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# Refuge in a Moving World: Tracing Refugee and Migrant Journeys across Disciplines. Edited by Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh. UCL Press, 2020, pp. 529

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## Book Review

Irene Tuzi<sup>a,b</sup>

### REFERENCE

Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2020). *Refuge in a Moving World: Tracing Refugee and Migrant Journeys across Disciplines*. UCL Press, 2020, pp. 529. ISBN (hard cover): 9781787353176

In *Refuge in a Moving World*, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh brings together over thirty authors from different disciplines to discuss the idea of refuge. Originating from the academic network called *Refuge in a Moving World* at University College London, this edited volume challenges the monolithic representations of refugees and displacement and proposes a more nuanced understanding of the history, causes, experiences, and responses to refugeehood. Set against the notion of “crisis”, this book challenges representations that have dominated the public humanitarian narrative in the past decades. Indeed, to counteract widespread xenophobic responses to migrants and refugees around the world, humanitarian actors have often created “pro-refugee” narratives that have “securitized” displaced people (p. 2) and limited their agency. They have portrayed refugees as victims and passive recipients of aid, as “ideal refugees” “worthy” of humanitarian assistance, or placed them into

categories of exceptionalism—such as what Fiddian-Qasmiyeh calls the “super refugee”. These narratives generate inclusion and exclusion and keep displaced people “in their place” within a framework of epistemic violence (p. 3). To challenge these representations, this volume presents displacement and forced migration not as something that people simply experience, but as experiences to which people respond.

The volume is organised into four thematic parts. In the first we find eight contributions discussing the complexity of researching refugeehood. From different perspectives, these chapters critically reflect on creative methodologies, including participatory research approaches (p. 23), autobiographies, and interdisciplinary approaches. For example, the authors in this section create “intersections between academic modes of knowledge production and artistic expressions” (p.107). They reflect on how to write about the camp (52) and how to use visual

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approaches (e.g., film) to talk about forced migration (p. 94). The second part includes nine chapters and focuses on responses to displacement. Through artistic interventions and research papers, these chapters explore how people and organizations engage in different forms of responses to displacement. For example, the authors in this section explore the visual politics of the "refugee crisis" through the images of Alan Kurdi (p. 166) or the systemic exclusions of groups of migrants, through rhetorics of distance and proximity offered, for example, by the LGBTI asylum advocacy to engage a wider public in "caring for the plight of LGBTI asylum seekers" (p. 145). The third part reflects on the intersections between individual responses to displacement and external interventions. The five chapters included in this section focus on well-being and coping (p. 289) and the question of resilience in displaced children (p. 306), and they discuss "acceptable and unacceptable forms of homophobic harm" (p. 273). This part invites analyses between lived experiences and external interventions in a wider historical and contextual perspective. The final part includes ten contributions that use empirical research to explore how migrants and refugees in eastern Africa, the Middle East, and Europe negotiate living, working, and learning in the space of displacement. For example, the authors reflect on how the construction of apolitical refugee camps in prolonged displacement creates spaces of resistance (p. 382), or on how the allegedly neutral and depoliticized humanitarian assistance is based on nuanced understandings and practices of neutrality (p. 415). Other chapters investigate the question of long-term refugee camps and how these settings affect education (p. 362), or use Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* as a political allegory to discuss the spatial politics of displacement

(p. 440).

Overall, this book's contributions are centred on four leitmotifs: time, space, relationality, and interdisciplinarity. The authors suggest that in order to understand ways in which refugeehood occurs, it is imperative to emphasize temporal and geographical modes of analysis. In this way, it is possible to avoid an "ahistorical and presentist account of displacement" (p. 4), which does not offer a comprehensive understanding of how people experience it and respond to it. Relationality is equally significant, as the authors suggest to focus their analysis on interconnections between people, organizations, states, and other actors, as well as the nature and implications of these interactions. In this volume, relationality is also expressed through the intersectional analysis of different experiences of displacement and the power structures they create. This helps to consider refugeehood not as a phenomenon on its own, but as part of larger processes. Finally, interdisciplinarity is the approach through which this volume analyzes displacement and the perspectives that can be employed to study it.

Interdisciplinarity is also one of this book's most significant contributions. Placing social scientists, urban planners, artists, activists, and other interlocutors in conversation with each other greatly enriches the scholarship on forced migration and displacement. Indeed, refugeehood has often been analyzed from monolithic scholarly perspectives without involving a wider public in the debate. Moreover, the diversity of experiences and voices presented in this volume are tied together by the concept of agency in a way that is innovative and includes, for example, contributions from authors who personally experienced displacement. The second most important contribution of this volume is its ability to go beyond academia

and to speak to a wider public. Bringing the scholarly discourse about displacement outside academia and making it accessible to a wider public is greatly needed to undermine the concept of "crisis" and the binary understandings of refugeehood and refugees.

Precisely in light of its interdisciplinarity and accessibility, the book proposes to change the approach towards displacement. With a view to decolonise the discourse around forced migration, it places the onus on "the refuge" instead of "the refugee." In this sense, it problematizes the ways in which knowledge is produced and it fits into the

wider framework of decolonization around forced migration.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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