

# Introduction

## Un-Settling Middle Eastern Refugees

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The first-ever Global Refugee Forum convened in Geneva on 16–18 December 2019, on the invitation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nation’s main refugee agency (“UN Urges ‘Reboot’” 2019). Heads of state and international aid organizations, as well as business leaders, representatives of civil society organizations, and refugees met in Switzerland to discuss how to meet the needs of increasing numbers of forcibly displaced persons. All of the attendees agreed on the severity of the problem, but there was no agreement on the amount of aid needed and who was going to pay for and deliver it. While the Global Refugee Forum was in session, the Syrian government launched a renewed offensive on its civilians in the country’s northern Idlib province, a military operation that would lead to the displacement of more than 235,000 people by Christmas, most of them refugees from prior violence (British Broadcasting Corporation 2019).

At the end of what UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi called this “decade of displacement” (UNHCR 2019), the world continues to struggle to find ways to respond adequately to the humanitarian crisis in the Middle East, in a world where there are now more refugees than at any time in modern history, including during World War II. It was in the aftermath of that horrifying war—which saw unprecedented numbers of displaced persons—that world leaders first gathered in Geneva, Switzer-

land, to define the status of refugees. The goal of that convention—called the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, or the 1951 Refugee Convention for short—was to establish protections for persons “outside the country of their nationality” if they could provide evidence for a “well-founded fear of being persecuted on grounds of race, religion, nationality, [or] membership of a particular social group of political opinion” (Gatrell 2013: 6). Not every member state of the United Nations signed the resulting document. But those that did “agreed to the principle of non-refoulement whereby no refugee could be returned to any country where he or she faced the threat of persecution or torture” (Gatrell 2013: 6).

By international law, then, individuals who have crossed international borders as refugees have a right to protection from host states if returning to their own states would harm them. However, the 1951 Refugee Convention left outside its mandate a very large group of forcibly displaced persons—namely, internally displaced persons (IDPs)—who fled their homes but did not make it across any international borders. It also left unspecified what forms of protection host states must provide to refugees. This lack of clarity has generated a patchwork of largely inadequate refugee and asylum policies and practices in nation-states around the world.

Furthermore, it is important to distinguish clearly between two terms that are often used interchangeably in public debate: “refugees” versus “asylum seekers.” Every asylum seeker is a refugee, but not all refugees become asylum seekers (Gibney 2004: 5–11). For asylum to be claimed, a person must be near or inside the border of the country where an asylum petition will be lodged. Most of the world’s refugees remain in countries close to the ones they left, waiting to return to their homes once the conditions that forced them to flee cease to exist. But more and more persons now travel from their home countries to Europe and North America to ask for asylum there, and “it is the growth in asylum seekers that has, over the last thirty years, made refugees such a burning political issue” (Gibney 2004: 9). Put differently, asylum seekers are refugees at Europe’s and North America’s doorstep.

## **Middle Eastern Refugees**

This book focuses specifically on Middle Eastern refugees. “Middle Eastern” here refers to individuals residing in the geographical area from Egypt in the west to Afghanistan in the east.<sup>1</sup> While aware of the problematic colonial legacy of the term “Middle East” and the existence of other maps of the region that also feature, for example, the countries of North Africa (Volk 2015: 13–16), we use “Middle Eastern” here as an umbrella term that comprises the region’s countries most affected by war and forced displacement.

Unfortunately, the Middle East is a region with a well-documented history of forced displacement from the time of the Ottoman Empire until today (Chatty 2010; Gelvin 2015). In that sense, the topic of Middle Eastern refugees is not new. Looking at the historical record, it becomes clear that Middle Eastern refugees do not come out of nowhere: they have been produced by wars in the Middle East (Inhorn 2018), which have led to death and destruction, various forms of physical and structural violence, precarious economic and social conditions, and dysfunctional and highly volatile political environments.

Indeed, no other region of the world has suffered so much war, turmoil, and population disruption due to protracted conflict than the Middle East (Mowafi 2011). Conflicts dating back to the end of World War II can be traced to six critical forces. First was the founding of the state of Israel in 1948, which resulted in an ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine, as well as a series of wars between Israel and neighboring Arab nations. The second cause was colonial independence movements, especially against the French but also the British, which led to wars of independence. Third were sectarian-inflected battles, such as the civil war in Lebanon and the eight-year Iran-Iraq War, launched by Saddam Hussein and his secular Baath regime against the Shia theocracy that came to power in Iran in 1979. A fourth factor was thus the rise of Islamist movements in the region, which led to wars between the more secular and Islamist forces. Fifth was the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, which has played out in the Middle East in ways that continue to haunt the region, particularly in Afghanistan. Finally, the 2011 Arab uprisings—which began as peaceful protest movements to gain greater political freedom, economic prosperity, and human dignity—descended into military repression and turmoil in several countries and erupted into the most bloody war in the country of Syria.

These various wars have created the Middle Eastern refugees who are the focus of this book—namely, Afghans, Iraqis, Palestinians, and Syrians. Over the past decade, they have been the nationalities with the dubious distinction of rising to the top of the UNHCR charts. Chronologically speaking, Palestinians are the nationality with the longest history of displacement, beginning in 1948 with the founding of the state of Israel. Approximately 750,000 Palestinians became refugees as a result of the 1948 war, and none were allowed to return to the homes or communities from which they were displaced. Thus, today, more than 7 million Palestinian refugees live scattered around the world, with more than 1.5 million of them in refugee camps within the Middle East.

Afghans began leaving their homeland in large numbers with the beginning of the Soviet invasion in 1979. Due to subsequent wars—including the United States' war in Afghanistan, which began in 2001 after the September 11 terrorist attacks, and has continued for two decades—Afghans have been

forced to flee, primarily to neighboring Iran or Pakistan, in search of safety and stability. Iraqis, too, have experienced two US military interventions: the first Gulf War in 1991, which lasted seven months, and the second Iraq War in 2003, which officially ended nine years later in December 2011, but which has lasted well beyond in terms of violence and troops on the ground. Both of these Iraq wars have produced large numbers of refugees and IDPs.

In 2011, in response to popular protests, the Syrian government began attacking its own citizens, leading to a decade-long war that has been fueled by support from foreign governments, including those of Iran, Russia, Turkey, the Arab Gulf states, and the United States. The many front lines in Syria have been shifting over the past decade, also spilling over into the Kurdish sections of southern Turkey. Moreover, in parts of eastern Syria, Islamist militias used the resultant power vacuum to attempt to establish their idea of an Islamic State. Targeted by Syrian government, militia, Islamist, and external military forces, more than half of Syria's population has become displaced. Half of these forcibly displaced persons have fled the country as refugees, while the other half remain as IDPs inside Syria's borders.

Today, Middle Easterners make up the majority of the nearly 80 million forcibly displaced persons. This is double the number seen twenty years ago (UNHCR 2020). Of the world's 26 million refugees—20.4 million of them registered with the United Nations—the largest population consists of Palestinians, 5.6 million of whom have lived since 1948 under the mandate of the second largest UN refugee agency, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). Syrians now comprise the largest newly created refugee population, with nearly 6.6 million refugees, and 6.2 million IDPs in need of humanitarian assistance (UNHCR 2020). Afghanistan currently places third on the UNHCR's list of globally displaced persons, with 2.7 million Afghans registered with the United Nations despite not having formal refugee status in the neighboring host countries of Iran and Pakistan (UNHCR 2020). Iraq has among the highest number of new IDPs, more than 3 million since 2014, and 6.5 million in need of humanitarian assistance (UNHCR 2020). Adding up these numbers, Middle Eastern refugees currently make up more than half of the world's total refugee population. As a region, the Middle East has more IDPs than any other.

## **Regimes of Exclusion and Inclusion**

It is important to remember that refugees do not choose to be uprooted; somebody with control over deadly force displaces them. Historically, Germany created the largest number of refugees during World War II. As a result, Germany today sees refugee resettlement as a moral and political responsibility. Even though Germany did not cause any of the deadly conflicts

that have led to their displacement, the country has taken in more Middle Eastern refugees than any other European country (Bock and Macdonald 2019: 13; Volk, this volume). Germany and Finland—both strong European welfare states—grant foreign nationals rights in their respective constitutions (Bock and Macdonald 2019; Gifford, this volume). While it can be debated whether Germany and Finland live up to the actual spirit or just the letter of their laws, granting a certain set of rights to noncitizens via a national constitution has been an important step for these states in promoting a more inclusive national community. It is important to remember that the United Nations may be the source of most human rights legislation, but it is nation-states that must implement and enforce them, thereby creating viable and welcoming regimes of refugee inclusion.

Unfortunately, as of 2018, less than 5 percent of refugees identified by UNHCR were resettled—or a mere 0.2 percent of the global refugee population (Baldoumas, van Roemburg, and Truscott 2019). Although some European states, such as France, Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, have taken in considerable numbers of Middle Eastern refugees, they have still been criticized for failing to take in their “fair share” (Baldoumas, van Roemburg, and Truscott 2019), while the underresourced Mediterranean nation of Greece continues to be overwhelmed with boatloads of newly arriving refugees (Grewal, this volume; Ingvars, this volume), many of them housed in deplorable conditions on the Greek islands. Unfortunately, Greece’s appeal to share the refugee burden with other EU states has fallen on deaf ears. Indeed, many of the wealthier European states, such as Denmark and Norway in Scandinavia, have chosen to turn away Middle Eastern refugees at their doorsteps (Bune, this volume; Gifford, this volume). Increasingly, right-wing governments have come to power in many Western European nations by promulgating anti-immigrant rhetoric grounded in Islamophobia and rationalized by threats of terrorism.

Unfortunately, the United States—a country once known for its refugee inclusion, particularly in the aftermath of its twenty-year military intervention in Vietnam—has become one of the most profoundly exclusionary regimes in the world. On 1 November 2019, U.S. president Donald Trump capped the number of Iraqis eligible for priority admission, even though most had served with U.S. troops in Iraq. Despite an estimated 110,000 applications at various stages of the approval process (Jakes 2019), only 4,000 special immigrant visas (SIVs) were granted for Iraqi men who had served as aids and interpreters for U.S. forces and faced a “well-founded fear of being persecuted” in their home country. The United States is a signatory to the 1967 UN Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees—which universalized the 1951 Refugee Convention by dropping references to “European refugees” in the context of World War II. But during the Trump presidency, the United States no longer lived up to its moral obligations to protect those

who had been displaced, particularly through America's own wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Inhorn, this volume).

At the same time, countries that did not sign the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol now host some of the largest numbers of refugees. For instance, the relatively small Middle Eastern nation-states of Jordan and Lebanon have received large numbers of Palestinian refugees over many years (Barbosa, this volume; Pérez, this volume). In recent years, both countries have also taken in millions of Iraqis and Syrians. Turkey is currently number one on the UNHCR refugee host country list, with more than 3.6 million Syrian nationals now living on Turkish soil. Ironically, Turkey is a signatory to the 1951 Convention, but it never signed the 1967 Protocol, which means that it officially grants refugee protections "only to Europeans" (Chatty 2018: 230).

Turkey, a non-Arab Middle Eastern nation, has taken in the largest number of Arab refugees from Syria, throwing into question the moral and political responsibility of the wealthy Arab Gulf states to aid in Syrian resettlement. As of this writing, it is also important to note that the Arab Gulf is witnessing the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with Saudi Arabia leading a nine-state coalition in a devastating war against Yemen. The UNHCR (2019) estimates that 24 million Yemenis, or 80 percent of the total population, are in need of some form of humanitarian assistance. Two out of three Yemenis are unable to afford food, and half of the country is on the brink of starvation. One million cholera cases have occurred in Yemen since 2018, 25 percent among children, making this the largest cholera epidemic in the world. Yet the military and public health crisis in Yemen has received little media or scholarly attention, prompting the question, Does anyone care about this new population of forcibly displaced Middle Easterners?

## **Scholarly Perspectives on Un-Settling Refugees**

Although the UNHCR continues to report record-breaking numbers of forcibly displaced Middle Eastern people, global media attention to the refugee crisis has waned. Such attention was at its peak in 2015, when boatloads of Middle Eastern refugees began washing up, both dead and alive, on Europe's shores. It was at that point that scholarly attention to Middle East refugees began to gain significant traction, with researchers entering the host communities to which vulnerable populations had fled.

Two disciplines in particular took interest in the Middle Eastern refugee crisis. The first is the discipline of international relations (IR), one of the subfields of political science. Since refugees cross nation-state borders, and therefore subvert, undermine, or challenge state sovereignty—a core principle of the international order established by the Treaty of Westphalia in

1648–refugees, by default, become a security threat to that order. Moreover, since international governmental and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), such as the United Nations, the International Red Cross, or the International Organization for Migration, handle many of the bureaucratic and logistical responsibilities for individuals who find themselves displaced, most IR classes that deal with the role of international political bodies in addressing global crises cover the issue of refugees.

International relations scholars often work with an implicit or explicit bias toward a stable international order, as well as a bias toward the state and its rights. However, as some scholars have pointed out, a critique of the state and state agencies becomes necessary when these institutions fail to see what human beings must endure as a result of the policies they enforce (Fassin 2011: 222). States can be actors that erect physical or legal barriers to entry, pushing refugees to undertake ever riskier sea passages or clandestine (refrigerated) truck rides in order to find their entry. Yet states are also actors that grant residency rights and dispense aid to refugees, especially in welfare states with high tax burdens on their citizenry. Because of their state-centered point of departure, IR scholars tend to aggregate their findings, resulting in what anthropologist Liisa H. Malkki (1995: 504) calls “a view from above.”

In contrast, a “view from below” has been the main focus of anthropology, the other discipline that has engaged in research on refugees over several decades (Malkki 1995). Anthropologists tend to emphasize the day-to-day experiences of refugees in circumscribed contexts, as they attempt to make new lives in trying circumstances. Anthropologists gain their “on-the-ground” perspectives of refugee life from fieldwork conducted over a period of time in sites such as refugee or detention camps, refugee housing centers, waiting rooms in health clinics or asylum offices, public meetings, or protests, as well as by analyzing representations of refugees in various media. Anthropologists often work with an explicit or implicit bias toward individuals or small communities and the promotion of their human rights.

Both anthropology and IR start their analyses with the same premise: namely, that all human life should offer some measure of order and stability, even in situations of ongoing movement (Malkki 1995: 508). Additionally, both anthropologists and IR scholars work with or toward the notion of “citizenship” as a category that needs defending or obtaining. In that sense, neither knowledge domain questions the fundamental global order of states with boundaries that require passports and permits. States, by definition, include citizens and exclude noncitizens. But in reality, states exercise their regimes of inclusion and exclusion in different ways at different times. For instance, France granted 95 percent of asylum seekers refugee status in 1976, but in 2006 that number had fallen to 6 percent (Fassin 2011: 220). Between 1946 and 1994, the United States granted protection to almost 3 million

refugees (Gibney 2004: 132). But in 2019, the Trump administration slashed the refugee cap to 18,000, curtailing the United States' role as a safe haven.

Clearly, informed discussions about the ways refugees are—or are not—being admitted and resettled in the wealthiest nations in Europe and North America are still critical and need to be continued by IR scholars, anthropologists, and other concerned scholar-activists. What anthropology can offer, perhaps more than any other discipline, is the breaking down of stereotypes, or those generalized perceptions of entire populations that are based on the actions of just a few. In the context of Middle Eastern refugees, we frequently encounter stereotypical representations, including masses of hapless victims streaming into Western countries to burden their welfare systems, or, more troublingly, Muslim refugees threatening to attack societies in pursuit of fundamentalist religious goals. The first stereotype often accompanies images of the elderly, women, and children, while the second invariably pictures young men, at times featuring their mug shots after arrest. Because of the resentment and fear elicited by the overreporting of isolated violent incidents, constructive debates about refugees and their rights to find new homes have become very difficult in both Europe and North America. It is impossible to build trust among people when stereotypes remain such a prominent part of ongoing discussions. While it is important to acknowledge the existence of fear and distrust, it is urgent to overcome both.

## Five Themes

To that end, this is the first volume that focuses exclusively on Middle Eastern refugees through an ethnographic lens. All of the contributors are anthropologists who have conducted recent research with displaced Middle Eastern populations, including Afghans, Iraqis, Palestinians, and Syrians. Some of these anthropologists have worked with refugee populations still living in the Middle East (i.e., in the Gaza Strip, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon). Others focus on Middle Eastern refugees who have made their way to Europe (i.e., Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, and Greece) and North America (i.e., Canada and the United States).

Taken together, their research shows that Middle Eastern refugees experience both regimes of exclusion *and* inclusion as they confront the challenges of involuntary displacement. Refugees face legal, financial, and cultural barriers that restrict their ability to move about, enroll in school, access health care, or find housing in the countries that host them. Refugees have to confront existing stereotypes and prejudices. Yet, refugees can also find spaces where they can make themselves heard, obtain rights from host states, and receive support from local communities. Refugees undoubtedly experience



asymmetrical power relationships—states police their legal status; aid organizations control their financial support; and some citizens in host countries create unwelcoming discourses. But (state) power is never absolute. Power can be wielded by forcibly displaced persons themselves in particular ways at particular times, often in concert with host-society supporters.

The chapters of this volume are grouped together around five major themes that highlight the ways in which exclusion and inclusion can occur simultaneously. While some chapters highlight more forcefully the exclusionary aspects of state power, others provide nuanced examples of human agency, resilience, and resistance as Middle Eastern refugees respond to exclusion by demanding their welcome.

### *Part I. (Dis)Counting Refugees*

The first section of the book begins, quite appropriately, in the Middle East—reminding us that Middle Eastern nations have done much more than the West to shoulder the contemporary refugee burden. The chapters in this section also show that Middle Eastern host nations have not been entirely or uniformly magnanimous. Middle Eastern refugees have been discounted *as refugees* in several Middle Eastern settings, and even forced to return to their home countries amid ongoing war. Within host countries, governments and government agencies can turn refugees into second-class citizens who need to be watched and whose rights need to be curtailed. Commonly, a nation-state will seek to restrict refugees' movements by placing them in camps or in other sites of surveillance. If states grant temporary residency permits, they often come with restrictions. In situations of precarity, refugees may need to continue to move and seek out economic opportunities, thereby violating state rules. Refugees may move out of camps into urban dwellings, while other impoverished persons who are not refugees may move into refugee camps as a form of available, precarious housing.

Who then exactly “counts” as a refugee? This issue can be contentious. The different labels applied to forcibly displaced persons may lead to dramatically different outcomes. For example, are displaced Iraqi Arabs who flee from Anbar Province in western Iraq to the semiautonomous northern region of Iraqi Kurdistan internally displaced persons or refugees? The Iraqi government in Baghdad considers Arabs from Anbar Province who flee north to the Kurdish city of Erbil as IDPs, but the government of semi-autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan may consider them refugees, as long as they do not pose a threat to Kurdish security (Rubaii, this volume). Similarly, are forcibly displaced Afghans living in Iran refugees according to the 1951 Refugee Convention? Or are they mostly economic migrants looking for better opportunities, while their own country languishes under four decades of perpetual war? The Iranian government has given different answers to this

question at different points in its history, leading to significantly different treatment of displaced Afghans in their country (Adlparvar, this volume). For Palestinians living in Lebanon, the “refugee” label may prevent us from seeing important similarities between refugee populations and other disenfranchised communities living in proximity (Barbosa, this volume). While this book deals with the lives of forcibly displaced persons, and the contributors use the labels introduced above, it is important to acknowledge that these terms have frayed edges.

The three chapters in this section discuss how Middle Eastern host countries label and deal with refugees from neighboring countries. These refugees are viewed as anonymous numbers to be managed, as economic burdens on the state, or as potential security threats to be ousted. Indeed, new regimes of exclusion are in some cases leading to forcible deportation of Middle Eastern refugees back to war zones.

Kali Rubaii explains in chapter 1, “When States Need Refugees: Iraqi Kurdistan and the Security Alibi,” that refugees allow governments to build up security states to surveil and control their populations, thereby turning on its head the conventional wisdom that refugees threaten nation-states. Conducting her fieldwork among Iraqi farmers from Anbar Province who had fled repeated outbreaks of violence to the safer Iraqi Kurdistan region in the north, Rubaii was told about Kurdish policing of refugee movements. Anbaris were the target of night raids, interrogation, and deportation, even as they were provided with refugee status and aid in the city of Erbil. Claiming that “good refugees don’t move around,” Kurdish security forces disregarded farmers’ need to check up on their fields. Furthermore, by 2015, Anbari people seeking refuge in semiautonomous Iraqi Kurdistan were suspected of being ISIS supporters because of their regional origin. By including some displaced people as “refugees” and excluding others as “terrorists,” Kurdish counterinsurgency regimes carefully policed the movement of displaced people to strengthen claims to statehood. In the name of protecting refugees, Kurdistan received not only international humanitarian support, but also a major thrust of military expertise and supplies by which to enforce its borders. Thus, defining and policing refugee movement became a core alibi in the construction of a security state.

In chapter 2, “Navigating Precarity, Prejudice and ‘Return’: The (Un) Settlement of Displaced Afghans in Iran and Afghanistan,” Naysan Adlparvar takes a close look at the long-term displacement of Afghan Hazaras who—in 1979 and 1998—went to live, and whose children were born, in Iran. A Shia minority group inside Afghanistan who were specifically targeted by the Taliban, the early Hazara refugees obtained “blue cards” from the Iranian government, granting them limited work and residency rights. But post-1990, with Iran’s economy in shambles, rights and benefits were rescinded, leaving newly arriving Afghan refugees and their descendants in

a more precarious position. Furthermore, Adlparvar shows that by 2018, difficult economic conditions in Iran made it necessary for refugees to move back “home”—a place they may have never seen before—looking for ways to make a living. Indeed, 773,000 Afghans “returned” from Iran due to a declining economy and coercion by Iranian authorities. They arrived to a resurgent Taliban and massive internal displacement. Most of them experienced exclusion based on ascribed ethnicities and identities as outsiders. This chapter draws heavily on the migration experiences of two Afghans, Hekmat and Sayid Basir, both born in Iran but later relocated to Afghanistan. Adlparvar concludes that the challenges experienced by Afghans in Iran, compounded by the circumstances and effects of relocation to Afghanistan, contribute to deepening states of precarity, and, for many Afghans, extended states of unsettlement.

Chapter 3, “Unsettling ‘Refugees’ as a Category: Labeling, Imagined Populations, and Statistics in a Palestinian Refugee Camp in Beirut,” by Gustavo Barbosa, examines the “refugee” label as a category. Barbosa argues that by focusing on a person’s legal exclusion in a host state, refugee debates often sideline much more significant regimes of social and economic exclusion, which are shared by other disenfranchised communities inside the country. Barbosa presents three nuanced family biographies. The interlocutors all live inside or in close proximity to the Shatila refugee camp in Beirut, Lebanon, imagined as a uniformly Palestinian community. Yet, as Barbosa reveals, these lower-class families are not all Palestinian. This chapter thus shows the problematic nature of some of the abstractions—or “imagined populations”—statisticians and policymakers work with in their refugee studies. Indeed, Barbosa asks, what do generalizing labels such as “Palestinians,” “refugees,” and “refugee camps,” which show up so habitually in statistical studies and policy reports, effectively mean? When manufacturing such generalizations, what is excluded? While there is no doubt that Palestinians face barriers for legal inclusion in Lebanon, they share much in common with other poverty-stricken communities in the country. Employing a Marxist lens that privileges class solidarity over other forms of ethnic or national solidarity, Barbosa speculates whether class might enable “Arab encounters” of a different kind and serve as a basis for political mobilization.

## *Part II. Protesting Exclusion*

This section of the volume moves to Europe, showing how welfare states may or may not welcome Middle Eastern refugees and extend their largesse to these newcomers. These chapters present powerful examples of the ways in which refugees are assigned a second-class status and disavowed as citizens, even in the most humanitarian regimes in Europe. But refugees do

not simply accept the conditions of their displacement. These chapters also show quite vividly how refugees advocate for their rights. Indeed, this section of the book demonstrates the highly creative and often effective strategies that have allowed some Middle Eastern refugees to forge networks of solidarity with supporting actors in different host societies—whether they be refugee advocacy groups, activists, social workers, or anthropologists themselves—who unite with refugees to overcome the barriers they face.

These chapters highlight the differences that can prevail within host communities and countries. Within some European countries, pro-refugee activists have vociferously advocated for refugees and asylum seekers, welcoming them into their communities through their support and helping to direct political debates. Yet, these chapters also show that anti-refugee groups in many Western European countries may seek to intimidate refugees and asylum seekers and try to hijack political debates by instilling fear. Within any receiving community or country, different refugees may have vastly different experiences—for example, Syrian families versus young solo Afghan and Iraqi men. At the same time that the number of refugees has reached alarming heights in many European countries, public attention to the topic, as well as rates of admission, are dropping precipitously. This is particularly true in the resource-rich Western European countries such as in Scandinavia, which would otherwise be expected to host them.

In chapter 4, Lindsay A. Gifford explores “Middle Eastern Refugeehood in the Happiest Place on Earth: Syrians and Iraqis Entering Finland’s Welfare State Bureaucracy.” Finland is ranked the world’s happiest country and is admired for its equality and high per capita GDP. Yet within this environment of strong state capacity, Middle Eastern refugees in Helsinki do not evenly experience or perceive welfare state beneficence. The Finnish state’s record in dealing with refugees is mixed: it can be humanitarian or inhumane, depending upon the individual case under review. Gifford particularly juxtaposes the experiences of Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Finland. Syrians, who generally arrived in Finland as family units, were welcomed despite expressions of racism, while many Iraqi men were rejected for asylum because they arrived in Finland alone. This differential treatment led Iraqis to organize a 141-day-long protest in a public plaza despite freezing weather conditions. Finnish locals supported the Iraqi protestors, arguing for social inclusion amid otherwise exclusionary state policies. As Gifford concludes, it is important to treat legal policies and bureaucratic methods of state exclusion and inclusion as flexible and changing in response to refugee and community activism.

Chapter 5, titled “‘I Live Here; I Have a Right to Be Here’: An Afghan Refugee’s Disorientations and Insistence on Inclusion through Theater,” by Julie Nynne Bune, illustrates a different form of agency—that of a young

Afghan woman, Aliah, who speaks her mind on stage in a theater workshop. Young Afghan refugees in Denmark face uncertain futures. A recent change in Danish immigration policy from “integration” to “deportation” means that residence permits for refugees are currently issued for only one to two years, with the imminent risk of deportation. Young refugees like Aliah must navigate this uncertainty while at the same time negotiating their position in Danish society and within their own families. Aliah’s story demonstrates how theater workshops produce spaces for Afghans to articulate themselves in bold and critical ways. “I live here; I have a right to be here” is Aliah’s creative response to being silenced by a Danish official who visits her school. Through acting out possibilities, Aliah is able to overcome the disorientation and rejection she feels, not only by Danish society, but by her own family as well. Bune is both ethnographer and activist, leading theater workshops following Augusto Boal’s work on the Theater of the Oppressed. Using the scripts that refugees produce in the workshops in addition to ethnographic interviews and participant observation, Bune deepens our understanding of refugees claiming their rightful place in the Danish welfare state.

In chapter 6, “Demanding Their Welcome: Agency-in-Waiting at a Protest Camp in Dortmund, Germany,” Lucia Volk examines the situation in Germany in 2015, when the country received close to one million asylum petitions, a record-breaking number, with most applicants from Syria. Germany’s asylum bureaucracy, cumbersome in a normal year, came close to a standstill. German politicians across the spectrum struggled to find a unified response, as did the European Union. Syrian refugees, for their part, engaged in their own struggles to obtain humanitarian asylum and protection from war and political persecution. In the city of Dortmund in northwest Germany, the extended waiting time imposed on refugees during the asylum application process generated a 53-day-long public protest of Syrian refugees, which was supported by local immigrant rights groups, such as Refugees Welcome Dortmund, and members of left-leaning parties and community organizations. Protected by Dortmund police against neo-Nazi attacks, the Syrian refugees in the protest camp demanded that their asylum applications be approved faster so that they could bring their families to Germany legally. As long as the men waited in Dortmund, their families awaited death in Syria, linking the asylum process to the loss of Syrian lives. At the end of the protest, German authorities reviewed and approved the asylum applications of the protesters, who brought their families to safety. By organizing and executing their public protest in Dortmund, Syrian refugees exercised “agency-in-waiting,” demanding their rights from the German public, politicians, and ultimately the asylum bureaucrats who adjudicated their applications.

### *Part III. Making Lives in Exile*

In situations with little hope of legal resolution to their displacement, refugees must find ways to make do with limited opportunities. Protracted displacement requires endurance. Sometimes refugees have to invent new life trajectories for themselves that might not correspond to their ideal imagined futures but that still enable them to live meaningful lives. Refugees may need to seek out work or education outside of state-sanctioned and supported channels, relying on each other and on refugee solidarity networks. In particular, young refugee men may need to adjust their culturally informed expectations of becoming autonomous financial providers to what is feasible in the absence of job opportunities or steady income, while still living up to cultural expectations of caregiving and reciprocity.

Indeed, meeting normative masculine expectations—including that a Middle Eastern man should receive an education, establish a household, marry and have children, then assume the “provider role” for his nuclear family and his aging parents—becomes nearly impossible for most refugee men, whether remaining in the region or resettling elsewhere. Making lives in exile may entail a refashioning of masculinity, as dreams and aspirations become curtailed. In this section of the volume, we see young men trying to move ahead with their lives, despite profound structural and legal constraints that marginalize and unsettle them.

In chapter 7, “Living as Enduring: The Struggle for Life against the Limits of Refuge among Gaza Refugees in Jordan,” Michael Vicente Pérez looks at the ways in which Palestinian refugees from Gaza, who came to reside in Jordan in 1967, make their life in exile both dignified and livable. The Gaza camp is one of ten official UN refugee camps in Jordan. But unlike other Palestinian camps in the kingdom, its inhabitants are *de jure* stateless. Denied Jordanian citizenship, they have lived for more than fifty years as a stateless community excluded from some of the most basic rights. Gaza refugees cannot vote, work for the government, or own property. These limits and others have resulted in a chronic condition of vulnerability that reveals the limits of refuge in protracted situations. Specifically, the chapter argues that refuge is grounded in acts of endurance that challenge Gazans’ exclusion as noncitizens and that seek to establish forms of living they can claim as their own—an effort that Pérez characterizes as “living as enduring.” Based on interviews with twenty Gazan refugees in the Jarash refugee camp in Jordan, Pérez zooms in on the story of two young Gazan refugee men: Shadi, who struggled in the informal economy but eventually landed a job with an international company; and Rami, who succeeded in winning an international educational scholarship to the United States. In emphasizing living as enduring, Pérez emphasizes that these ex-Gazan refugees work hard to make their exile bearable, exercising a form of

agency characterized by striving, experimentation, and “active waiting” in limbo.

Chapter 8, “Reimagining ‘the Arab Way’ in Exile: Futures ‘Off Line’ among Syrian Men in Amman,” by Emilie Lund Mortensen, examines “the Arab way,” defined in collective terms as a linear life course from childhood to marriage to the position of family breadwinner, which is expected among contemporary urban middle-class men in Syria. This chapter demonstrates how the Arab way has been profoundly disrupted for young Syrian refugee men in Jordan, excluding traditional futures for them, but also opening other paths. Introducing the story of a young Syrian refugee named Hani, Mortensen shows how his circumstances made a desired marriage difficult to pursue, but still allowed him to provide daily care for his sick refugee mother. Brought “off line” in such ways, experiences of exile force young Syrian men such as Hani away from expected masculine trajectories, but reposition them as caring moral agents nonetheless.

This theme of masculinity and care is also found in chapter 9, “Proactive Reciprocity: Educational Trajectories Reclaimed through Patterns of Care among Refugee Men in Greece.” Árdís K. Ingvars explains how many refugee men in Greece imagine education as a pathway to decent employment, active citizenship, and modern masculinity. Yet forcibly displaced single men in Athens face limited access to government services and no access to higher education or job training. In this case, many of these young refugee men seek free language lessons offered by Greek solidarity initiatives to increase their prospects. Within solidarity spaces, where their uncertain legal status is approached with reciprocity and autonomy by existing solidarity members, the men can begin to reconfigure knowledge production by teaching their own classes, highlighting the diversity of their home communities and sharing their expertise with newly arriving refugees and volunteers. As a result, through inclusive practices and care across ethnicities, ages, genders, and sexualities, young Middle Eastern refugee men in Greece increase their opportunities for the future and perform what Ingvars describes as a new kind of “proactive reciprocity.”

#### *Part IV. Seeking Health*

Many refugees arrive in their host societies needing medical care, especially after surviving war-related violence causing physical injuries and disabilities, toxic exposures, and mental health stresses and traumas. Indeed, refugees who are admitted to host countries are often selected out of a large pool of applicants for resettlement because of their medical vulnerabilities (Ticktin 2011). Yet, depending on the site of resettlement, refugees may or may not receive adequate medical attention, particularly in societies with-

out access to universal health coverage. Furthermore, once inside doctors' offices, exclusionary practices may occur when refugees ask for help.

This section of the volume focuses on North America, where the United States and Canada provide contrasting regimes of care. In the United States, with its fee-for-service medical system, Middle Eastern refugees can face major obstacles in accessing the care that they need. Not only are medical centers sometimes understaffed and underfunded, but American medical providers may operate with significant prejudices toward the refugee populations they serve. Western medical practitioners may be ignorant of Middle Eastern cultural sensitivities, and much doctor-patient communication may be lost in translation. Furthermore, medical services in the United States are the most costly in the world, meaning that affordable care can become an impossibility. In Canada, on the other hand, where refugees have been welcomed by the Canadian government, access to state healthcare services has been far greater, helping refugees to settle into their new surroundings. Still, as this section highlights, offering culturally sensitive care can be a challenge, even in refugee-friendly medical clinics in Canada. Furthermore, refugees may come with significant reproductive and sexual health challenges, which are difficult to discuss even under the best of clinical circumstances. In this section, we see how issues of virginity and hymen repair, fertility and infertility, and pregnancy and cesarean section are handled in North American reproductive healthcare settings—sometimes quite sensitively, and at other times with callous disregard.

In chapter 10, “America’s Wars and Iraqis’ Lives: Toxic Legacies, Refugee Vulnerabilities, and Regimes of Exclusion in the United States,” Marcia C. Inhorn reminds readers that American wars in the Middle East have long-lasting consequences, not only for populations in the region, but also for those who flee. As a medical anthropologist, Inhorn analyzes health hazards, many of them chronic and irreversible, which plague Iraqis who were exposed to U.S. radioactive weaponry. During her ethnographic research among Iraqi refugees in America’s poorest big city, Detroit, Michigan, Inhorn listened to many stories of serious male infertility among Iraqi men who had been exposed to wartime toxins. Yet these men found themselves in a state of “reproductive exile,” unable to return to their home country with its shattered healthcare system, but also unable to access costly assisted reproductive technologies in the private U.S. healthcare system. This chapter thus examines Iraqis’ overall structural and reproductive vulnerability in the U.S. setting, where most Iraqi Muslims live well below the federal poverty line. Iraqi refugees have had to face ten major resettlement challenges over the past two decades, even though many Iraqi men previously risked their lives assisting U.S. forces. This chapter concludes by describing new regimes of refugee exclusion in the United States under President Donald Trump’s “Muslim ban” and cap on refugee admissions. Ultimately,



the chapter questions America's commitment to Iraqi lives amid America's responsibility for their displacement.

Chapter 11, "Regimes of Exclusion in the Reproductive Healthcare Setting: Exploring Experiences of Syrian Refugees in San Diego, California," by Morgen Chalmiers, illustrates the many structural barriers and stereotypes that Syrian refugee patients face when making and attending prenatal care appointments in San Diego, California. Both a medical student and an anthropologist, Chalmiers displays keen sensibilities on both sides of the medical encounter. In the contemporary political climate of xenophobia and anti-refugee sentiment, biases and stereotypes may shape healthcare providers' ideas about their pregnant Syrian patients and influence the kind of care they provide or withhold. Syrian refugee women are blamed for "low health literacy" and "noncompliance" when they are unable to navigate a healthcare system that many U.S. citizens struggle to understand. Furthermore, this chapter illustrates how pregnant Syrian refugee women's encounters with the U.S. reproductive healthcare system are deeply shaped by providers' Islamophobic assumptions, as well as American gender norms that define "responsible" versus "irresponsible" reproduction. Nevertheless, Syrian women do not uncritically submit to patronizing regimes of exclusion that characterize them as uneducated and irresponsible. Rather, Syrian women adopt innovative strategies to negotiate their inclusion and ensure their access to high-quality, respectful prenatal care that "good" patients should receive.

In chapter 12, "Valuing Health, Negotiating Paradoxes: Medicalization of the Hymen, Hymenoplasty, and Women's Healthcare in Ontario," Verena E. Kozmann analyzes how Middle Eastern refugee women negotiate culturally sensitive healthcare in Toronto, Canada. While the Canadian universal healthcare system is meant to reflect a regime of inclusion, healthcare professionals working with refugees often operate at its margin. In this case study, Middle Eastern refugee patients requesting female genitalia procedures—namely, hymen repair surgery (hymenoplasty) and female virginity testing—embody highly charged discourses concerning women's rights and self-determined sexuality. A topic that is either regarded as taboo, or severely judged by Westerners as evidence of oppressive patriarchal structures in Middle Eastern communities, female genitalia procedures put female refugee patients in a particularly difficult position when seeking healthcare in their new home. Canadian medical practitioners, for their part, are also placed in a morally and ethically challenging position when asked to participate in a secretive procedure leading to potential "virginity fraud" and the perpetuation of gender-based sexual discrimination. This chapter thus focuses on the everyday interactions of healthcare professionals in a Toronto refugee clinic with their patients, who are mainly Syrian and Iraqi refugee women. The chapter shares both patients' and providers' perspectives, in-

cluding what hymens and hymen repairs mean for young women of Middle Eastern background. Seeking to make informed choices about their bodies, these refugee women may experience a form of inclusion if met by culturally competent medical practitioners at one of the most intimate moments of their reproductive and sexual lives.

### *Part V. Reshaping Humanitarianism*

In the final section of this book, the authors investigate specific encounters and relationships between humanitarian organizations and refugees. International humanitarian institutions have been criticized for leading refugees into situations of dependency by allocating funds for the perpetuation of their refugee status. Yet, the face of humanitarianism has been changing, not only because neoliberal logics have decreased the overall aid budget, shifting much of the burden of self-sufficiency onto refugees, but also because refugees take part in shaping the aid they receive. Whether it is through project partnerships between aid givers, host country agencies, and refugees, or negotiations in individual refugee–aid worker encounters, “helping refugees” is not a simple, direct path. Moreover, refugees in prolonged exile have had to learn to help themselves in light of fluctuating funding levels from international institutions.

For instance, in chapter 13, “A Death Sentence? UNRWA in the Trump Era,” Khaldun Bshara responds to the 2018 decision by the U.S. government to cut off all of its funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the UN institution created in 1948 specifically to respond to the Palestinian refugee crisis. Although UNRWA today obtains its funding from a variety of international donor countries, the United States had been prominent among them. Thus, in the aftermath of the 2018 Trump administration announcement, alarmed UNRWA officials, EU representatives, and regimes of host countries issued statements detailing the cataclysmic consequences of the funding cut for both Palestinian refugees and regional stability. In this chapter, Bshara disentangles the politics of the Palestinian question—specifically their right to return to Palestine—from the humanitarian question of providing food, education, and healthcare for forcibly displaced Palestinians. Bshara shows that the U.S. political calculus to force Palestinian refugees to stop demanding their right of return will not succeed. During previous reductions of UNRWA’s aid budget, Palestinian refugees built more homes in camps and began to commemorate their homeland with more frequency. Yet, Bshara also shows that a possible “death sentence” will be felt by camp-based refugees, who will suffer from further austerity measures including food insecurity if significant funding cuts are made. This chapter thus forces us to see beyond humanitarian politics or speculations about the future of refugees. Instead, it care-

fully interrogates the human ramifications of changing refugee funding landscapes.

In chapter 14, “Race, Religion, and Afghan Refugees’ Practices of Care in Greece,” Zareena A. Grewal considers the changing role of faith-based organizations in the (often failed) humanitarian efforts of Greece’s bloated NGO ecosystem, as well as the role of religion in the humanitarian responses initiated by Afghan refugees themselves in Athens. Beyond the purview of states and NGOs, Muslim Afghans in Greece have developed networks of support in their own communities and with other Muslim communities in Greece as they deal with the pressures of pervasive anti-Muslim racism, which sometimes makes them the targets of white supremacist violence. Despite the illegibility of Islamic relief work and the racialized stigma attached to Islam, refugee activists serve the needs of refugee communities in Athens and, through their practices of care, expand the category of basic needs to include their religious needs around funerary rights, prayer services, Islamic charity (*zakat*), and dignity. Some Afghan refugees who have converted to Christianity also engage with U.S.-based evangelical Christian international NGOs (iNGOs). Because of these privileged relationships with iNGOs, born-again Afghan Christians tend to receive more resources for both their basic and religious needs from their religious brethren abroad. Yet, as shown in this chapter, Afghan Muslims manage to care for the living and dead amid both structural and physical violence.

Chapter 15, “Blurred Lines and Syrian Tea: Negotiations of Humanitarian-Refugee Relationships in France,” by Rachel J. Farell, turns our attention to the micropolitics of interactions between Syrian refugees and French social workers who are employed by humanitarian aid agencies. Basing her research in a humanitarian housing center providing temporary shelter for Syrian refugees in a Parisian suburb, Farell examines the ways in which Syrian refugees in France have advantageously navigated relationships with humanitarians and renegotiated the norms of humanitarian engagement in their own lives. Her research is situated during a tense time in France, where far-right politics, national unrest and protest, anti-migration sentiment, and rising rates of Islamophobia have created a socially tenuous *mélange*. Despite these social factors, this chapter argues that the power dynamics between humanitarians and refugees can be shifted and negotiated in ways that promote social inclusion. The chapter offers three powerful vignettes of everyday social interactions: first, of Syrian refugee families extending their tea hospitality to humanitarian workers during home visits, thereby forging more personal relationships and obtaining better services; second, of humanitarian workers defending the rights of Syrian teenagers to take shortcuts by fence-jumping, even protecting them against the complaints of hostile French neighbors; and third, a French *crêpe*-making lesson turned into an Arabic sweets production, when Syrian women concerned about the

French baker's cleanliness invited her to learn from them instead. Clearly, Syrian refugees in France are neither inherently helpless nor automatically victimized while living in a refugee housing center and depending on government aid.

In the final chapter 16, "Inclusive Partnerships: Building Resilience Humanitarianism with Syrian Refugee Youth in Jordan," Catherine Panter-Brick asks, how do we come together to influence narratives of exclusion and inclusion in systems of humanitarian assistance? Her chapter argues for the need to build and sustain "inclusive partnerships" in humanitarian spaces as a pathway to improve the life chances of war-affected people and social cohesion in their communities. Panter-Brick draws on her own experience leading a research consortium—involving scholars, practitioners, policymakers, funders, media, refugees, and host communities—to evaluate youth-focused humanitarian programming with Syrian refugees in Jordan. She illustrates the regional tensions that threaten acts of hospitality and solidarity, and the contested notions of "rights," "dignity," and "social inclusion" in the lived experiences of refugees and citizens. Her chapter employs visual ethnography to provide specific examples of how young refugees intersect with humanitarian work, illustrating narratives of courage, dignity, and resilience. This "vertical slice" ethnography of the humanitarian ecosystem in Jordan helps to connect refugees' personal lives to policy interventions designed to address the emotional, social, economic, and political issues of forced displacement and resettlement. As this chapter concludes, inclusive partnerships lay the foundations for local, regional, and international actors to move from refugee crisis management to what Panter-Brick calls "structural resilience" in humanitarian action.

## **Conclusion: Ethnographies for a More Settled Future**

Ultimately, this ethnographic collection of timely research on Middle Eastern refugees unsettles many of the dominant media narratives, cultural assumptions, and racist stereotypes that have accompanied these refugees as they have fled from danger to what they hope will be places of safety. As many of these chapters show, new homes are not necessarily "safe," nor is resettlement necessarily a "refuge." However, the case studies in this volume also offer ample hope for social inclusion in host societies, based on the goodwill of refugees and their allies. In this regard, anthropologists can play a crucial role in documenting refugee encounters and alliances, humanizing the sometimes vitriolic discourses about Middle Eastern refugees, and, in doing so, work toward a better, more tolerant, inclusive, and just social world.

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## Note

1. We define this geographical area according to the United Nations' mapping project: <https://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/mideastr.pdf>.

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