them, from holiday camps to logging camps to army camps, and so are other sites of confinement: quarantine stations, asylums, or ‘mother and baby’ homes. But the variety is enormous. Almost any type of building can become a refugee camp, from a film studio (Cinecittà in post-WWII Rome) to a decommissioned airport or conference centre (Tempelhof and the International Congress Centre in 2010s Berlin) (Steimatsky 2009; Parsloe 2020; Young 2020).

Existing research across interdisciplinary refugee studies often focuses on camps, but it does not systematically address prior use of their sites. Work in the social sciences, focused on what is contemporary to the research itself, does not necessarily look back to the histories of its field sites. The rise of the ‘refugee camp’ as large encampment managed by humanitarian agencies, usually in the Global South, coincided with the expansion of the social sciences in the second half of the twentieth century, and camps have become privileged sites of both ethnographic research and theorizing (Bakewell 2014: 136). But theorizing from this empirical basis misrepresents the longer and more varied history of encampment. Even for this period, the assertion that ‘As a general rule, camps [of this sort] are established on virgin land’ (Agier 2011: 54) deserves to be tested: as we will see, a large tented encampment may nonetheless owe its location to existing infrastructure used for another purpose.

Researchers’ attention has also understandably been drawn to the increasing tendency for purpose-built encampments to endure indefinitely, what Kjersti Berg (2015) has termed (for the Palestinian case) the ‘unending temporary’. As one reference work notes, ‘The question is what happens when the camp remains in place for any length of time’ (Bakewell 2014: 130)—and the accretion of such sites into material and social permanence has been analysed in terms of an evolution

‘from camp to city’ (Herz 2012). But what of the camp’s prior history? To the extent that ethnographies of specific sites of encampment do mention their origins, they do so in passing: that refugee camps may have begun as an army barracks, a camp for a prior displaced population, or a new settlement (Knudsen 2016: 446), or that reception or detention centres in the global north may ‘use recycled old buildings’ such as warehouses or hangars (Agier 2011: 48). Legal approaches may recognize the empirical variety of forms of encampment, but they are concerned with their legal effects rather than the type of site that is chosen (Janmyr 2016). And analysing a specific camp’s history before it became a camp is a different enterprise than tracing the genealogy of the refugee camp as a legally defined space (McConnachie 2016). For obvious reasons, research in the ‘architecture of emergency’ pays more attention to the design and construction of camps, including adaptive reuse of other sites (Scott-Smith and Breeze 2020, Katz 2022). History, a disciplinary latecomer to the study of the refugee camp, also has an interest in antecedents and their consequences (Baikin 2018: ch1).

This article argues that it matters what the site of a given refugee camp has previously been. Research on the shift ‘from camp to city’ shows that such urbanization remains constrained: even as tents and shelters give way to buildings and streets, factors ranging from architectural elements like external fences to the attitudes of the host society or the ongoing refugee status of people living there mean that the ‘city’ is still a camp (Crisp 2015). Here, we address the less studied question, from what to camp? Just as a camp that becomes urbanized remains to some extent a camp, when an existing site is adapted into a refugee camp it retains elements of its prior uses. These, we argue, will shape the experiences of the people accommodated there. And the choice of site also indicates the attitude of the camp authorities, and particularly state authorities, to the population(s) being housed there. Malkki (1995b) influentially analysed refugee camps as sites of care and control: places where shelter, food, and other forms of humanitarian assistance can be provided, but where refugees’ movements and activities can be monitored and restricted. Following Malkki, we argue that the location and particularly the nature of the site chosen for adaptation tell us a great deal about where it lies on the spectrum from care to control. Refugees’ experiences of a camp depend heavily on which of these things is being prioritized, and the choice of priorities tells us how the host state views the refugees. To return the example of Earl’s Court, Britain had gone to war in 1914 to defend Belgian neutrality, so the 250,000 Belgian refugees it hosted were allies. The adaptation of a leisure venue in central London to house them, on their way to longer-term accommodation and what would today be termed ‘integration’, indicates the care that was very publicly being taken of these refugees. (Britain’s recent use of remote disused army barracks to house asylum-seekers indicates the opposite.) At the other end of the spectrum are the camps where France accommodated Spanish refugees fleeing the victorious Fascists in 1939. The French government viewed the Republican *exiliados* with intense suspicion. Women and children were interned in harsh conditions in military camps like Rivesaltes, or foresters’ camps like Le Vernet d’Ariège. But men of military age, stripped of their weapons at the border, were held in barbed-wire enclosures on the

Roussillon beaches (Stein 1979: ch4). Exposed to the winter weather and desperately insanitary, these camps were all control and no care, and had correspondingly high death rates. The nature of the site matters.

Here, we present case studies of three quite different camps under the aegis of one agency, to think about what kind of site becomes a refugee camp, with what effects for the residents, and what that tells us about how they were viewed by the authorities. We do so as a step towards developing the ‘site biography’ as a methodological approach to researching refugee camps. Our case studies are historical, but the approach is applicable to contemporary camps too.

The case studies are drawn from the constellation of camps spanning 4000 km, from Morocco to Syria, set up in the 1940s to accommodate European refugees in North Africa and the Middle East: a significant but drastically under-researched episode in the history of the refugee camp. The Allies established their control in the region in 1941–43, between the British/Free French invasion of Vichy-run Syria and Lebanon, the Operation Torch landings in Vichy-run Morocco and Algeria, and the Western Desert campaign that ended in the Allied capture of (Italian occupied) Libya and (Vichy French occupied) Tunisia by May 1943. Refugees from Fascist Europe were already present throughout this region by 1941, including Spanish Republicans in French North Africa, Jewish refugees in British mandate Palestine, and escapees from the Balkans in Cairo. Through 1943 and 1944 their numbers continued to increase, especially after the German occupation of Yugoslavia and Greece (previously occupied by Italy). To take them in hand, the British military established a humanitarian agency, the Middle East Relief and Refugee Agency (MERRA), which interacted with colonial administrations, governments-in-exile, and international voluntary organizations on their behalf. In 1944, MERRA was absorbed into the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency, the larger and better-known humanitarian agency that accompanied the Allied military conquest of continental Europe in 1944–45. Encampment was a key technique for both agencies’ management of refugees, but as we will see, the camps themselves varied from a single building housing a couple of dozen people to vast tented encampments housing many thousands. Under UNRRA, the camps in North Africa and the Middle East remained in operation until after the war.

The MERRA/UNRRA camps are historically significant for many reasons. They were crucibles of political mobilization, where the contestations of postwar Europe were prefigured. They were sites where governments-in-exile attempted, on Allied sufferance, to exercise authority over civilian populations and maintain a military capacity. They were sensitive spots where populations ‘on the edge of whiteness’ (Lingelbach 2020) were cared for within racially hierarchized colonial societies whose politics were no less stormy for being muffled by wartime repression. In French colonial territories they were locations where Allied aspirations to assist refugees from fascism were in tension with the collaborationist administrations whose personnel remained substantially in place (Gilson Miller 2021). And UNRRA itself recognized that they were the testing-ground for Allied humanitarian capacity before the liberation of Nazi-occupied Europe.¹ UNRRA’s operations in Europe have been well studied in the context of histories of

humanitarianism and international institutions (Reinisch 2011, 2013; Salvatici 2012, 2015, 2017, 2019). In global refugee history the agency is recognized as a link between the interwar League of Nations and the postwar UN refugee regimes, a predecessor to UNHCR, and an organization where many careers in the post-1945 humanitarian and development sectors were launched (Holian 2008; Gemie and Rees 2011; Gatrell 2013: ch3). But the early phase in North Africa and the Middle East has largely been ignored.

This is beginning to change. Historians of North Africa (more than the Middle East) are increasingly exploring the years of the second world war on their own terms, rather than as an interregnum to be skipped on the way to the drama of independence in the 1950s and 1960s (Boum and Stein 2019, 2022; Gilson Miller 2021). Historians of many European countries—Spain, Poland, the former Yugoslavia, Greece—working with ‘national’ memoir literatures and national (ist) historiographies are exploring experiences of wartime exile in the region, sometimes in comparative perspective, aided by the digitization and publication of vast quantities of archival material by the UN archives (e.g. Ajlec 2020, 2021; Bieber 2020; Lamprou 2022; Martínez Leal 2020). And historians of refugees have begun to take an interest (Robson 2022), perhaps because at a time when Europe has been very grudgingly hosting, or simply rejecting, refugees coming from North Africa and the Middle East, it is salutary to remember a past within living memory when hundreds of thousands of European refugees fled to North Africa and the Middle East, remaining there for years or travelling on to other, more distant places of refuge in East Africa, South Asia, and beyond. This article contributes to the emerging literature that focuses on the MERRA/UNRRA camps as worthy of study in their own right.

Among the great variety of the MERRA/UNRRA camps, we explore three in particular. At Fouka [فوكة] on the Mediterranean coast near Algiers, a single modest hotel housed a few dozen Spanish Republicans. At Souk el Gharb [سوق الغرب *sūq al-gharb*] in the mountains above Beirut, hundreds of Greek refugees were accommodated in a partly converted health resort. And at El Shatt [الشط *al-shatt*], near Suez, over twenty thousand Yugoslav refugees lived in a vast tented encampment that had served as a military transit camp before being adapted to hold them. These three camps were all of concern to UNRRA, but they were very different sites in very different contexts that housed quite distinct populations of refugees. We focus on the UNRRA records held at, and digitized by, the UN archives, where the three camps left very different archival traces, ranging from a single document to many thousands of pages. We discuss the specifics of each case—the camp’s prior use, the experiences of the people living there, and the attitudes of the authorities—and draw comparisons.

Fouka Marine

The ‘camp’ at Fouka Marine was a small one-storey building by the beach, standing in some land that was used as a kitchen garden. It had once been a hotel, one of a string lining the beachfront of Fouka, a small resort town close to Algiers. This

tiny camp predated the foundation of MERRA, let alone UNRRA, and the agency seems to have registered its presence rather than needing to take responsibility for it: the information about it in the UN archives consists of a single brief report by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) written in March 1944. The ‘Spanish’ themselves (i.e. the Republicans) had set it up, and also received some funds from the French authorities. Before the AFSC got involved, some of the camp’s shortfall in funds was covered by money raised in London by the former ambassador of the Republic in the UK ([‘Pablo de Azcárate y Flórez’ 2018](#)). The AFSC offered to contribute to Fouka Marine’s costs if it took on more residents: their numbers then rose from about 25 to about 45.

What was life like in this camp? The men living there—all the residents were men, ‘whose families for the most part were still in Spain’—were relatively well cared for, in part because they were permitted to care for themselves.² Some of their food they produced for themselves in the hotel grounds, growing vegetables and keeping chickens and rabbits. The rest, after Operation Torch, either came from Allied agencies or was bought locally. The residents covered 50 per cent of the costs of running the camp through their production of traditional woven rope-soled sandals. Damián Ruiz Pérez, who lived at the camp in the early 1940s, had escaped Spain at the very end of the war: he was an *espartero* and *alpargatero*, a weaver and seller of espadrilles ([‘Ruiz Pérez, Damián’ 2016](#); [Rubio 2018](#)). These were made with both imported raffia and a type of local grass, alfa, and sold to American soldiers and members of the Women’s Army Corps. One resident would read aloud as the others worked. The French authorities in Algeria permitted this economic activity as it ‘was not in competition with any North African industry’, but the AFSC’s representative Leslie Heath noted that the refugees ‘would prefer to be allowed to work in other industries as well’. Meanwhile, the men cooked and cleaned for themselves, and had ‘an excellent form of self-government, with an elected chief who was a good administrator and very precise in his accounts’. They received medical care from French rather than American doctors: ‘a good move politically, as the French thus took a greater interest in the project’.

This picture of a relatively pleasant, relatively autonomous existence, supported by external organizations, is extremely unusual for Spanish Republican refugees in French North Africa. Most were not accommodated in converted hotels on the Mediterranean coast but in camps located in the Moroccan and Algerian interior, usually described as internment or concentration camps, along with other European refugees from Nazism. Conditions there were extremely harsh, and residents were made to undertake hard labour. Camp Morand, 150 km south of Algiers, held the largest number of Spanish Republican refugees, and their experiences were well documented through letters, camp newspapers and later memoirs and interviews. The men at Camp Morand were used as forced labour to construct the ultimately doomed Trans-Saharan Railway line, alongside other infrastructure projects or heavy labour like mining ([Martínez Leal 2020](#): section 5; [Gilson Miller 2021](#): 90–119; [Boum and Stein 2022](#)). The Allied takeover of Morocco and Algeria did not bring immediate liberation for the residents of these camps. On the contrary, organizations like the Joint Distribution Committee had to intervene at

length, and down to the level of individual refugees, to secure their release (Gilson Miller 2021: ch3). In Algeria, the antisemitic Vichy legislation abrogating the French citizenship of Algerian Jews, expelling Jews from state employment, and barring Jewish professionals from practice was not (provisionally) lifted until late 1944 (Jewish Telegraphic Agency Daily News Bulletin 1944). The Vichy-era personnel of the French colonial administrations too remained largely in place, and their suspicion of *indésirables*—including Spanish Republicans, other Europeans who had fought alongside them in Spain, and European and North African Jews—was unchanged (Boum and Stein 2022).

The site at Fouka Marine, then, a former hotel in a coastal resort, shows that the residents they were subject to less tight control on the part of the French colonial authorities than most Republican refugees, and better conditions. Why? No doubt because they were ‘mutilados’: that is, they had been severely injured during the civil war. In 1946, the camp, still in operation, was visited by a reporter for the Algiers newspaper *Alger républicain* (who signalled his own relationship to encampment by the pseudonym Libéré, ‘liberated’ [i.e. from a concentration or POW camp]). His report is accompanied by a photograph of two men making espadrilles, one missing his right arm and the other his right leg. The care these men received during the war came mostly from elsewhere, from Republican sources, the Allies, or international humanitarian agencies—but they were allowed to receive it, and to look after themselves. We would argue that this is because they did not pose a military threat. The relatively benign conditions of their encampment may also have been a publicity gesture on the part of the French authorities in Algeria, to deflect attention from the much worse conditions endured by Republican refugees in forced labour camps. Their economic activities were nonetheless restricted. The director told *Alger républicain* that in the period of Vichy rule their movements had been restricted too, and the camp subjected to visits ‘as disagreeable as they were frequent’ by the gendarmes; 19 of the less severely mutilated residents had been sent to harsher camps (Alger Republican 1946).

Fouka Marine is far from the only hotel to have been adapted to house refugees, and the treatment of the residents under Vichy shows that accommodating refugees in hotels does not automatically mean that they are being treated ‘nicely’. It matters how the site is run, and residents’ movements controlled: hotels as ‘camps’ can also represent loss of autonomy, tighter surveillance, and more restricted movement (Minca and Ong 2016; Aksu *et al.* 2022; Jerrems *et al.* 2023; BurrIDGE 2023; Esposito and Tazzioli 2023; Ubayasiri and Balle-Bowness 2023; Russell and de Souza 2023; Jerrems 2023). The freedom and autonomy enjoyed by the inhabitants at Fouka Marine were relative, contrasting with the bleak and highly restricted conditions endured by most Spanish Republican and other refugees in Algeria and Morocco even after the Allied takeover. But they were real.

Souk el Gharb

The men at Fouka Marine were not the only refugees from Europe occupying former hotels across North Africa and the Middle East. In Souk el Gharb, on the

mountain slopes overlooking Beirut, a larger group of Greek refugees were housed in a mixture of hotels, pensions and holiday homes. Byrtene Anderson of the Greek War Relief Association described the accommodation:

The buildings used are built in the typical Lebanese style of architecture, with large central halls on each floor, the rooms opening off the hall on each side; they have large verandas on front and back.³

These buildings, including villas formerly owned by wealthy Syrian families, provided accommodation for up to 950 people at a time. Souk el Gharb was a health resort, perched on the mountainside at 3000 ft, and the beauty of the site struck official visitors such as Anderson: ‘The air is invigorating; there are pine trees, and the view of the mountains and valleys with the Mediterranean a short distance away makes it a place of magnificent beauty’. The site continued to serve as a resort throughout its time as a refugee camp, and this too mattered to the lives of the refugees, as we will see. Souk el Gharb was envisaged as a transit camp for people who had entered Allied-held territory from Turkey via Aleppo. Michael Barratt Brown of the American Society of Friends noted that ‘all hope not to go on to Africa but to return straight to Greece’.⁴ But most Greek refugees in the Middle East were funnelled further away from zones of active conflict, returning (sometimes via the same transit camps) only in 1945–46 ([Lingelbach 2020](#)).

Who were the refugees at Souk el Gharb, and how did they live? The inhabitants of the camp were islanders from Samos, Chios, Nikaria, and Mitylene who had left with British troops following the fall of Greece. Of 950 inhabitants recorded in 1943, only 150 were adult men, most too old for active service. A total of 350 were children between the ages of 6 and 14, rather under-served by only two teachers.⁵ (A year later there were 215 children but three teachers.⁶) Alongside the teachers were a small staff of doctors, orderlies, and an interpreter, plus twelve guards and the Commandant, Captain John Karayannis.⁷ His Greek name is no coincidence. Souk el Gharb was part-financed by MERRA, which issued Army rations, paid rents, and covered some wage costs, but its other costs were covered by the Ministry of Social Welfare of the Greek government-in-exile. In other words, where the Spanish Republicans at Fouka Marine ‘governed’ themselves, the Greek refugees at Souk el Gharb were governed by their own national government, albeit in exile and operating on Allied sufferance. This created a somewhat different situation for the residents, as well as producing a ‘national’ archival record that was repatriated to Greece after the war.

Work in the camp took several forms, and the site offered particular opportunities. The residents received no financial assistance from the camp authorities beyond food rations, and they were expected to work for the camp by cleaning their own quarters: unpaid work that was enforced via the threat of a cut in rations (cf [White 2023](#): 51). So some of them tried to make a living for themselves. Several women in the camp had ‘started dressmaking establishments in their own rooms where they sew for resorters’.⁸ As in many other instances up to the present, sewing and dressmaking were considered appropriately feminine forms of employment

for refugee women. Sometimes this is organized top-down and on a large scale, as at Baquba after the first world war (Austin 1920: 38–39; White 2019: 223–224). But at Souk el Gharb, enterprising refugee women started small-scale work for themselves, and the site was particularly suited to this type of trade. Dispersed across a series of buildings, the refugees lived alongside holidaymakers who continued to come and stay in the resort. The village's resort status provided a rotating clientele of holidaymakers for the refugee women to sell their products to. The accommodation in hotels and pensions presumably included spaces which could be adapted into changing rooms or spaces for dress fittings. (Some men in the camp had 'opened coffee shops and small stores with capital obtained in some way'; it is not clear whether these served refugees, resorters, or both.⁹)

The nature of the site lent itself to other forms of interaction with locals, visitors and others. The Greek authorities attempted to limit access, but enforcing these restrictions at a site without clearly defined edge would have been a struggle. Evidence of the porosity of the camp boundaries is clear in a report by a Greek official on seven refugee women who 'were prostituting themselves to soldiers, but even to Arabs, and to do so they go to Beirut and the [nearby] village of Aley or even *they accept them into their rooms, day and night, as normal visitors*' (quoted in Lamprou 2022: 6; our italics). As Lamprou (2022) has argued, the Greek authorities were concerned to protect both the virtue of Greek women—as wives and daughters of the fighting men—and the 'image of the nation' in exile: the behaviour of the refugee women reflected on the morality and social standing of the nation itself. The scarcity of men in the camp was one explanation given by Greek state officials for what they took to be the unrestrained sexuality among refugees. But these fears over (female) refugees' sexuality, which were deeply inflected by class, only highlight the tenuousness of the government-in-exile's authority over them.

Like Fouka Marine, the relative pleasantness of the site at Souk el Gharb suggests that exerting tight control over the refugees housed there was not the priority for the colonial authorities. They could leave with permission, for the village or for Aley a little further off.¹⁰ Because there were few men in the camp, and even fewer were fit and of fighting age, they were not viewed as a threat. But this also meant that it had a much smaller number of officers and other military personnel to police it than camps of similar size. Souk el Gharb had 'A Greek Captain ... [and] a few Greek O.R.s [other ranks]'.¹¹ By comparison, the pair of camps at Aleppo that received incoming Greek refugees, with a similar population at any one time, had three Greek officers and ten other ranks, despite being run directly by UNRRA. These camps were also 'guarded by British Colonial troops, mostly East African, and visitors were not allowed except for unusual reasons'.¹² Greek official concerns over refugee sexuality at Souk el Gharb may have been heightened because the site was 'low risk' and lightly guarded: the camp's (Greek) guards themselves were implicated, becoming known as 'the studs of the camp' (Lamprou 2022: 2). Perhaps it was the relatively light control exerted by the Allied military that prompted Greek officials to try and assert control for themselves.

El Shatt

If Fouka Marine was a former hotel holding a few dozen refugees, and Souk el Gharb a health resort housing nearly a thousand, El Shatt in Egypt was emphatically a ‘refugee camp’: a large tented encampment capable of accommodating tens of thousands of refugees. But though it was orders of magnitude larger than our other examples, El Shatt too was adapted from a previous use to house refugees. Once again, the nature of the site decisively influenced their experience of living there and also tells us something about how the residents were perceived.

The first refugees from Greece and the Balkans began making their way to Egypt in the spring of 1941. They were initially housed in hotels, but numbers rapidly outpaced supply: Cairo, the capital of Egypt but also the Allied military and strategic hub for the whole Middle Eastern theatre of the war, was in the grip of an accommodation crisis. The escalating set of responses shows the importance of ‘adaptive reuse’, especially under conditions of wartime exigency (cf [Holborn 1956](#): 218). First, the buildings of the Egyptian Agricultural Society were loaned to UNRRA’s predecessor the Repatriation Office for a temporary camp in central Cairo.¹³ But by 1944, several other camps had been established around northern Egypt from Alexandria to the Sinai (a region that had also hosted several refugee camps during and after the first world war, for Armenians, Russians, and others [[Ibrahim 2021](#)]). At Moses Wells near Suez, the Egyptian Government loaned a site to MERRA, initially as a transit camp: housing around 2000 Greek refugees, it was formerly a quarantine station (cf [White 2020](#)) for pilgrims returning from Mecca. At Tolumbat near Alexandria, an army convalescent camp became a refugee camp for Greek Royalists as well as a detention camp before coming under UNRRA administration and accommodating some 2000 Yugoslav refugees.¹⁴ Over half of the refugees at Tolumbat were under the age of 18, and most of the adults were women.¹⁵ Some of the children had been sent from the larger camp inland at Khatatba, where over 6000 Yugoslav refugees lived by autumn 1944: it was felt that at a former convalescent camp on the coast they would have ‘a better chance to bathe and play and regain their health, than here in the desert where the sand scorches their feet and fills their lungs with dust’.¹⁶ (Like Fouka Marine and Souk el Gharb, Tolumbat shows the link between a pleasant site, ‘low-risk’ refugees, and an emphasis on care over control.) At El Arish, near the border with British mandate Palestine, a British Army rest camp would also be adapted to house about 350 Yugoslav refugees and a few dozen Italians, Romanians, Czechoslovaks, and Greeks. But by far the largest camp set up in Egypt, and the largest camp administered by MERRA/UNRRA in the region, was El Shatt, close to Suez and the Suez canal. It had the capacity to house up to 25,000 people, a maximum set by the available water supply.¹⁷

Like many other camps where refugees have lived, El Shatt began life as an army camp, for British and British colonial forces—or rather, two camps. If the refugee population of North Africa and the Middle East was substantial in these years, it was dwarfed by the number of Allied troops fighting in or passing through the region: in Egypt alone, this ran into the millions. The British military estate,

especially around Alexandria, Cairo, and the Suez Canal, was enormous. Only a small part of it was turned to humanitarian purposes. El Shatt, in the canal zone, began as a military camp with ‘a handful of brick buildings and . . . thousands of troops’.¹⁸ In January 1944, it was refitted at very short notice by MERRA, with the assistance of the British Army. In February a similar camp a couple of miles south became El Shatt’s camp 2: it too had ‘a number of good stone buildings, including a large NAAFI [army canteen] building, water towers, and other existing amenities’.¹⁹ A camp 3 was built from nothing close to camp 1 in March 1944, with only tents; two new water towers were built even as residents arrived to fill it. By April, all three subcamps housed their intended residents: thousands of Yugoslavs who had fled under threat from the Germans. Evacuated under British escort via Italy to Port Said at the northern end of the Suez Canal on Egypt’s Mediterranean coast, they then travelled by train to Suez at the southern end before crossing the canal by barge to the docks at El Shatt. The final leg of their journey was by army lorry to the camp. Upon arrival, the refugees were confronted by the sight of rows of square, pale canvas military issue tents stretching off into the desert. The prospect was bleak (Figure 1) and prompted descriptions far removed from the rhapsodizing over Souk el Gharb. UNRRA’s official History of the Middle East Office put it bluntly: ‘The camp is desert and will return to desert. There is no such place. It is but a latitude and a longitude’.²⁰

The sheer scale of El Shatt made the lives of the people living there very different from Fouka Marine or Souk el Gharb. (It also accounts for the much richer archival record, memorial activity, and historiography that the camp has generated.) El Shatt was a Class A camp, the largest classification of UNRRA camp, for those containing three or more groups of over 5000 refugees.²¹ Most of the people who lived there in its first 2 years of existence were Yugoslavs from the Dalmatian coast and islands around Split. According to a 60-page report on the camp sent to Washington in May 1944, some had been ‘removed from the islands by the Allies for military reasons’, while others were ‘women, children, old or disabled persons evacuated from Yugoslavia by the Government of National Liberation’.²² The Greek government-in-exile that ran Souk el Gharb was made up of Greece’s prewar government that had escaped to Crete then Cairo as their country was overrun, but this Yugoslav National Committee of Liberation was a provisional government formed from the Partisan struggle against Nazi occupation and its local collaborators. Dominated by the Yugoslav Communist Party, led by Josip Broz Tito, it gradually displaced the ‘official’ Yugoslav government-in-exile as the Allies’ preferred partner. The fact that it played the major role in deciding who would even be evacuated in the first place indicates its political importance in the life of El Shatt. Most of the Yugoslavs in the camp were either Partisans or civilians who accepted their authority; only a small minority were not aligned with them. Yugoslavs dominated the camp, but smaller numbers of people of many other nationalities also passed through.

El Shatt served as both a destination and a transit point. The Yugoslavs who arrived there in early 1944 stayed until they could return home, most leaving between March 1945 and October 1946 in what were termed repatriation ‘flights’



Figure 1.

El Shatt, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration's Refugee Camp for Yugoslavs. Photo by Otto Gilmore, September 1944. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, LC-DIG-fsa-8d37890.

by ship and rail. But El Shatt also served as a transit camp for other refugees at and after the end of the war: it was 'the Piccadilly Circus of refugee activity in the Middle East'.²³ Greek refugees returning from East Africa were staged there, and so were Poles, Czechs and Austrians returning from Palestine. By September 1945, 'imminent trouble in Palestine' necessitated the evacuation to El Shatt of the 3558 Greeks encamped at Nuseirat. And another group of Yugoslavs only arrived that same month, as most others had left or were leaving: 1348 Royalists from Tolumat. The remaining 800 people in the camp as of November 1946 were dissidents who did not wish to return to a Yugoslavia now governed by Tito's Communist Party. They spent another 2 years at El Shatt attempting to find a country that would accept them, eventually departing for Argentina, Australia, or 'camps in Italy' (Matulić 2014: 39). The last refugees left on 2 November 1948.

The camp covered several square miles, but as we have seen, like present-day camp complexes such as Dadaab in Kenya, it was not contiguous. To its three separate subcamps, several satellite camps were later added: a labour camp, a transport depot, and a convalescent camp on the Red Sea coast beyond the mouth

of the canal.²⁴ In its early days it had no more than about fifty permanent buildings in stone, brick, or cement, mostly in camps 1 and 2. These largely housed camp services: offices, stores, medical services, bathhouses, mess buildings for British soldiers and camp staff (including ‘lounge equipped with ancient and new magazines, bar stocked with Egyptian liquor’²⁵), or kitchens for the refugees. The Central Yugoslav Committee had one cement building with offices, auditorium, printing room, sewing room and kitchen. The Yugoslav historiography presented the spatial separation of the camp’s sections as a conscious decision to create division within the larger group of Partisan refugees, but Kornelija Ajlec argues that the organization of the camp was determined by the location of essential infrastructure such as water towers and concrete buildings. But tents, not permanent buildings, were the dominant feature of the camp, with the 18’ by 20’ EPIP tent (‘English Personnel Indian Pattern’, an Indian army infantry tent) serving as ‘the basic unit of all housing’. Doubled tents for the refugees, as [Figure 1](#) shows: over 900 in each of the three subcamps, with each tent accommodating about 18 people. Single tents for camp staff, in two compounds, male and female. Tented pavilions as dining areas, each seating about 600 people; 30–35 doubled tents in each sub-camp serving as schools; tents housing overspill hospital beds and such medical services as could not be accommodated in permanent structures.

In such a vast camp, the need for welfare and entertainment provision was apparent from the beginning. This was in contrast to our smaller case studies: even Souk el Gharb, despite accommodating close to a thousand people, lacked any provision of activities for the refugees. Far from any local shops or other infrastructure, El Shatt required a degree of self-sufficiency through small-scale manufacture. Food and other essential supplies came from the British military, and voluntary organizations including the American and Australian Red Cross societies issued clothes. But almost anything else the refugees had to make for themselves. The workshops of El Shatt allowed the camp to both produce and maintain the vast quantities of clothing, tools, and other goods required for everyday life. Camp tradespeople included cobblers, carpenters, dressmakers, and toy-makers, often working with great ingenuity from ad hoc materials: cobblers made shoes from rubber tyres and unpicked hawsers, while metal-workers made waste cans, fly traps, and fire buckets from ‘discarded petrol tins, practically the only source of metal’.²⁶

This ingenuity also figures, more informally, in personal recollections. Dragoslava Williams, a child in the camp, remembered her family making clothes from the linings of their tent, and a spindle and recorder—representing work and leisure respectively—from bamboo tent-poles ([Williams 2010](#)). Another former resident recalled ‘our people’ collecting driftwood from the Suez Canal and using it to make furniture or toys:

These people were so resourceful and talented that the English were in awe of what we had made. They used to say, ‘One day, they will use these small wood chips and twigs to make a ship and sail back home on it’. That’s how capable we—our elders—were. (Interviewed in [Abramac 2018](#): 100–101)

For former residents, stressing how active and ingenious ‘we’ were is perhaps a way of offsetting the loss of agency of being stuck in a camp, far from home. But this emphasis on industry and ingenuity, in both contemporary sources written by camp officials and later personal recollections of camp residents (and staff: [Corsellis 1994](#)), also reflects the truth that life in the camp was tedious. The camp authorities acknowledged this:

For those not actively engaged in communal duties, camp life is apt to be dull, and the importance of providing occupation for body and mind for as many as possible and as varied as circumstances allow, is fully recognised.²⁷

Work provided it, and by the end of 1944, 4000 refugees were employed in a variety of trades including interpreters, barbers and waiters in the officers’ mess. They were not paid wages for any of this, though. When the camp administration was being set up with the British, the Government of National Liberation had decided that as the refugees’ countrymen back in Yugoslavia were fighting for liberation and not getting paid, the non-combatants should likewise not receive any wages, beyond a minimal allowance (literally referred to in the documents as ‘pocket money’).

If work was one way of keeping people busy—and the camp provided a lot of it—cultural and leisure activities were also available. The camp choir gave concerts to British and US Army units in Suez and was recorded by Allied broadcasters. The workshops eventually included studios for sculptors and artists. There was a lively cultural programme ranging from lectures to theatre to dance, and an active sporting calendar ([Bieber 2020](#): 308; ‘[Phyllis Mackenzie](#)’ n.d.). Less organized leisure activities included swimming and sunbathing by the banks of the Suez canal, a shipping route of great strategic importance in wartime. The refugees would sit on the banks and watch ‘the endless number of ships sailing north and south’. Rusko Matulić, still stuck at El Shatt awaiting resettlement in 1947, recalled watching the *Ile de France* and *Pasteur* transporting French troops to Indochina ([Matulić 2014](#): 38). He also noted that there was lively trade across the canal in smuggled hashish, though it is not clear if any camp residents involved themselves in it.

Yugoslav political organizations played a role in every area we have discussed so far, from deciding who was evacuated to El Shatt in the first place, through organizing work and leisure in the camp, to the scheduling of departures ([Bieber 2020](#)). In this, the camp resembles our other case studies—Fouka Marine with its self-elected camp leader and some involvement of Republican exile leaders, Souk el Gharb with the Greek government-in-exile struggling to discipline the (sex) lives of the residents. But refugee political organization in El Shatt was of a different order, quantitatively and qualitatively. The residents’ lives were politically structured, and refugees participated in their own government, from the level of individual tents, each of which selected a tent leader (cf [White 2023](#): 51, 53, 58), up through the areas and subcamps to a camp-wide Refugee Central Committee. This could create tension with the Allied authorities: one British officer, Major

Langman, announced early on that he would ‘break this arrogant communist spirit’ (Vladimir Dedijer, quoted in [Corsellis 1994](#)). But it was Langman who was replaced, and a kind of dual power stabilized within the camp. Samuel Yoder, a doctor with a Mennonite voluntary organization, described it like this:

The refugee camp contained two headquarters areas. There was the headquarters referred to by the refugees as ‘The British Command’, and there was the headquarters of the Yugoslav leaders, a Tito-appointed ‘Central Committee’ which functioned through a hierarchy of committees and subcommittees. . . . As I later found out, this Yugoslav government carefully guarded its prerogatives, and it seems that the UNRRA administration within the camp was quite willing to play ball with the Yugoslav committees. As a consequence no one ever knew who was running the show. In theory it was UNRRA. But in actuality the managing of affairs seemed to lie somewhere between British Army and the Communist-dominated Partisans of Yugoslavia. (Yoder, quoted in [Matulić 2014](#): 16)

The Partisans ran their own police and even courts in the camp, though nominally El Shatt was subject to Egyptian law.²⁸ The Central Yugoslav Committee, whose members had been appointed by the Yugoslav authorities before arriving at El Shatt, produced a daily mimeographed newspaper called *Naš List* (‘Our paper’) which had a circulation of 500 copies, as well as educational materials for the camp’s schools. Its organized bureaucracy was a kind of government in miniature, whose records were repatriated to Yugoslavia after the war and are held at the State Archive in Split ([Abramac 2018](#): 90).

These refugees were housed in an isolated complex of ex-army bases partly because of their numbers, but also because of their politics. The Egyptian government, which operated under tight British supervision, had agreed to accommodate them on condition that they be confined to the eastern side of the canal, with restrictions on their movements that were notionally quite strict. ‘[N]o publicity of any sort (newspapers, radio, or periodicals)’ was meant to be released in Egypt: at a time of political tension and rocketing inflation, the government wanted to keep the presence of such a large group of ‘aliens’ secret.²⁹ (These conditions were honoured partly in the breach: the Yugoslav choir performed in Cairo and Alexandria, and the camp football team played friendlies advertised in English and Arabic with a team in Suez.) Army rear bases in the desert, left empty after the fighting in Egypt itself subsided and Allied troops were redeployed to other fronts, had already served a similar purpose, limiting the urban population’s exposure to foreign soldiers. But the nature of the site also indicates the Allies’ political ambivalence towards its inhabitants. The Yugoslav refugees were politically formidable, and closely connected to the Partisan leadership. The Allied authorities felt some admiration for ‘the only occupied country to field an above ground organized anti-fascist team’.³⁰ But this ‘anti-fascist team’ was dominated by the Communist Party, and as such it was also the object of British and American suspicion. The intensity of political engagement at El Shatt is evident in contemporary sources and later recollections of the camp. It helps to explain why the Yugoslav evacuees were held at a distance, on the ‘sour ground’³¹ of a site that was

‘but a latitude and a longitude’. Care was not lacking. But control at El Shatt was tighter, even though the Yugoslav refugees were—sheer numbers notwithstanding—overwhelmingly women and children (Bieber 2020: 299, n6), like the Greek refugees at Souk el Gharb.

Paradoxically, as other work by Malkki suggests (Malkki 1995a; see also Gatrell 1999: ch7; Gatrell 2013), this isolation almost certainly intensified rather than weakening their political mobilization. Florian Bieber argues that El Shatt became a crucible for the emerging Communist Yugoslav nation, ‘a microcosm of early Yugoslav state-building, the negotiation of relations between the Partisans and the western Allies, and calibrating the tools of control, consent, and repression among their people’ (Bieber 2020: 302). That control, indeed, was just as important to the Partisans as to the British, and keeping the refugees at El Shatt also distanced them from the Royalist government-in-exile in Cairo. But the site was surely no less politicized for its minority of anti-Partisan dissidents, and the Royalists who moved there after the war ended.

Conclusion

There is much more to say about the MERRA/UNRRA camps in North Africa and the Middle East: for example, about the role of Allied militaries in their construction and functioning; about their residents’ position within colonial politics that were all different but all racially hierarchized, as has been explored in other contexts (Lingelbach 2020; Robson 2022; see also Shahani 2021); perhaps above all, about how they were viewed by local populations, colonized and (in Algeria) settler. But for the purposes of this article we have focused quite tightly on the case study sites themselves and what they had previously been.

The implication for researchers across interdisciplinary refugee studies is that as we study any given camp and the experiences of the people who live there, we should systematically analyse the site’s prior uses. They do not *determine* the experiences of people encamped there, but they do create conditions that are likely to play out in certain ways. Jordanna Bailkin’s survey of refugee camps and internment camps in modern Britain, many of which saw ‘temporary’ accommodation stretch out over months and years, provides numerous examples (Bailkin 2018: ch1). Earls Court showground remained crowded but cheerful throughout the first world war, whereas the tented encampment for Basque child refugees at North Stoneham in the late 1930s descended rapidly into squalor. Former homeless hostels turned into ‘reception centres’ to accommodate Polish refugees (as well as unhoused Britons) after 1948 retained something of the workhouse, while former military sites accommodating different groups of refugees from Poles in the 1940s to Vietnamese in the 1970s and 1980s varied drastically depending on how badly they had decayed by the time they were reused and how remote they were. The way a camp’s origins shape the experience of its residents is a subject that deserves more systematic comparative study. Such a study could also inform humanitarian practice.

Bailkin's examples also show how the prior use of a site chosen for adaptive reuse as a refugee camp indicates the attitudes of the authorities to the people housed there. The mostly Belgian refugees at Earls Court were allies to be looked after for the duration of the struggle against Germany; the Basques, although children, were grudgingly accepted in conditions that made clear that Britain was no ally of the embattled Republic (Bailkin 2018: 41). The Poles had been allies in the battle against Nazism and were now in flight from communism, but accommodating them indefinitely raised awkward questions about the responsibilities of the state when British citizens also faced a housing crisis. And Britain's increasingly hostile attitude to most asylum-seekers continues to manifest itself in the choice of sites adapted to house them. This, too, deserves more rigorous comparative study, across many different contexts.

Recognizing that refugee camps are often adapted from existing sites and structures, and that this matters for the camp, is a step towards applying the methodological approach of the 'site biography' to the study of refugee camps. It is often the case that different populations of refugees are held, successively, in a single site. Similarly, refugees are often housed at sites that have previously served, or later serve, to 'contain' other mobile populations, from soldiers and prisoners-of-war to migrant workers and immigration detainees, from people with leprosy to quarantined travellers (Minca and Ong 2016; White 2020). A site biography can highlight the way the treatment of refugees fits into a larger logic of state efforts to manage 'suspect' mobile populations. And it can also help us recognize and analyse the diversity of what refugee camps become. The 1970s desert camps for Sahrawi refugees have become a tenuous kind of city; the 1940s Palestinian camps on the edges of Lebanese cities have become permanently disadvantaged urban quarters; but the self-settled Armenian refugee encampments around Aleppo and Beirut in the 1910s and 1920s became prosperous middle-class quarters with colonial sponsorship and international assistance (Watenpaugh 2006). Finally, not all camps remain camps or become cities. A site biography allows us to understand how some become the site of a memorial museum, like Rivesaltes in southern France, while others are commemorated with memorials (Shahani 2021). The graveyard at El Shatt was badly damaged in the Six Day War of 1967, but restored in the 2000s to play a role in the memory politics of post-Yugoslav Croatia, and the twenty-first century diplomacy of postcolonial Egypt (Abramac 2018: 100; President of the Republic of Croatia 2023)—now stripped of its communist symbols, but still laid out in the five-pointed star of the Partisans. The camp did not wholly 'return to desert'.

Co-Authorship (CrediT Taxonomy)

Mackinnon: investigation; writing—review and editing.

White: conceptualization; writing—original draft; writing—review and editing.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the editors of this special issue, the members of the ‘European Refugees in the Middle East’ discussion group (especially Esther Möller and Alex Lamprou), Lynn Abrams at the University of Glasgow, and the journal’s anonymous peer reviewers for their constructive feedback on drafts of this article.

Funding

This article was supported by a project grant from the Research Council of Norway (FRIHUMSAM 288398, PI Are Knudsen).

ENDNOTES

1. United Nations Archives, New York City, United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) (1943–46) [henceforward UNRRA], Balkan Mission and Middle East Office, Middle East Office. S-1313-0000-0043-00001—Office of the Historian—History of the Middle East Office. ‘United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. History of the Middle East Office’, n.d., p. 18. <https://search.archives.un.org/office-of-the-historian-history-of-the-middle-east-office-3> (NB: We include URLs for digitized folders from the UNRRA archives). Where documents within these folders are paginated, we include page numbers for specific quotes; for unpaginated documents, we use section numbers/letters where available. Archival references to specific documents are abbreviated after the first reference.
2. All quotes in this paragraph are from UNRRA, Bureau of Services, Camps Division of the Bureau of Areas—Subject Files—Camps and Procedures. S-1263-0000-0007-00001—Fouka Marine Camp. ‘Information on FOUKA MARINE CAMP obtained from Mr. Leslie Heath, American Friends’ Service Committee’, 28 March 1944. <https://search.archives.un.org/fouka-marine-camp-2>.
3. UNRRA, Bureau of Services, Camps Division of the Bureau of Areas—Subject Files—Camps and Procedures. S-1263-0000-0009-00001—Souk-el-Gharb—near Beirut. ‘Report on Souk el Gharb by Byrtene C. Anderson. May 27th–May 30th’. 15 June 1944, p. 2. <https://search.archives.un.org/souk-el-gharb-near-beirut-2>.
4. UNRRA, Bureau of Services, Camps Division of the Bureau of Areas—Subject Files—Camps and Procedures. S-1263-0000-0009-00001—Souk-el-Gharb—near Beirut. ‘Name of camp: Souk-el-Gharb’, compiled 6/8/44 (i.e. 8 June 1944 in the American mm/dd/yy format), 1-F. <https://search.archives.un.org/souk-el-gharb-near-beirut-2>.
5. UNRRA, Bureau of Services, Camps Division of the Bureau of Areas—Subject Files—Camps and Procedures. S-1263-0000-0009-00001—Souk-el-Gharb—near Beirut. ‘Greek refugee camp at Suk-el-Gab, Aley, nr. Beiruth’ by Michael Barratt Brown, 4 August 1943, p. 1 (NB: date given is ‘4. 8. 43’, which could be 4 August 1943 or 8 April 1943, but other documents refer to it as being dated August 1943) <https://search.archives.un.org/souk-el-gharb-near-beirut-2>.
6. UNRRA, ‘Report on Souk el Gharb by Byrtene C. Anderson. May 27th–May 30th’. 15 June 1944, p. 2.
7. UNRRA, ‘Report on Souk el Gharb by Byrtene C. Anderson. May 27th–May 30th’. 15 June 1944, p. 2.
8. UNRRA, ‘Report on Souk el Gharb by Byrtene C. Anderson. May 27th–May 30th’. 15 June 1944, p. 3.

9. UNRRA, 'Report on Souk el Gharb by Byrtene C. Anderson. May 27th–May 30th'. 15 June 1944, p. 3.
10. UNRRA, 'Greek refugee camp at Suk-el-Gab, Aley, nr. Beirut' by Michael Barratt Brown, 4 August 1943, p. 1.
11. UNRRA, 'Report on Souk el Gharb by Byrtene C. Anderson. May 27th–May 30th'. 15 June 1944, p. 1.
12. UNRRA, 'United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. History of the Middle East Office', n.d., p. 54.
13. UNRRA, 'United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. History of the Middle East Office', n.d., p. 29.
14. UNRRA, Bureau of Services, Camps Division of the Bureau of Areas—Country and Mission Files. S-1264-0000-0057-00001—MERRA—Khatatba—Egypt. 'Second Report on Khatatba Camp for Yugoslav Refugees. To Mr. Charles E. Bailey, Director. American Red Cross. Middle East Operations. From Ida McNair, American Red Cross, Khatatba', 9 September 1944, p. 1. <https://search.archives.un.org/merra-khatatba-egypt-2>.
15. UNRRA, Bureau of Services, Camps Division of the Bureau of Areas—Country and Mission Files. S-1264-0000-0062-00001—MERRA—Tolumat—Egypt. 'UNRRA Refugee Camp—Tolumat. Observations on the Functioning of the Camp Committee', 13 February 1945, p. 1. <https://search.archives.un.org/merra-tolumat-egypt-2>.
16. UNRRA, 'Second Report on Khatatba Camp for Yugoslav Refugees', 9 September 1944, p. 1. The report on Souk el Gharb by Byrtene Anderson cited above noted that it had a favourable climate for refugees with tuberculosis at Nuseirat and Moses Wells.
17. UNRRA, Bureau of Services, Camps Division of the Bureau of Areas—Country and Mission Files. S-1264-0000-0054-00001—MERRA—El Shatt Camp—Egypt. 'Information requested by refugee camp unit Bureau of Areas on EL SHATT CAMP, by S.K. Jacobs, Field Organiser UNRRA, Cairo, Egypt', 25 May 1944, p. 1. <https://search.archives.un.org/merra-el-shatt-camp-egypt-2>.
18. UNRRA, 'United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. History of the Middle East Office', n.d., p. 57.
19. UNRRA, 'United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. History of the Middle East Office', n.d., p. 63.
20. UNRRA, 'United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. History of the Middle East Office', n.d., p. 55.
21. UNRRA, Bureau of Services, Camps Division of the Bureau of Areas—Country and Mission Files, MERRA—Personnel, S-1264-0000-0045-00001. 'Proposed amendment to UNRRA Camps' Division W.E. (M.E/1906/1), effective from 27.12.43'. <https://search.archives.un.org/merra-personnel-3>.
22. UNRRA, 'Information Requested by Refugee Camp Unit Bureau of Areas on EL SHATT CAMP', 25 May 1944, p. 3.
23. All information and quotes in this paragraph are from UNRRA, 'United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. History of the Middle East Office', n.d., pp. 100–104.
24. UNRRA, 'United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. History of the Middle East Office', n.d., p. 66.
25. UNRRA, 'Information Requested by Refugee Camp Unit Bureau of Areas on EL SHATT CAMP', 25 May 1944, p. 4.

26. UNRRA, 'Information Requested by Refugee Camp Unit Bureau of Areas on EL SHATT CAMP', 25 May 1944, p. 40 for quote and *passim* for other information in this paragraph.
27. UNRRA, Balkan Mission and Middle East Office, Middle East Office. S-1313-0000-0012-00001—El Shatt. Untitled document [first two pages missing; begins on p. 3 with '1. Feeding of the Staff'], p. 4. <https://search.archives.un.org/el-shatt-141> (NB: The four digitized PDFs of this folder appear to be out of order as numbered; another of them ends with the first two [numbered] pages of what may be the same document, but the ink and type quality are different).
28. UNRRA, 'Information Requested by Refugee Camp Unit Bureau of Areas on EL SHATT CAMP', 25 May 1944, p. 14.
29. UNRRA, 'Information Requested by Refugee Camp Unit Bureau of Areas on EL SHATT CAMP', 25 May 1944, p. 15.
30. UNRRA, 'Information Requested by Refugee Camp Unit Bureau of Areas on EL SHATT CAMP', 25 May 1944, p. 37.
31. UNRRA, 'Information Requested by Refugee Camp Unit Bureau of Areas on EL SHATT CAMP', 25 May 1944, p. 9.

Abramac, G. (2018) 'Dalmatian WWII Refugees in El Shatt, Egypt: Narratives of Sanctuary and Suffering'. In Hasanhodžić, A., Rustemović, R., and Uhl, H. (eds) *Being a Refugee. A European Narrative*. Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Culture Studies and Theatre History, pp. 85–106.

Agier, M. (2011) *Managing the Undesirables: Refugee Camps and Humanitarian Government*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Ajlec, K. (2020) 'UNRRA and Its Arrival in Yugoslavia, 1944–1945'. *Istorija 20. veka* 38(2): 129–150.

Ajlec, K. (2021) 'Yugoslav Refugees and British Relief Workers in Italian and Egyptian Refugee Camps, 1944–1946'. In Reinisch, J. and Brydan, D. (eds) *Internationalists in European History: Rethinking the Twentieth Century*. London: Bloomsbury, pp. 105–123.

Aksu, P. et al. (2022) 'Destitution, hotels, and pandemic responses to asylum housing in Glasgow, Scotland'. *Refugee Law Initiative Blog*, 11 July, <https://rli.blogs.sas.ac.uk/2022/07/11/destitution-hotels-and-pandemic-responses-to-asylum-housing-in-glasgow-scotland/> (accessed 8 June 2023).

Alger Republicain (1946) 'Dans la République Socialiste de Fouka-Marine'. *Alger républicain*, 28 June 1946.

Austin, B.-G. H. (1920) *The Baqubah Refugee camp: An Account of Work on Behalf of the Persecuted Assyrian Christians*. London/Manchester: The Faith Press.

Baiklin, J. (2018) *Unsettled: Refugee Camps and the Making of Multicultural Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bakewell, O. (2014) 'Encampment and Self-Settlement'. In Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E., Loescher, G., Long, K., and Sigona, N. (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, pp. 127–138.

Berg, K. G. (2015) 'The Unending Temporary. United Nations Relief and Works Agency and the Politics of Humanitarian Assistance to Palestinian Refugee Camps 1950–2012'. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Bergen.

Bieber, F. (2020) 'Building Yugoslavia in the Sand? Dalmatian Refugees in Egypt, 1944–1946'. *Slavic Review* 79(2): 298–322.

Black, R. (1998) 'Putting Refugees in Camps'. *Forced Migration Review* 2: 4–7.

Boum, A. and Stein, S. A. (eds) (2019) *The Holocaust and North Africa*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

- Boum, A. and Stein, S. A.** (eds) (2022) *Wartime North Africa: A Documentary History, 1934–1950*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Burridge, A.** (2023) 'Towards a Hotel Geopolitics of Detention: Hidden Spaces and Landscapes of Carcerality', *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23996544231157254>.
- Corsellis, J.** (1994) 'Yugoslav Refugees in Camps in Egypt and Austria 1944–47'. *Refugee Participation Network newsletter*, 17, <https://www.fmreview.org/sites/fmr/files/HTMLcontent/rpn173.htm> (accessed 8 June 2023).
- Crisp, J.** (2015) 'Zaatari: A Camp and Not a City'. *Refugees International*, 9 October, <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/zaatari-camp-and-not-city> (accessed 8 June 2023).
- Esposito, F. and Tazzioli, M.** (2023) 'Cramp, Choke and Disperse: The Economy of Migrants' Confinement in the UK', *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23996544231157254>.
- Gatrell, P.** (1999) *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Gatrell, P.** (2013) *The Making of the Modern Refugee*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gemie, S. and Rees, L.** (2011) 'Representing and Reconstructing Identities in the Postwar World: Refugees, UNRRA, and Fred Zinnemann's Film, the Search (1948)'. *International Review of Social History* 56(3): 441–473.
- Gilson Miller, S.** (2021) *Years of Glory: Nelly Benatar and the Pursuit of Justice in Wartime North Africa*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Herz, M.** (ed.) (2012) *From Camp to City: Refugee Camps of the Western Sahara*. Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers.
- Holborn, L. W.** (1956) *The International Refugee Organization: A Specialized Agency of the United Nations: Its History and Work, 1946–1952*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Holian, A.** (2008) 'Displacement and the Post-War Reconstruction of Education: Displaced Persons at the UNRRA University of Munich, 1945–1948'. *Contemporary European History* 17(2): 167–195.
- Ibrahim, B.** (2021) *Refugee Settlement and Encampment in the Middle East and North Africa, 1860s–1940s*. Research guide, <http://refugeehistory.org/resources> (accessed 8 June 2023).
- Janmyr, M.** (2016) 'Spaces of Legal Ambiguity: Refugee Camps and Humanitarian Power'. *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 7(3): 413–427.
- Jerrems, A.** (2023) 'Hotels as Just-in-Time Border Infrastructure', *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23996544231157254>.
- Jerrems, A., Barry, K., Burridge, A. and Ozguc, U.** (2023) 'Border Hotels: Spaces of Detention and Quarantine', *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23996544231157254>.
- Jewish Telegraphic Agency Daily News Bulletin** (1944) *Algeria Cleansed of anti-Jewish Legislation, Jewish Leader Reports; Lauds J.D.C. Relief*, XI(249), 2 November, <https://www.jta.org/archive/algeria-cleansed-of-anti-jewish-legislation-jewish-leader-reports-lauds-j-d-c-relief> (accessed 8 June 2023).
- Katz, I.** (2022) *The Common Camp: Architecture of Power and Resistance in Israel–Palestine*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Knudsen, A. J.** (2016) 'Camp, Ghetto, Zinco, Slum: Lebanon's Transitional Zones of Emplacement'. *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 7(3): 443–457.
- Lamprou, A.** (2022) 'Negotiating Sexuality: Greek Refugees in the Middle East and Africa (1942–45)'. Paper presented at the conference International Organizations and Body Politics in MENA History, Mainz.
- Lingelbach, J.** (2020) *On the Edges of Whiteness: Polish Refugees in British Colonial Africa during and after the Second World War*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Malkki, L.** (1995a) *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Malkki, L.** (1995b) 'Refugees and Exile: From "Refugee Studies" to the National Order of Things'. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24(1): 495–523.

- Martínez Leal, J.** (2020) *El exilio republicano en el norte de África*. Universidad de Alicante. Available at <https://archivodemocracia.ua.es/es/exilio-republicano-africa/> (accessed 8 June 2023).
- Matulić, R.** (2014) *Feb 1944 El Shatt Egypt Nov 1948*. USA: Xlibris.
- McConnachie, K.** (2016) 'Camps of Containment: A Genealogy of the Refugee Camp'. *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 7(3): 397–412.
- Minca, C. and Ong, C.** (2016) 'The Power of Space: The Biopolitics of Custody and Care at the Lloyd Hotel, Amsterdam'. *Political Geography* 52: 34–46.
- 'Pablo De Azcarate Y Flórez'** (2018) *Real Academia de la Historia*, <https://dbe.rah.es/biografias/7284/pablo-de-azcarate-y-florez> (accessed 8 June 2023).
- Parsloe, T.** (2020) 'From Emergency Shelter to Community Shelter: Berlin's Tempelhof Refugee Camp'. In Scott-Smith, T. and Breeze, M. E. (eds) *Structures of Protection? Rethinking Refugee Shelter*. Oxford: Berghahn Books, pp. 275–286.
- 'Phyllis Mackenzie'** (no date) 'I. Phyllis Mackenzie at El Shatt Refugee Camp, 1944–5'. *Phyllis Mackenzie*, <https://www.phyllismackenzie.co.uk/el-shatt-refugee-camp/> (accessed 8 June 2023).
- Powell, G. A.** (ed.) (1919) *Four Years in a Refugee Camp. Being an Account of the British Government War Refugee's Camp, Earl's Court, London, 1914–19*. London: The Baynard Press.
- President of the Republic of Croatia** (2023) 'President Milanović Visits World War II Croatian Refugees' Memorial Cemetery at El Shatt'. *Predsjednik.hr*, 5 February, <https://www.predsjednik.hr/en/news/president-milanovic-visits-world-war-ii-croatian-refugees-memorial-cemetery-at-el-shatt/> (accessed 8 June 2023).
- Reinisch, J.** (2011) 'Internationalism in Relief: The Birth (and Death) of UNRRA'. *Past & Present* 210 (Suppl 6): 258–289.
- Reinisch, J.** (2013) 'Auntie UNRRA' at the Crossroads'. *Past & Present* 218(Suppl 8): 70–97.
- Robson, L.** (2022) 'UNRRA in North Africa: A Late Colonial History of Refugee Encampment'. *Past & Present*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtac022>.
- Rubio, D.** (2018) 'Stanbrook: Pasajeros y tripulación'. *Alicantepedia*, <https://alicantepedia.com/bases-de-daros/stanbrook-pasajeros-y-tripulaci%C3%B3n> (accessed 8 June 2023).
- 'Ruiz Pérez, Damián'** (2016) *Fundación Pablo Iglesias, Diccionario Biográfico del Socialismo Español*, <https://fpabloiglesias.es/entrada-db/ruiz-perez-damian/> (accessed 8 June 2023).
- Russell, E. K. and de Souza, P.** (2023) 'Soundmapping Hotel Detention', *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23996544231157254>.
- Salvatici, S.** (2012) 'Help the People to Help Themselves': UNRRA Relief Workers and European Displaced Persons'. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25(3): 428–451.
- Salvatici, S.** (2015) 'Sights of Benevolence: UNRRA's Recipients Portrayed'. In Fehrenbach, H. and Rodogno, D. (eds) *Humanitarian Photography: A History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 200–222.
- Salvatici, S.** (2017) 'Fighters without Guns': Humanitarianism and Military Action in the Aftermath of the Second World War'. *European Review of History: Revue Européenne D'histoire* 25(6): 1–20.
- Salvatici, S.** (2019) *A History of Humanitarianism, 1755–1989: In the Name of Others*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Scott-Smith, T. and Breeze, M. E.** (2020) *Structures of Protection? Rethinking Refugee Shelter*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Shahani, U.** (2021) 'The Dispersal of Displaced Persons in the British Empire and Beyond: From World War Two to the Partition of India'. *Refugee History*, 10 June, <http://refugeehistory.org/blog/2021/6/10/the-dispersal-of-displaced-persons-in-the-british-empire-and-beyond-from-world-war-two-to-the-partition-of-india> (accessed 8 June 2023).
- Steinmatsky, N.** (2009) 'The Cinettä Refugee Camp (1944-1950)'. *October* 128: 22–50.
- Stein, L.** (1979) *Beyond Death and Exile: The Spanish Republicans in France, 1939–1955*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Turner, S.** (2016) 'What Is a Refugee Camp? Explorations of the Limits and Effects of the Camp'. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 29(2): 139–148.
- Ubayasiri, K. and Balle-Bowness, A.** (2023) 'A Photo-Journalistic Exploration of COVID, Refugees, and Brisbane's Polymorphic Border', *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23996544231157254>.

- Watenpugh, K.** (2006) *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism and the Arab Middle Class*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- White, B. T.** (2016) 'Images of Refugee Camps, Part 1: Aerial Views'. *Singular Things*, 21 Feb. <https://singularthings.wordpress.com/2016/02/21/images-of-refugee-camps-part-1-aerial-views/> (accessed 8 June 2023).
- White, B. T.** (2019) 'Humans and Animals in a Refugee Camp: Baquba, Iraq, 1918–20'. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 32(2): 216–236.
- White, B. T.** (2020) 'Protection or Isolation? Humanitarian Evacuees in Australian Quarantine Stations'. In Scott-Smith, T. and Breeze, M. E. (eds) *Structures of Protection? Rethinking Refugee Shelter*. Oxford, UK: Berghahn Books, pp. 187–198.
- White, B. T.** (2023) 'The Global Origins of the Modern Refugee Camp: Military Humanitarianism and Colonial Occupation at Baquba, Iraq, 1918–1920'. In Knudsen, A. J. and Berg, K. G. (eds) *Continental Encampment: Genealogies of Humanitarian Containment in the Middle East and Europe*. Oxford: Berghahn Books, pp. 43–67.
- Williams, D.** (2010) 'Belongings: Post WWII Migration Memories and Journeys. Interview with Dragoslava Williams'. *Migration Heritage Centre New South Wales*, <https://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibition/belongings/williams/index.html> (accessed 8 June 2023).
- Young, H.** (2020) 'Life in the Aluminium Whale: A Study of Berlin's ICC Shelter'. In Scott-Smith, T. and Breeze, M. E. (eds) *Structures of Protection? Rethinking Refugee Shelter*. Oxford: Berghahn Books, pp. 163–174.