The Crack
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"LA GRIETA" [*"The Crack"*] documents, through photos and explanatory text, some of the most embroiled locations concerning immigrant refugees seeking entrance to the countries of Europe in the five years following the inception of the "Arab Spring" rebellions in 2011. With the fall of totalitarian regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, plus civil war in Syria, the exodus of millions of people trying to get to Europe grew to never before seen numbers, increased by mortal turmoil in other places, too. Hundreds died in shipwrecks, fires, and other tragedies trying to flee to safety.

Quotations (summarized here) and photographs introducing the photo journal's theme eerily echo the past as they set the stage for current inhumane and criminalizing official efforts to curtail entry by the immigrants into the destination countries. The quote from 1941, in essence, says "no one could believe European countries could return to barbaric wars, or undo the peace and security of shared humanity." The 1993 quote ponders how many victims, how much pain and sorrow, have been caused by the question of borders. A stock photo of triumphant soldiers parading through a European city after World War II notes that, for the first time in its history, Europe comes to an agreement: that peace could only endure with the union of countries who had spent centuries spilling each other's blood. Yet, with the onset of mass migration of refugees, the borders and their protectors once again hardened.

Persistent and courageous reporting by the authors, known and honored in Europe (for example, video "At the doors of Europe," partly included here, won a World Press Photo award in 2015), attempted to document the political and emotional climate regarding

[La Grieta, p. 2]

refugees at specific points of entry, managed variously by the corresponding countries. In the process, they recognize the distinct protections and opportunities they themselves are privileged with, simply by holding European passports, and the fissures that exist between the Europeans and the refugees, the great divide between two worlds. At times, though, even the documentarians feel the restrictions imposed on the refugees, when they are not allowed to talk to them, to photograph the subject area or people, or to move about freely.

The reporters attempt to include moments of positive spirit among the refugees, such as playing football or attempting to make their situation feel more like home, in spite of the horrors they endure. They appreciatively record rare observances of decency and kindness offered by rescue workers and some countries, notably Italy's "Mare Nostrum" naval rescue program, now defunct due to lack of funds, and Finland's progressive, welcoming assimilation, assisting people with learning

the language and enrolling children in one of the world's best educational systems, for starters. Even as countries like Germany express open door policies, though, the effects of ISIS and other political devastations drive more refugees to countries where resources for them are depleted. Unable to return to their own homes, and often driven away cruelly by the authorities from their paths to safety in Europe, the refugees live in limbo sometimes for years, as the book says, "in a ring of hell from which no one escapes." Perhaps intentionally, the reader leaves with a sense of foreboding about this division between the European Union and the outsiders who need it.

The information shared in the photos and commentary is compelling, in terms of the need to reshape actions in light of compassion and interdependence instead of borders, segregation, and exclusion, although no guidance is given for that. Unfortunately, the focus on strictly the five years of migration to the European Union covered in the photo journal might tend to nullify its significance to American audiences. Time elapsed since its publication, the added concerns over the COVID-19 epidemic, and internal political struggles in the U.S. in its own right might keep this valiant photo journal from gaining traction with American readers at this time. There may be a market for it in specialized settings, such as political science classes, but widespread appreciation from a broader audience seems unlikely.