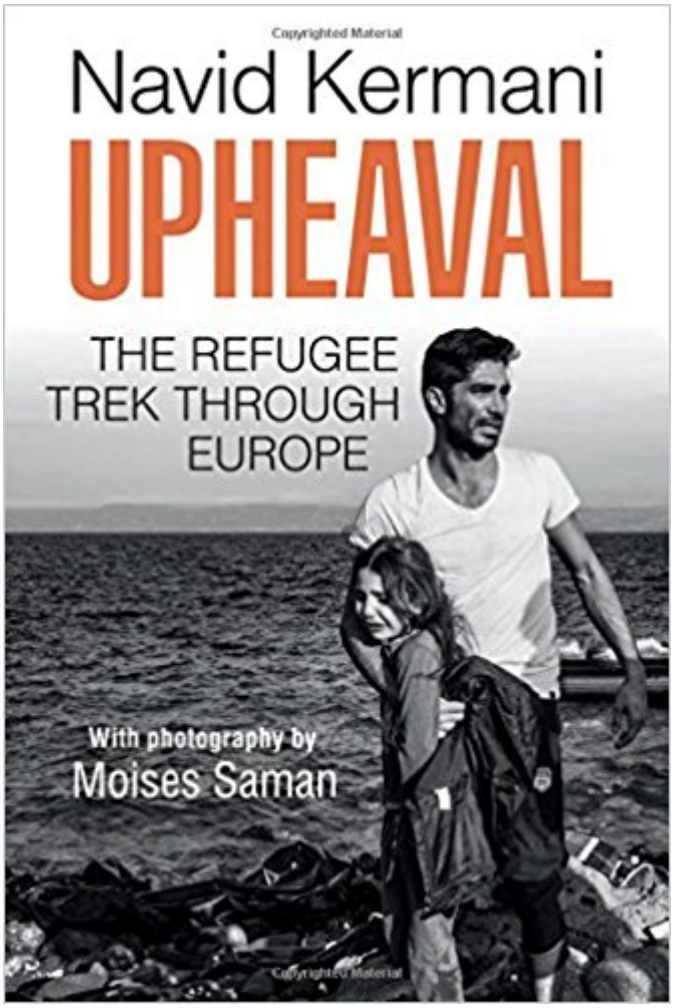
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# Upheaval: The Refugee Trek Through Europe




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## Synopsis

By foot, in buses, prison vans and trains, a steady stream of refugees traveled from the Greek island of Lesbos into Europe. In the autumn of 2015, award-winning writer Navid Kermani decided to accompany them on the "Balkan route." In this perceptive account from the front line of the "refugee crisis," Kermani shows how a seemingly distant world in which war and conflict rage has suddenly collided with our own. Kermani describes the situation on the Turkish west coast where thousands of refugees live in the most desperate conditions, waiting to take the perilous journey across the Mediterranean. Then, on Lesbos, he observes the culture shock amongst those who have survived the ordeal by sea. He speaks to aid workers and politicians, but most importantly of all to the refugees themselves, asking those who have come from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere what has driven them to risk everything and embark on the long and treacherous journey to Europe. With great sensitivity Kermani reveals, often through small details, the cultural and political upheaval that has caused people to uproot their lives, and at the same time shining a light on Europe’s inadequate and at times openly hostile response to the refugees. Interspersed with powerful images by the acclaimed photographer Moises Saman, Upheaval is a much-needed human account of a crisis we cannot ignore.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Kermani once more shows his brilliance as a reporter."Ã¢â ¬â •Der Standard "The real significance of this reportage lies in the many questions Kermani poses to the reader, in the face of the refugee

crisis and its political consequences, as well as rampant levels of hate and fearÃ¢â ¬â •questions that cannot remain unanswered."Ã¢â ¬â •Die Tagespost "Among the most thoughtful intellectual voices in Germany today."Ã¢â ¬â •The New York Review of Books "The moral power behind Kermani's extraordinary achievements is scarcely paralleled among all the great figures of German literature."Ã¢â ¬â •SÃƒÂ ddeutsche Zeitung "Kermani doesn't conceal a thing. He records everything that he sees and hears. But he also says what he thinks of it all...masterful."Ã¢â ¬â •Frankfurter Rundschau "Does Kermani just tell the nice stories? No, he is too good for that. He shows empathy towards the refugees, but also looks more closely to reveal the complex reasons for their flight."Ã¢â ¬â •Die Welt "In Upheaval, Navid Kermani shows what a serious public discussion of migration could look like."Ã¢â ¬â •Deutschlandradio"Kermani has done a great job of not only capturing something of what the refugees are experiencing as they take the last stage of their journey to what they hope will be a new world, but the mood of the people whose hands they pass through. He shines a light in the dark spaces of our current world and exposes the dirty and shameful way we treat our fellow human beings."Ã¢â ¬â •http://blogcritics.org/

Navid Kermani is a writer and Islamic scholar who lives in Cologne, Germany. He has received numerous accolades for his literary and academic work, including the 2015 Peace Prize of the German Publishers' Association, Germany's most prestigious cultural award.

"Upheaval" is an expanded article written by German intellectual and Orientalist Navid Kermani that articulates his observations and opinions about the European refugee crisis of 2015. Kermani and photographer Moises Saman spent a week, 24 September to 2 October 2015, observing and speaking to refugees and to aid workers on Lesbos, in Budapest, Belgrade, and Izmir, Turkey for Der Spiegel magazine, which printed a shorter version in its 11 October issue. This book 99 pages long with large font, plus 12 black-and-white photographs, mostly taken on Lesbos, printed as two-page spreads. Kermani is a German of Iranian descent who apparently speaks Arabic and English as well as German and Farsi, so he could communicate with some of the refugees.The refugees he encounters are from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, as well as one Roma from Serbia. He begins in Lesbos, where he watches a group of 40-50 Afghani men come ashore in an inflatable boat, hoping to catch a UN bus to Mytilene, but many will have to walk the 55 kilometers to the port city. The narrative jumps back and forth from Lesbos to Budapest before expanding to Belgrade and Izmir. In Budapest, Kermani meets three volunteers who are surreptitiously helping the refugees in a country where that is not a fashionable thing to do. In Germany, on the other hand, it became so

fashionable to aid the refugees that volunteers with the appropriate language skills had to get on a waiting list to get an assignment in a few weeks time.Kermani talks a lot, explicitly and implicitly, about the European project, Enlightenment ideals, and how good it makes people feel to help the refugees, who vary a great deal in the conditions that they endure. But he says very little about what the refugees think of it all. There are Afghanis who came because "there's no future in Afghanistan" and other Afghanis who regret making the journey. There is a Syrian Kurd who wants to attend university in Germany, a Syrian who fled Dera'a and an Iraqi who fled Mosul. That's about it. Kermani doesn't systematically ask refugees why they came to Europe. He can't ask them if they made the right decision, as they have just arrived, and those in Izmir have not even done that. He doesn't ask about their experiences en route."Upheaval" isn't about the refugee experience or even their reasons. It's about Kermani's belief that Europe should open its doors to suffering peopleÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â|though he admits that many people he met were in no danger in their home nations but rather taking advantage of the opportunity for what they hope will be a better life. There are everything from half-starved desperate men from war-torn cities to middle-class, educated families in fashionable clothing, carrying smart phones, hoping for more opportunity than their nations are providing at the moment. What is universal, however, is that these refugees are robbed, swindled, overcharged at every turn, forced to leave possessions behind, and the situation has brought every profiteer, in Turkey and in Europe, out of the woodwork.What happens to these refugees, many of whom are more accurately described as immigrants, is not good. They went to Europe because they saw it on television. The opportunities that they saw on TV are not going to materialize for most of these people. The influx in 2015 -1 million refugees in Germany alone- not only creates social tensions that will eventually develop into fissures, but it saw a vast criminal network emergeÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œnot the refugees but the racket that grew up to exploit their importation. It makes me wonder why Germany, in particular, advertised itself this way. Who was behind those television segments that encouraged everyone in the Middle and Near East to head for Europe, and with what agenda? None of those national governments wanted citizens to leave.No one could feel more sympathy for Syrians than I do; a large part of my family is Syrian. But Syria has lost the intelligent, skilled people that it needs to prosper, and Germany has gained enormous social problems. I donÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t think that's what Navid Kermani intended to say, but I don't know how you could conclude otherwise. And I would like to have heard more from refugees in this book and less about Kermani's feelings. Someone needs to remind him that the Enlightenment he so reveres was the Age of Reason, not of emotionalism. That's not to say I don't admire Kermani's work. His dissertation "God Is Beautiful" is fascinating and offers a different way to

view Islam that Westerners can grasp, not just "understand" intellectually from afar.

Upheaval wasn't really what I expected it to be.I expected a book that would immerse the reader in the stories of refugees to Europe and really bring them to life, the way Helen Thorpe's Just Like Us brought stories of Mexican girls in America to life. I expected to hear lots of details about what the people's lives were like, what drove them, and how to help them.The book does feature some details of refugee's lives and difficulties. Overall, though, it feels like a Germanycentric mishmash of European scenes. Instead of following refugees from their starting points in Syria and other countries, in the horrific situations they are leaving, to the points where they make arrangements with smugglers, cross water in a raft, land, and either get turned back or move on to their goal, the text provides out-of-order snapshots of refugees at various points along the way. At no point during my reading did I feel like I was in a refugee's shoes, actually riding in a tightly packed raft or finding myself cheated of tens of thousands of euros with no way to improve my situation. Instead I saw a disordered array of sites: a busy landing site here, an unoccupied landing site there, a miserable camp of people who have been robbed and may be starving in another place, a mosque courtyard or a cafe elsewhere. Occasionally there is a dig at one country or another's policies, but the dig is unaccompanied by suggested solutions.Overall, I found the text confusing (from an organization standpoint) and not altogether enlightening (in that it seems to assume that I'm already European and am familiar with European locations and policies, so it doesn't bother to explain them to me), but there are occasional valuable snippets of information and insight. The book, while oddly arranged, still has value.The photos may appear differently in different editions of the book, so it may be easier to look at them and get information from them in other copies than it is in my copy. In my copy, key portions of photos are buried close to the spine; the fact that the photos are monochrome does not lend drama in this case so much as create a sense of detachment from the fact that these are recent photos taken of real people and places in our own world. I think color and better placement would be useful here; one spread, for instance, shows a refugee's feet peeking out from blankets on a sleeping mat, but I had to read the caption to discover what I was looking at and open the book farther to even see the feet at all; without knowing what I was looking for, it just looked like a black-and-white portrayal of burlap.I'd like to see a bigger edition of this book, in color, with more detailed descriptions of what people are experiencing, and possibly updated information letting us know about the current situation.

Navid Kermani, himself a child of Iranian immigrants in Germany, works for a German news

magazine. He goes to the Greek island of Lesbos with his photographer Moises Saman to witness the influx of refugees coming from across sea east in Turkey. These are mostly young men who are strong enough for the journey. It’s a heart-breaking story that leaves one feeling helpless to these desperate people.Kermani reports on what he and the volunteers around him see. Various humanitarian organizations are providing tents, medical care, food and blankets. Few people speak English and thus few people are interviewed for this story. These refugees are fleeing Syria, Afghanistan, but among them is at least one Roma and one Syrian Kurd. The more one reads into the book, the more this small narrative becomes a political message about the lack of assistance from the afflicted European countries. Border guards from some countries deny they have a refugee problem. Others just look away and render no aid. It’s the smugglers who are benefiting from this crisis, smugglers and taxi drivers, food vendors and hostel owners who are raising their rates to profit from these people.More compelling are Saman’s black/white photographs, the wet, human masses huddled together, with anguish in their eyes and fear in their hearts, but the personal stories of these people is lacking.This is a quick read that puts the blame more on the European countries Kermani feels aren’t doing enough for the sake of European unity.

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