

Concluding Remarks

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As of September 2020, there were nearly 80 million forcibly displaced people worldwide (UNHCR 2020). Among them were 5.6 million Syrians who fled their country. Turkey, together with Lebanon and Jordan, are the leading host countries for Syrian refugees. While millions of Syrians remain displaced within their own country, those who have found a way to overcome increasingly sealed borders are struggling with anti-immigrant measures, xenophobia, mounting racism, and limited access to basic human rights. The pandemic of racism and intolerance has a longer history than that of Covid-19; at this writing, however, both are in full swing.

When we started working on this book, the growing population of refugees the world over was already facing challenging conditions; the criminalization of asylum seekers and restrictive measures taken against them by the wealthy states of the North, limited access to basic rights in the host countries, and protracted incarceration in refugee camps with inadequate facilities were very much in evidence. An increasing number of refugees were defying European borders, and Europe was thus forced to pay more attention to them due to a simple accident of geography. Most of the discussion taking place there concerned potential ways to keep the refugees near their countries of origin. Europe's immediate periphery turned into a buffer zone, whose function was to keep the refugees out of the European Union itself. Southern and Eastern European countries began to grapple with an unprecedented influx of refugees. In the meantime, limited humanitarian relief and assistance were offered by the wealthier members of the European Union so that the already economically struggling host countries were forced to shoulder an increasing share of the burden.

People do not become refugees as a result of individual actions in specific settings. Rather, the refugee problem is the inevitable result of the international state system in which we live (Haddad 2008). The increasing

emphasis placed on aligning rights with belonging points directly to the international context in which the refugee problem has arisen. The current focus on security and policy has suppressed any possibility of addressing the actual reasons for which refugees become refugees. Although the motivation for seeking refuge is often a war, the causes of that war are not questioned. Everyone agrees that refugees experience unbearable and inhuman conditions in their home countries, but providing them with humanitarian relief is preferred to taking direct political action that might address the war that made such relief necessary.

Focusing on Syrian refugees in Europe and Turkey, the chapters in this book offer a variety of perspectives and research results. The authors mainly address the challenges that refugees face in different localities and make us think of, and question, the international context. Rising nationalism in Europe, conditions prevailing in refugee camps in Greece, the criminalization of asylum seeking, and the working conditions faced by Syrian refugees are just some of the topics addressed by this book. Furthermore, although these issues certainly remain important and relevant, conditions have worsened with the ongoing pandemic, the economic crises, fires, closed borders, and an increasingly harsh anti-immigrant and racist political climate.

We believe this book contributes to furthering the public's understanding of the current state of affairs for refugees. Once a hero and now a criminal, the refugee has seen their image evolve in recent years in accordance with the changing political interests of concerned governments. But refugees are, first and foremost, our neighbors, our friends, our families; hearing their stories, understanding the causes that have forced them to leave their homes, and showing solidarity with them must be our primary response.

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References

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