Editorial
In, and For, Hope and Solidarity

Mette Louise Berg and Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh

We write this editorial in mid-February 2023 as the first anniversary of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine fast approaches. The war has so far led to over eight million people fleeing Ukraine to seek refuge across neighboring countries, an unprecedented situation in Europe since the end of WWII. While the hospitality and solidarity extended to Ukrainian refugees was widely commended from the onset, commentators, including the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, Tendayi Achiume, have widely denounced and critiqued the racist and orientalist double standards and “racial tiering” inherent in popular and political responses to displacement from Ukraine (OHCHR 2022; Bayoumi 2022; Jackson Sow 2022; Ray 2022). Ukrainian refugees were welcomed with open borders and “open arms” while racialized third nationals fleeing from the same conflict, including 76,000 students from diverse African countries studying in Ukraine, were forcibly prevented from crossing the same borders, as an extension of institutionalized discriminatory policies which continue to frame migrants and refugees from Africa and the Middle East through the lens of hostility and suspicion (Zaru 2022; Banerjee 2023). Indeed, while Ukrainians have been welcomed across Europe, often explicitly because they have been racialized as white and Christian, people fleeing other conflicts, including wars in which European governments have played an active part, notably Afghanistan, have been met with soldiers and push-backs, in violation of international and regional rights frameworks, including the European Convention on Human Rights, in some cases at the very same borders, notably those of Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania (see Sanderson 2022).

The onward movement of Ukrainians has been actively supported by European governments—to the extent that they were offered free train travel across the continent and the UK by the EU Transportation Directive and the UK government—and yet EU asylum rules have historically restricted refugees’ movement, with the Dublin Regulation requiring people to apply for asylum in the first member state they reach. In response to the large-scale arrival of refugees fleeing the Syrian conflict in 2015, many European governments proposed building walls, interrupted train routes, and closed motorways to prevent the movement of people from Syria (Damon and Smith-Spark 2015; Reuters 2015). The Danish parliament even went as far as to pass the so-called jewelry law, granting the authorities the right to confiscate cash and jewelry from people arriving to seek asylum (ostensibly to offset the costs of their reception and accommodation). Yet, Ukrainians have been officially exempted from this and other laws precisely to facilitate their arrival and settlement, while across the country refugees from Syria have concurrently been threatened with deportation to Damascus and its surrounding areas, in spite of ongoing hostilities and widespread violence there (John 2022) (for a discussion of the Danish government’s politics of “intolerability,” see Suárez-Krabbe and Lindberg 2019).

Applying measures originally developed in response to another intra-European refugee crisis—mass displacement from the Balkans in the 1990s—and later applied in the case of dis-
placement from Kosovo, but notably not for refugees from Syria (Mitrovic 2015), the EU has granted those fleeing the war in Ukraine Temporary Protection status for at least one year, extendable for up to two years at the time of writing. This may be read as a remarkable volte-face, especially from governments that have otherwise introduced increasingly hostile policies toward people seeking asylum in recent years, but it is in fact remarkably consistent with the broader history of European states’ (and publics’) differentiation between welcoming people racialized as white (and Christian) while simultaneously restricting the movement and arrival of people who are racialized as brown and black (and Muslim) (e.g., see Baker 2017; Banerjee 2023).

In the face of mass displacement within Europe, even countries which are not bound by the EU Temporary Protection Directive, such as Denmark and the UK, have sought to develop fast-tracked systems for Ukrainians to enable them to reach their borders and be granted settled status. In 2019, the Danish parliament introduced requirements for protection in the country which were so restrictive that most people fleeing from Ukraine would not meet current asylum criteria; rather than reconsider the country’s stance toward refugees, parliament passed a special ad hoc law to provide Ukrainians the right to residency and to access the labor market for a two-year period. Restrictions on people of other nationalities remain in place. Meanwhile, only a few weeks after Ukraine was invaded, the UK government passed the 2022 Nationality and Border Bill criminalizing refugees arriving through irregular means (this penalization is in breach of the 1951 Geneva Convention), seeking both to prevent refugees from reaching the UK and to deport those who have arrived to overseas detention centers for their asylum-claims to be processed (through the so-called Rwanda deal). Acknowledging that the vast majority of Ukrainians would be ineligible for asylum under the Bill, the UK launched the Ukraine Family Scheme for family members of Ukrainians already living in the UK, and the Ukraine Sponsorship system, also known as the Homes for Ukraine program, which enables named host families or organizations in the UK to sponsor Ukrainian individuals and families, thus passing the responsibility for welcome and protection from the state to private citizens (a dynamic examined in the Special Themed Section of Volume 5 on “The role of ‘voluntariness’ in the governance of migration”).

Such schemes are limited in many ways: the UK schemes require Ukrainians to obtain a UK visa before arrival in the country, therefore remaining in breach of the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees; and both the Danish and UK policies fall short of granting refugee status. Nevertheless, they far surpass state responses to people displaced from conflicts outside of Europe. It remains to be seen how people displaced from Ukraine continue to be treated by their host governments over the coming years, especially as recent history reminds us that states often fail to uphold their promises toward refugees and migrants. In our Editorial in Volume 5, written shortly after the US armed forces withdrew from Afghanistan and the Taliban retook control of the country in August 2021, we noted that:

North American and European states scrambled to evacuate their own citizens and selected Afghans (in particular those who had collaborated with occupying forces). Soon after, they established Afghan refugee resettlement programs for those deemed worthy of protection, at times only weeks, even days, after those same states had been variously deporting or promoting the “voluntary return” of so-called failed asylum seekers to the country. (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Berg, 2022: v)

At the time of writing, the UK has granted resettlement places to 6,300 Afghans who had already been evacuated in September 2021 under pathway 1 of the resettlement scheme, while the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme had only resettled four people from neighboring countries under pathway 2 by the end of September 2022, and zero people had arrived in the
UK through pathway 3. The government’s broken promises have been widely denounced in regard to not only Afghan refugees, but also the Windrush scandal (discussed by Wardle and Obermuller 2019), as the UK government withdrew its commitments to implement key recommendations to increase the independent and impartial scrutiny of the UK’s immigration policies and external checks on the UK’s Home Office (Gentleman and Syal 2023; Griffith 2023). These and other false and broken promises do not go uncontested by civil society—indeed, we are witnessing strikes and resistance to government failures across Europe and further afield, insisting on a more humane and fair distribution of resources, favoring solidarity and hospitality, and opposing hostility and exclusion.

While these opening editorial reflections focus largely on the structural inequalities underpinning European states’ responses to migrants and refugees from within and beyond Europe, the current issue of *Migration and Society* includes articles examining a range of refugee and migration situations across the world, including dynamics that fall under the remit of South-South migration explored in Volume 3 (2020). The Special Themed Section, guest edited by Camilla Ravnbøl, Trine Mygind Korsby, and Anja Simonsen, focuses on migrants in informal urban street economies, including Senegalese street vendors in Buenos Aires (Vammen), East African market stall workers in Durban (Mbatha and Koskimaki), Somali migrants in Athens (Simonsen), and Romanian pimps seeking to enter the transnational sex work market (Korsby). Collectively, the articles in the section examine the contradictions of hospitality and hostility that migrants face across the world (cf. Berg and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2018) in a context of structural inequalities. As the ethnographically rich and nuanced articles in the section show, migrants’ everyday lives are marked by “the metropolitan paradox” (Back 1996), including lived experiences of conviviality as well as discrimination and violence. In the General Article Section, Lugosi and co-authors focus on the identity work of migrants in São Paulo’s hospitality sector. Meanwhile, the article by Morano-Foadi, Lugosi, and Della Croce examines the role of third sector organizations in facilitating and enabling refugee access to the labor market in the UK as an example of bottom-up solidarity. In turn, Cangià’s contribution picks up on the theme of how stasis and im/mobility are intertwined, as previously explored by Tošić and Lems (2019), in this case in the lives of relatively privileged migrants in Switzerland. Paynter and Powell draw the section to a close with their analysis of the traces that remain even after migrant and refugee camps are destroyed, as in the case of Moira camp in Lesbos (Greece) and the unofficial settlement run by Baobab Experience in Rome (Italy).

In the People and Places section, the focus is also on street-level encounters via a visual narrative article by Ramírez. The piece documents women’s neighborhood participation in creating hospitable and convivial spaces in a multicultural neighborhood in Santiago, Chile, during the confluence of the Chilean social uprising, which began in October 2019, and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Reflections section includes a conversation between Michaela Benson and Manuela Boatcă. As Boatcă eloquently argues, Europe has yet to reckon with the inherent, historically embedded inequalities of citizenship which are linked to contemporary global social inequalities.

This volume’s Creative Encounters continues the focus on streets and their unruly dynamics, featuring a selection of poems by Jessica Mookherjee that, in the words of Yousif M. Qasmiyeh, our Creative Encounters editor, are set to “recalibrate the reader’s pulses in their sheer brilliance at capturing what it means, and entails, to continuously return to people and place in writing.”

As always, we conclude the volume with a set of book reviews edited by Agnieszka Kubal and Gunvor Jónsson. We are deeply grateful to Agnieszka and Gunvor for their contribution to the journal since its inauguration in 2018 and wish them all the best as they move on. We look forward to working with two new reviews editors from Volume 7 onward.
These are hostile times for migrants and refugees in many parts of the world; international laws and regulations put in place to support and include people seeking sanctuary, including the 1951 Geneva Convention, are under pressure. Yet as contributors to this issue show, there are also reasons to hope, including through gestures of friendship (Mbatha and Koskimaki), conviviality (Ramírez and Chávez), mutual support (Vammen), and in defiant re-inscriptions of migrant presence and visibility against erasure (Paynter and Powell).

NOTES

8. Following extensive public and political criticism that the requirement to apply for a visa prior to arrival at the UK border created unbearable bureaucratic requirements for people fleeing conflict, the British government’s network of pop-up Visa Application Centres for Ukrainian refugees across Europe from Lviv to Kyiv to the Polish border with Ukraine, and eventually for travellers en route to the port of Calais (see https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2022-04-28/debates/803D3BE8-5010-4BDC-90E7-BD4550E2FFF1/HomesForUkraineVisaApplicationCentres, accessed 15/02-2023), have been rendered largely unnecessary, as applicants holding a valid Ukrainian passport have been able to apply online rather than in person (see https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-a-ukraine-family-scheme-visa#apply-from-outside-the-uk, accessed 15 February 2023). While applying for a visa is challenging and often impossible for people fleeing conflict, and while clearly in breach of international legal frameworks, it is nonetheless notable that it remains impossible for non-Ukrainian refugees to secure UK visas to gain access to humanitarian protection when they are outside of the UK, let alone while they remain within their country of origin.
10. As editors, we are delighted that Yousif’s poetry was Highly Commended by the Forward Prizes, and his collection, Writing the Camp, was both a Poetry Book Society Recommendation and shortlisted for the Royal Society of Literature’s Ondaatje Prize.

REFERENCES


