

**Europe and the Refugee Crisis. By Frances Trix. I.B. Tauris, 2018, pp. 266**

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## Book Review

Robert L. Larruina

### REFERENCE

Trix, F. (2018). *Europe and the Refugee Crisis: Local Responses to Migrants*. Bloomsbury. pp. 266. ISBN (hard cover): 9780755617753


What many have called “the European refugee crisis” or “the asylum system crisis” has revealed the fragility of the current refugee reception system in Europe. During 2015 and 2016, regional, national, and local authorities in Europe struggled to cope with the high numbers of refugees crossing their territories or arriving to request asylum. At the same time, civil society organizations, volunteer groups, and engaged citizens displayed the flexibility to act quickly and locally in assisting refugees. With her attention to individual stories, Frances Trix brings a much-needed anthropological perspective to observe, feel, and understand the spaces and opportunities for encounters between refugees and citizens in the countries of transit and destination. Her book brings a human perspective to the refugee crisis in Europe. However, understanding the crisis at an individual level necessarily entails embracing Trix’s narrative process: “Notice that fieldwork has a narrative quality. Therefore, reading it, just as engaging

in it, requires a different rhythm. The purpose will often become clearer at the end, not at the beginning, of a passage” (p. 7). Trix describes the perceptions, actions, challenges, and opportunities that the regular, yet exceptional, men and women assisting refugees encounter. Following the same journey refugees took, she immerses herself in diverse contexts to offer a critical view of the different forms of refugees’ reception. Her fieldwork starts during the winter of 2015 in Macedonia, a vital stop on the Balkan migrant trail between Greece and Serbia, and the ultimate crossing point for refugees to reach Western Europe. In the spring of 2016, Trix travels throughout Germany to witness local social initiatives and submerge herself in refugee reception centres, mosques, and churches.

*Europe and the Refugee Crisis* provides accounts from local leaders and citizens who had the potential to influence others’ attitudes toward refugees, as in small towns where these individuals could have had a strong

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impact because of the tight-knit community. By asking simple yet poignant questions about how these influencers came to work with refugees, what they thought about the refugee situation, and what their general perceptions were, Frances Trix explores the qualms, uncertainties, and problems they faced. She shows great sensitivity in recounting the vivid accounts of the situations and people she encounters: readers can feel the cold outside the tents, the warmth of the food provided, and the stridency of languages and dialects inside and outside the places she visited. Trix accomplishes this while negotiating and adapting to her contextual circumstances.

*Europe and the Refugee Crisis* invites readers on a physical, mental, and emotional journey. In chapter 1, Trix elaborates on the influences upon people's attitudes toward refugees in Europe. She focuses on "those who did not leave their homes; the Europeans who received the refugees" (p.7). The chapter also examines how German Chancellor Angela Merkel, as the national leader with the most favourable view of refugees, and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, as the leader most opposed to refugees, affected people's attitudes during the 2015 crisis. Trix studies Merkel's and Orban's views through her analysis of political discourses and political actions that took place during 2015 and 2016. The chapter also details how earlier refugees were treated in Europe and how that attitude worsened as the 20th century progressed. After WWI, Germany and France welcomed many refugees from Russia. However, Europe did not favour Jewish refugees who escaped Germany in the 1930s and those who fled the Balkan Wars in the 1990s. By the beginning of the 21st century, Germany's attitude towards refugees had become more positive, while hostility increased in the rest of Europe. Chapter

2 presents the refugee crossings through Macedonia along the Balkan migrant trail, discussing the government's responses and the actions of NGOs and engaged individuals. Chapter 3 then examines refugee transit camps in Macedonia during the winter of 2015–2016, where Trix helped by interpreting and translating. She explores the experiences of volunteers who tried to ameliorate refugees' conditions by serving warm food, providing clothing, or playing with children.

Chapter 4 describes how people in three small German villages (Elzach and two unnamed locations near Freiburg) responded to the new refugees and shows the importance of volunteer initiatives. The responses in several small German towns and cities (Bruchsal, Bamberg, Nürnberg, and Schwäbisch Gmünd) are described in chapter 5, while chapter 6 takes an in-depth look at refugee programs in large German cities (Munich, Cologne, and Hamburg). The multi-layered and multi-level integration issues in Germany are elaborated in chapter 7, which provides a detailed description of the successful experiences and specific challenges faced by refugees arriving in 2015–2016 and the German policies to promote integration. This chapter also discusses significant integration issues, such as urban planning, social cohesion, and access to education and the labour market, concluding with a reflection on security issues such as crime, terrorism, and attacks on refugees. Trix also suggests directions for future research.

While crises in the refugee system continue and discourses about the importance of nation-states and borders gain ground, *Europe and the Refugee Crisis* provides a great resource for researchers and service providers in governmental and non-profit migrant organizations. It is also an essential work for citizens taking action to lessen refugee exclusion. *Europe and the Refugee Crisis* brings a criti-

cal yet compassionate perspective to refugee reception in Europe that is easily translatable to other critical contexts. Trix shows the human dynamics of the European migrant crisis and provides readers with stories of hope from small and meaningful actions. These actions are far from the geopolitical debates and deterrent politics yet close to the small but significant human exchanges that offer optimism in times of almost total impossibility.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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