The twentieth century was dubbed the century of the refugee. War, the dissolution of multinational empires and the social engineering of totalitarian regimes were major factors in causing forced migration within Europe. Armenians, Cossacks, Jews and ethnic Germans in Central Europe were some of the victims of war and conflict in its opening five decades. Europe’s prolonged internal conflicts strengthened the forces of resistance to its far-flung empires. In the three decades after the close of the Second World War, European formal empires were wound up throughout Africa and Asia. More than a hundred newly independent states made their bow on the international stage. This process of decolonization coincided with massive displacements of population and resulting refugee flows. Taken together, the uprooting of populations in Europe and the wider world make one of the most terrible and tragic themes of modern history. There are, however, relatively few comparative examinations of forced migration, despite excellent case studies on such regions as the Balkans, central Europe, Africa and the Indian subcontinent. Dirk Hoerder, in his analysis of world migration, does, however, make it one of his categories, along with voluntary migration. 

Populations have been forcibly displaced throughout history. The technology of the modern state, however, has enabled this to occur on a much greater scale than in previous epochs. Modernity has also provided the potent brew of racial, scientific, ethnic and nationalist ideas that have prompted attempts to expel and even more terribly exterminate whole populations. Outside of Europe, nationalist struggles and the state-building processes initiated by elites who had seized the apparatus...
of the colonial state led to large-scale population displacements. Just under a million and a half French settlers fled Algeria when it became independent. Around 800,000 Portuguese settlers were expelled from the country’s West African territories. Religious conflict accompanying India’s independence created an eventual refugee population of around 18 million. Most study, however, has focused on the European experience of refugees arising from war and revolution. There are numerous works on decolonization, but its impact on forced migration has seldom been acknowledged, save in regional studies. There has been little comparative analysis of why decolonization as a process should have been attended by such profound population dislocation.

The aim of this chapter is twofold: first to consider the reasons why decolonization caused large-scale population displacements, second to illustrate the main varieties of decolonization-related forced migration. The chapter concludes with a brief reflection on the long-term psychological and social problems arising from exile from the ancestral home.

Three clear patterns of decolonization-related displacement can be discerned. First, the return of settlers to the European homeland along with groups of indigenous collaborators; second, migration that anticipated or accompanied independence as a result of ethnic fears and tensions amongst minorities; third, the post-colonial state’s expulsion of scapegoat communities as part of its process of nation building. Only groups involved in the final type of migration have been unequivocally termed refugees. Those caught up in the first two processes have been more frequently regarded as economic migrants or as internally displaced persons, even when their own perception is that of refugee status.

**Decolonization and forced migration**

Decolonization’s circumstances and characteristics determined its impact on migration. Prolonged colonial wars of national liberation were likely to result in the migration of white settlers and of natives closely associated with the security system. Ill-prepared and hasty exits could create vacuums in which rival ethnic groups contended for power. If power was transferred to a nationalist elite which had little involvement in the modern sectors of the economy, it was more likely to seek to expropriate comprador capitalists drawn from ethnic minority communities.

The European response to colonial crisis hinged on a number of factors. These included the impact of domestic and international opinion