

Conclusion

Rethinking Exclusion and Inclusion in Refugee Resettlement

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In concluding a book on Middle Eastern refugees, it is important to reiterate some sobering facts. According to the United Nations, 80 million people have now been forcibly displaced from their homes, including 26 million refugees. Two Middle Eastern countries, Afghanistan and Syria, are currently home to the longest wars, the largest numbers of casualties, and the highest rates of forced displacement, thus accounting for the largest number of refugees in the world today. But of the 45.7 million people around the world who are internally displaced, Iraq and Yemen have among the world's highest percentages. Moreover, Palestine has the longest history of forced displacement in the Middle East—now spanning more than seventy years—and some Palestinians have been doubly or triply displaced as a result of the ongoing wars in Middle Eastern countries.

This book has sought to shed light on the experiences of recent and long-term refugee displacement across and beyond the Middle East in order to understand how war has affected refugees' lives and how resettlement in other countries has unfolded. Facing risky and arduous journeys, Middle Eastern refugees have not always been well received by countries unprepared to take them. Even in presumably "safe" havens, refugees have often found themselves trapped in confusing and contradictory webs of immigration policies and asylum laws. Cumbersome bureaucracies and exclusionary politics have forced refugees into waiting patterns that have prevented them

from beginning new lives in host settings. Underfunded and understaffed aid agencies often provide only temporary and inadequate support. And increasingly conservative political regimes in many countries have fueled anti-refugee xenophobia, Islamophobia, and outright exclusion. As a result, many Middle Eastern refugees have found themselves abandoned and in limbo—facing life in squalid detention centers and refugee camps and succumbing to food insecurity, physical and mental health problems, discrimination, xenophobic violence, and many forms of structural vulnerability.

The goal of this volume, then, is to bring together for the first time anthropologists from around the world who have conducted ethnographic fieldwork with Middle Eastern refugee populations in order to examine cultural, political, and legal regimes of refugee exclusion and inclusion, particularly in Europe and North America, but also in the Middle Eastern countries where the majority of refugees have fled. Contesting the notion that Middle Eastern refugees constitute a uniform, bounded category, this book demonstrates that specific historical and political contexts matter when explaining whether refugee resettlement is inclusive or exclusionary, life-promoting or oppressive. Through ethnographic studies undertaken with refugee communities in the Middle East, Europe, and North America, the anthropologists in this volume have emphasized the many contingencies and uncertainties that make up day-to-day life for Middle Eastern refugees, but also the ways in which restrictions are being overcome. Indeed, case studies from multiple refugee settings truly highlight the manifold ways in which refugees experience and respond to these challenges.

By presenting a “view from below” and focusing on individual refugees and their experiences, anthropologists bring home a subject matter that can appear abstract and distant. Importantly, anthropologists register everyday situations that are traditionally not seen or heard because mainstream media focus on the catastrophic or criminal, neither of which represents what the majority of refugees experience in their daily lives. Equally importantly, anthropologists register encounters between themselves and refugees, between refugees and local citizens, and between refugees and representatives of the state. It is these specific encounters that enable us to turn the discussion of refugees away from generalizing “us versus them” debates and toward an exploration that emphasizes the interrelationship and interdependence of people in today’s world. Refugees are people who want similar things as most nonrefugees but, because of their situations, must work much harder to obtain them.

Moreover, anthropologists can contribute to a more nuanced “view from above” by breaking down “the state” into the actual agencies and agents that comprise it and by observing their actions in specific contexts. In the case of refugees, that means studying the speeches, decisions, and behaviors of politicians and community leaders, city councils, lawyers, and members of

police and security forces. Anthropologists can illustrate the precise roadblocks that confront refugees in any given context, and ask how they came to be placed. Agents of the state—politicians, bureaucrats, or members of the police—may enact regimes of exclusion or inclusion. Thus, it is important to interrogate the factors that produce different kinds of policy outcomes. Ever since James C. Scott’s (1998) now classic book *Seeing Like a State*, we understand that states may fail to impose certain society-building or organizing visions on their citizens. States in today’s neoliberal order may also experience uncertainty and precarity—some more than others—which is something to consider in the analysis of refugee resettlement.

At a fundamental level, this book asks what it means to be unsettled or settled, uprooted or rooted, unwelcomed or welcomed in the world today. Overall, the main answer to this question is that modes of exclusion and inclusion coexist and are activated in actual encounters. While considering these regimes of exclusion and inclusion, a number of salient questions have emerged.

Regimes of Exclusion

It is important to ask how exclusion is manufactured because, like inclusion, it is neither a natural nor inevitable condition in social affairs. Regimes of exclusion have specific political, legal, economic, and cultural contexts that may make exclusion appear to be a logical response to a crisis. Agents of nation-states, such as police officers, border guards, bureaucrats, social workers, or humanitarians, are working to impose various kinds of order, which may have deleterious effects on refugees themselves. These regimes of exclusion need to be studied, not only to be mitigated, but to be dismantled.

Who Counts as a Refugee? Several of the chapters in this volume focus on the definitional problems posed by the “refugee” label and what refugees have in common with other forcibly displaced persons and impoverished local populations. It is important that we do not let the refugee label hide important realities, such as the causes that turned regular persons into refugees in the first place. It is equally important to acknowledge the suffering of local populations in host countries that predate the arrival of refugees. Furthermore, the “counting” of refugees is troubled by problems of registration and monitoring, leading to the “discounting” of some refugees but not others. “Keeping count” of refugees will always be problematic, despite the efforts by UNHCR and other international agencies to monitor the ever-changing global dynamics of refugee flight and resettlement. For those agencies, the ever-increasing numbers of refugees may be overwhelming. For the concerned public as well, the surge in refugees may lead to feelings of paralysis.

What Are the Legal and Bureaucratic Challenges in Host Countries? Middle Eastern refugees face numerous challenges upon arriving in host countries, some of which are legal or bureaucratic hurdles. The bureaucracy of refugee resettlement, especially in disparate European nations, can be complex, and refugees can become entangled in complicated legalities not of their own making. Several of the chapters in this volume question regimes of refugee exclusion put in place either purposefully or through institutional negligence, even in some of the most humanitarian nations in the world. Refugees are often forced to wait for bureaucratic decisions, which is not merely a coincidental state that comes with seeking refuge; it is, as some of the authors in this volume have argued, something that is actively imposed by governmental bureaucracies to act as a deterrent to refugees and asylum seekers. As several chapters show, host states' services to refugees are often far from adequate. Yet when looking at individual encounters between state providers of assistance and refugees, it is also important to ask under what conditions and in what ways refugees respond.

What Are the Limits on Refugee Mobility? Refugees are defined as people on the move, as they leave war-torn homes to seek safety elsewhere in the country or abroad. Instead of speaking about unidirectional refugee movements "away from danger" and "toward safety," we must not lose sight of more complicated trajectories, including those that may force refugees to move "back and forth," or to "return" back home, sometimes forcibly. Refugee mobility today may include the threat or actual implementation of repatriation or deportation. The reality for many refugees is that their daily lives include "being stuck" in situations of prolonged or protracted displacement—situations they are forced to endure. In protracted displacement, refugees might find themselves moving out of a refugee camp, but are likely to find themselves among other marginalized communities, sharing similar class barriers to upward mobility with them. In a legal sense, temporary residency permits that are issued to a large number of asylum seekers contain within them the threat of future movement, or forced expulsion, because temporary residency rights can be revoked. Many refugees must fear continuously that they will be forced to keep moving.

What Are the Long-Term Costs of War? In all cases, Middle Eastern refugees have fled war and political violence in their home countries, the legacies of which are often embodied by individual refugees. Those who cause the displacement are rarely held to account. The responsibility to care for the displaced then falls on individuals, communities, and nation-states that willingly or forcibly become hosts. War and displacement take a great toll on human health. The long-term wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria have been no exception (Mazzarino and Lutz 2019). Our book examines the human health costs of Middle Eastern war, and whether medical problems are being resolved, or not, in host country settings. What do foreign gov-

ernments owe sick refugees in terms of healthcare (Ticktin 2011)? This is an especially important question in the American case, given that U.S. military intervention has been the cause of great human suffering in both Afghanistan and Iraq. What do individuals or communities in host countries owe to the sick and displaced? If questions about responsibility for the causes of displacement are not clearly raised, it can lead to refugees shouldering the responsibility for both their illnesses and displacement.

Regimes of Inclusion

Many of the chapters of this volume are hopeful, pointing to the ways in which Middle Eastern refugees are increasingly being accepted, accommodated, and integrated into host societies, especially in Europe. Furthermore, Middle Eastern refugee populations have shown remarkable resilience, often amid profound adversity.

Do Alliances and Activism Matter? In numerous host communities around the world, Middle Eastern refugees are overcoming resettlement challenges, sometimes partaking in forms of local activism and alliance building with local populations. In some cases, resettlement in host societies is successful, marking the end of suffering and the beginning of new lives. Several chapters in this volume highlight the agency, proactivity, and solidarity between refugees and local activists, who have succeeded in bringing about positive change and legal resolutions in favor of refugee admission. According to these case studies, local alliances and activism matter. Indeed, several of the chapters of this volume feature public protests, which have garnered widespread community support, even from local police. As refugees raise their voices and demand to be heard, sites of refugee activism and resistance are reshaping existing power dynamics.

Who Enacts Care? Several of the chapters in this volume examine issues of care and caregiving for refugees, not only on the part of local volunteers, but among refugee men and women themselves. Even in their darkest hours of need, refugees are enacting regimes of care for each other, including parents and children, husbands and wives, and nonrelated individuals. Several chapters in this volume show that young refugee men are often helping each other to achieve masculine adulthood far from home. New regimes of care are emerging as well in resettlement communities, as seen in refugee shelters, community centers, and refugee clinics. Several of the chapters in this volume encourage readers to think about who cares about and for refugees. Just as refugees care about each other and their families, local communities can extend their welcome, letting Middle Eastern refugees know that they have new friends ready to help them on their arrival.

Who Provides (Access to) Healthcare? The focus on the clinical world is important in refugee studies because refugee health is often gravely impacted by war, flight, and the stresses of resettlement. As shown in this volume, increasing focus is being placed on refugee health, particularly in specialized clinics in countries with subsidized healthcare. Furthermore, programs are being put in place by international agencies and consortiums to address the physical, mental, and reproductive healthcare needs of refugee populations. In this volume in particular, we focus on refugee reproductive health, highlighting the physical and social challenges that refugees face, but also the willingness of some healthcare providers to make common cause with refugees in their struggles.

How Is Refugee Humanitarianism Being Reshaped? After much criticism of the way humanitarian aid is being delivered, we have seen improved refugee policies in host countries. Multiple stakeholders are reshaping debates on refugee resettlement in the Middle East, Europe, and North America. Today, the presumably unidirectional trajectory of humanitarian assistance—of “us” helping “them”—is being reevaluated and recast in multidirectional terms. Not only are UN agencies and nongovernmental organizations attempting to meet the needs of Middle Eastern refugee populations, but so are local humanitarian actors, from agency social workers to ordinary citizen volunteers. Refugees themselves organize to be part of decisions about the allocation and delivery of humanitarian aid. In particular, this volume highlights new forms of “inclusive partnerships” that involve multiple stakeholders coming together to reshape the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

New Directions

The ethnographic studies presented in this volume paint a much more nuanced picture of Middle Eastern refugees than has previously been available. Furthermore, the studies suggest some important new directions for research. Clearly, this volume is only a beginning; much more anthropological work still needs to be done. Here, we suggest several new directions for future anthropological investigation.

Linking Causes to Outcomes. While providing nuanced and site-specific understanding of refugees’ experiences in different locations, anthropologists must draw clear connections between the *causes* and the *outcomes* of the Middle Eastern refugee crisis. This means that scholarship on refugees must move beyond harrowing stories of dislocation and trauma—and the accompanying trope of “White saviorism”—to shift attention toward the actors and actions that have actually caused refugees’ dislocation and suffering. As demonstrated by Inhorn (2018), Iraqi refugees bring with them medical conditions caused by U.S. weapons. Similarly, the United States is believed

to have sent nearly \$1 billion in arms, ammunition, and training to Syrian rebel groups, weapons that often ended up in the hands of Islamist fighters (Dick 2019). Thus, the answer to the question of how we “settle” refugee issues needs to remain closely tied to the agents and conditions that “unsettled” them in the first place. In the case of Middle Eastern refugees, much more scholarship must be devoted to understanding the effects of war and political violence as the main cause of refugee flight.

Refugees from Libya and Yemen. This book focuses on the effects of wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, as well as on ongoing Palestinian displacement. But it largely overlooks two other brutal wars in the Middle Eastern region—namely, the civil war in Libya, which emerged in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings, and the current Arab Gulf war in Yemen, which also emerged post-2011 and was instigated by the much stronger state of Saudi Arabia. As noted above, Yemen is in the midst of the world’s worst humanitarian crisis, with 24.1 million people (or 80 percent of the Yemeni population) in need of humanitarian assistance, according to the UNHCR. Although the crisis in Libya is of much smaller scale, the UNHCR still estimates that 1.3 million Libyans are in need of humanitarian assistance in a country presenting a “complex displacement” scenario. Relatively few, if any, anthropologists are working with these vulnerable Yemeni and Libyan populations. Many Yemenis have fled to countries in the Horn of Africa (e.g., Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia). Thus, future anthropological work must trace these refugee displacements.

Resettlement Communities in Other Parts of the Middle East. This book explores the experiences of Middle Eastern refugees living in the neighboring countries of Iran, Jordan, and Lebanon, but not in Turkey, which is a large non-Arab country that has taken in the majority of Syrian refugees. New studies of Syrian refugees in Turkey are clearly needed. Similarly, both Iraqis and Syrians have fled to Egypt over the past two decades, seeking refuge in a country that also suffered political violence in the aftermath of the so-called “Arab Spring.” The Arab Gulf states, such as Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, have not done their fair share to resettle Middle Eastern refugees on their territories. Still, some Afghans, Iraqis, and Syrians have fled to the Arab Gulf. Thus, it will be important for future anthropologists to study experiences of refugee displacement in parts of the Middle East that are not yet well represented.

Resettlement of Minority Communities. In this volume, only one chapter focuses on the flight and resettlement of a Middle Eastern ethnic minority community (i.e., the movement of Afghan Hazaras to Iran). Yet, over the past two decades, Middle Eastern ethnic minority populations have suffered tremendously and have had urgent needs for humanitarian assistance. This is especially true of the minority Yezidi community in Iraq and Syria. Under ISIS, Yezidi men were killed, women were forced into sexual slavery, and

children were turned into child soldiers. Although the plight of Yezidis has been captured by the news media, this minority refugee community has not yet been well studied by anthropologists. Similarly, minority Kurds in Syria are being crushed between two opposing regimes—the government of Bashar Al-Assad in Syria and the government of Recep Erdogan in Turkey. The future of the Kurdish population is uncertain and requires ongoing study by anthropologists. In addition, sexual minorities are at a heightened risk of discrimination at “normal” times in the Middle East, but in times of war, sexual minority persons are at grave risk of persecution, torture, and loss of life. Anthropologists must shed light on their experiences. In general, minority communities in the Middle East must be a future anthropological priority. Where have these communities fled? Who has provided their care and shelter? These are urgent questions.

Studies of Internally Displaced Persons. Finally, we also urge our fellow anthropologists to respond to another immediate call to action: namely, to enter Middle Eastern war zones themselves to understand the dynamics and consequences of conflict for internally displaced persons. Virtually all anthropological research conducted to date has taken place in the relative safety of host country communities. But internally displaced persons (IDPs) do not have the luxury of such safety. As shown in Kali Rubaii’s courageous chapter—based on her own risk-filled fieldwork in Iraq—life for the internally displaced is precarious. In the future, we must study the lives of Middle Eastern IDPs in their home countries, in addition to the Middle Eastern refugees who have fled across international borders. Clearly, this move from host to home country is risky and requires ingenuity. But only then will anthropologists be able to reveal the devastating costs of Middle Eastern war.

The fact that most of the mainstream media have moved on from refugee stories to the coronavirus pandemic and various political machinations in Europe and North America makes it more important than ever for scholars to fill in the gaps of the public debate. Anthropologists have the special ability—and responsibility—to describe the ongoing gravity of the Middle Eastern humanitarian crisis while also preserving the dignity, individuality, and preciousness of all those who have been forcibly displaced in the Middle East and beyond.

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