

Introduction

Jeremy Rinker

University of North Carolina Greensboro

Ali Askerov

University of North Carolina Greensboro

Welcome to Volume two of *The Global Journal of Peace Research and Praxis*. In this second volume, a special issue entitled “Refugees: Discourses of Displacement, Conflict, & Peace” our approach remains to engage actors in the interdisciplinary field of Peace and Conflict Studies who are practicing and researching peaceful conflict transformation, broadly defined, at the local, community, national, and international levels. This volume’s focus on refugees exemplifies the broad interdisciplinary reach of peace and conflict studies theory and practice. This special issue is the direct result of the co-editors and some of their students participating in the 2017 Global Communications Association Conference in Greensboro, North Carolina (April 6th-8th, 2017), in addition to ongoing research endeavors aimed at engaging refugee communities. This conference provided a venue to bring together many of the ideas that you will read about in this volume’s pages. A year on, the refugee crisis and possible responses to it continue to dominate the news headlines. The discourse around refugee and immigrant issues has over the last year taken center stage in political, social, and cultural conflicts around the United States, especially given the recent election of Donald Trump. The works contained in this second volume aim to deconstruct and illuminate ongoing issues that refugee communities face and explore the conflict generative discourse around refugees as ‘alien others.’

In the first issue of this journal the editors commented on the “messy” and “wicked problems” (Matyók and Schmitz, 2014) that peacebuilders routinely face. Refugee stories, as microcosms of the complex and contingent identity conflict that we as a human community face in the 21st Century, provide a rich lens through which to explore conflict processes and praxis. Refugees displaced from their home countries due to violent conflicts are now at levels the world has not seen since the end of the Second World War. According to the UNHCR, the United Nation’s lead refugee agency, there are an estimated 65.6 million forcibly displaced persons in the world today (<http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>). As a result of primarily violent conflict, human rights abuses, and persecution, approximately 34,000 people worldwide were forced to leave their homes each day of 2016. Many of these were internally displaced persons (IDPs), but once they leave their country of citizenship they become refugees. At least ten million of these people have already been denied the basic rights that come with a certain nationality and citizenship. The plight of refugees is more difficult than most of us can imagine. Sleeping outdoors, risking life and limb to be smuggled across borders, and being constantly vulnerable to crime and human trafficking, refugees are among the most vulnerable populations in any country. Often, considering the causes of the problems at global, regional, and national levels that force people to migrate across the border is ignored and this prevents necessary timely policy developments to address this wicked problem effectively.

With anti-immigrant sentiment on the rise around the world, the continued environmental and natural disasters do not bode well for the world's refugees. The unprecedented displacement of refugees worldwide brought on by conflict, climate change, and neoliberal globalization will continue to vex world leaders and peacebuilders alike for the foreseeable future. This issue of the *Global Journal of Peace Research and Praxis* is aimed at exploring the complexity of issues around refugee health and wellness and brainstorming ways that we can put what we know about their experiences into the development of peace praxis.

From Greensboro, North Carolina to Gaziantep, Turkey the issues refugees face impact local communities in many different ways and, despite their international causes, are best addressed at the local level. We believe that through exploring the lives, challenges, and opportunities of refugee communities we can develop and improve practices that uplift this often-forgotten segment of our world community. Still, this issue in aiming to give voice to the experiences and plight of the worlds refugees, came out of more than a desire to simply assist refugees, but a need to develop understanding of cultural difference as a precursor to any helping. The collected papers, book reviews, and special feature in this volume aim to both understand and inform policy and action for refugees.

In reading these papers, we hope that you will be challenged to think of refugee services and cultural assimilation in new ways. While the recent Syrian refugee crisis, the largest refugee crisis the world has ever seen, has certainly exposed critical cracks in the coordinated intervention of many Western developed economies, many responses to this human tragedy continue to discount the needs of refugees themselves. This volume of the *Global Journal of Peace Research and Praxis*, in the spirit of restorative peace praxis, endeavors to foreground the stories and experiences of those most affected. Most refugees would rather never leave their home countries, but circumstances in their homes have forced them to make the weighty decision to risk undocumented travels and extreme hardships to pursue the distant hope of peace and security. Refugee's need for safety need not clash with the States' internal security needs and the articles in this volume complicate simple understandings of the relationship between security and safety. While the gaps in providing international refugees safe passage, easily transferred citizenships, and support as they flee both environmental and man-made catastrophe worldwide represents a major challenge for governments in developed countries, it also represents an opportunity to develop empathy and understanding for the complexities of the refugee experience (PBS/Frontline). The fact is, refugees are more a boon than a draw on the economies they flee to. A recent International Monetary Fund (IMF) report argued that both "the inflow of asylum seekers is likely to have an immediate expansionary effect on the economy" and "displacement effects on native workers—a major political concern—are likely to be short-lived and small" (IMF, 2016). Given the realities that refugees are up against, it is easy to despair. We sincerely anticipate that this volume will bring you a sense of hope and change for the future – a future that begins

Global Journal of Peace Research and Praxis

Volume 2, Number 1 (Spring 2018)

with us!

Global Journal of Peace Research and Practice

ISSN: 2325-3274

3

Askerov and Rinker

Volume 2, Number 1 (Spring 2018)

References

- Matyok, Thomas & Schmitz, Cathryne. 2014. "Introduction" *Journal of Peace Research and Praxis*, Volume 1: Issue 1.
- International Monetary Fund. 2016. "The Refugee Surge in Europe: Economic Challenges" SDN/16/02 (January 2016), p. 32-33. Retrieved from <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/sdn/2016/sdn1602.pdf>
- United Nations Refugee Agency. (n.d.). Figures at a Glance. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>
- Frontline. (2017, May 8). Exodus [Video File]. Retrieved from <http://www.pbs.org/video/frontline-exodus/>