Refuge in a Moving World

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Acknowledgements

This book is the culmination of a series of interdisciplinary research and action-research initiatives convened since 2015 as part of the Refuge in a Moving World network at UCL. These include the 2016 Refuge in a Moving World conference, ‘Hospitality and Hostility in a Moving World’ (kindly supported and funded by the UCL Institute of Advanced Studies, the UCL Grand Challenges Programme and the UCL Department of Geography); a UCL-wide 10-week seminar series with more than thirty speakers; and a wide range of small-scale interdisciplinary and cross-faculty research projects funded by the UCL Grand Challenges Programme.

Directed by Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh as an initiative of the UCL Institute of Advanced Studies – and with a current membership of over a hundred researchers, students and staff from across UCL – the network was born with two main aims. First, it intended to redress and challenge the limitations (and dangers) of the unequal representations of and responses to displacement processes unfolding (or becoming increasingly protracted) around the world. Second, it aimed to recognize that working together, across disciplines and boundaries, can lead to more nuanced understandings of the history, causes, experiences, representations and implications of diverse shifts in people, politics and perceptions – and can, in turn, stimulate more meaningful ways of responding to the human, material and representational effects of the moving world around us.

A collective commitment to opening up informed conversations around different ways of engaging with, and responding to, displacement was thus accompanied by the determination to bring together insights and findings from the numerous studies, projects and initiatives taking place across and through our university by, with, for and about people experiencing and responding to conflict and displacement.

This book is therefore the outcome of a truly collaborative endeavour, and I am grateful to all of the speakers, chairs, participants and members from UCL and further afield who have contributed to the Refuge in a Moving World (RiMW) network, including all of the authors and artists
who share their important research and reflections in the following pages (the majority of whom contributed to the above-mentioned 2016 RiMW conference and/or seminar series).

Prof. Tamar Garb (Director of the UCL Institute of Advanced Studies) unconditionally and wholeheartedly supported the birth and development of our interdisciplinary network and its activities, fostering and engaging in intellectual debate and exchange, awarding small grants and hosting our seminars, workshops, exhibitions and conferences. I am both personally and professionally deeply thankful for her mentorship since I joined UCL. Alongside the Institute of Advanced Studies, Dr Ian Scott (Director of the UCL Grand Challenges Programme) and Prof. Andrew Barry (Head of the UCL Department of Geography) have enthusiastically and generously supported our network and our events; UCL Grand Challenges also kindly provided funding to help support the development of this volume.

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The framing of this volume draws on insights and processes emerging throughout the AHRC-ESRC-funded interdisciplinary research project ‘Local Community Experiences of and Responses to Displacement from Syria: Views from Lebanon, Jordan and Syria’, known by its short title ‘Refugee Hosts’ (www.refugeehosts.org), on which the editor is Principal Investigator (Grant Agreement Number: AH/P005438/1). The book could not have been possible without support from the AHRC-ESRC and the Leverhulme Trust (PLP-2015–250).

The energy and commitment that colleagues from across UCL have dedicated to advance understanding and more meaningful responses to displacement around the world has extended to numerous activities designed to encourage and support UCL as a leading global and local university, in developing a sustainable approach to supporting prospective and current students and staff with personal and family histories
of displacement. Through dynamic staff–student initiatives, working groups, and extensive meetings and consultations with UCL management, since 2015 we have lobbied UCL to commit to widening access to our courses, departments and faculties, including by removing a series of implicit and explicit barriers to access. UCL’s research environment has been extremely supportive in advancing interdisciplinary knowledge regarding displacement, and has been a keen advocate for building bridges so that this knowledge can inform policy and practice – and we have encountered many ‘Refugee Champions’ across UCL. However, after nearly five years of advocating for change within our own university, at the time of writing, UCL has still not committed to developing a central, institutional response to support people with migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds in accessing our university. It is my hope that by the time this book is published, the slow process of institutional change will have gained the necessary momentum to make this paragraph redundant. For now: #UCLCommit.