

Movement of People is a Norm, Not a Crisis.

THE DISCUSSION ON MIGRATION FLOW SHOWCASE A VARIETY OF ASPECTS ON THIS NEW GLOBAL DISORDER.

“GLOBAL POLICES AND THE REFUGEE CRISIS” DISCUSSION AT KARL POLANYI RESEARCH CENTER OF GLOBAL SOCIAL STUDIES, CORVINUS UNIVERSITY IN BUDAPEST

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North American and European players, nor their regional allies have been willing to abandon their brutal politics, regardless of their indefensible stance according to international law.

This has led to a very serious emergency, which has ruined various states and led to an immense refugee crisis, spreading consequences to the European Union. For this reason we held the discussion at the Karl Polanyi Center for Global Social Studies; the conversation reflected on the causes and the nature of the crisis as well as the various methods different countries and regions are using to handle the massive flow of migrants.

We need to look at how to respond to the immediate crisis, how to apply and possibly change international and EU laws, and what to do with the intensifying political competition and the exclusion of various migrants groups.

If we don't, we run the risk of populations becoming increasingly radical and frustrated by these vulnerable masses in and around Europe. In turn, populist politicians and media elites will elevate this hysteria – if the last few months are any indication of their behaviour – through orchestrated scapegoating, and there will be a cacophonous mob applauding newly erected razor blade fences and burning down refugee centers. This is an outcome no one wishes to see come true, but unless we solve some of the questions mentioned above, it could become our unfortunate future.

LÁSZLÓ CSICSMANN

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Today we are seeing the negative spill over from the Arab Spring that started in 2011 in Syria and other Middle Eastern countries.

The failed states in Iraq, Yemen, and Libya are the root of the so-called current global refugee crisis. So too, the Syrian state has fallen and foreign actors—the United States, Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar—are playing different roles in the situation, but there seems to be no political solution on the horizon. Similarly in Iraq, Libya, and Yemen, we have witnessed the government's failure to maintain order after the fragile equilibrium of the Hussein, Qaddafi, and Saleh's regimes was broken. Therefore, one possible solution to the refugee crisis is a reestablishment of order in those states. The question is how to do it.

Four million people have fled Syria since March of 2011 when the protests against the Assad regime erupted. Since July of 2012, the civil war has become a reality. As a result, the neighboring countries of Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon were forced to welcome most of the Syrian refugees while Egypt and Iraq took several hundred thousand. Millions of displaced people have been living in refugee camps and in the cities for two to three years now. They cannot return home safely, many do not have any homes to return to, and the living conditions in camps are difficult, to put it mildly. Their presence is a huge burden to welcoming states, which have no qualms against those people moving elsewhere, particularly to Europe.

BOLDIZSÁR NAGY

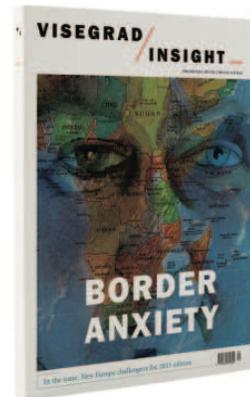
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When we talk about the situation in the Middle East, we should not forget about the five million Palestinian refugees scattered throughout the region. Secondly, we should take into account that nothing is unprecedented.

But, and this may appear as a maverick idea in essence, we have a crisis because there is no global freedom of movement. If there was freedom of movement for everyone, people from the Middle East would just move to the European common space just as Hungarians or Romanians

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did, or the Danish who moved to Germany. The whole scandal of criminalizing people trying to get into a country is created by the fact that the country is not willing to let them in. If freedom of travel would be re-established as it was the default norm prior to WWI, there would be no crisis. We created this crisis by creating borders. But of course no politician is in favor of abolishing the borders.

There were two million refugees from Rwanda, and six million from Afghanistan. The one thing that has changed; more of them reach Europe. Currently it amounts to 10% of the total number; in comparison, the number reaching Europe from Afghanistan was only around 2%. Therefore, I am inclined to believe this is not an unprecedented refugee crisis. We in Europe are somewhat more affected than we used to be. Earlier, as a consequence of the war in Afghanistan, Iran took in three million refugees. Pakistan took in another three million refugees. Mainly Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Zaire) hosted the Rwandan refugees. And as a final example, Malawi took in 700,000 Mozambicans. Neither the proportions nor the absolute numbers of the current migration to Europe are of exceptional magnitude.

When dealing with the fears induced by the present migratory movements to Europe, the next thing to consider is that refugee status is temporary. The whole discourse is suggesting that these people are coming to Europe to stay. That is wrong. Once the stakeholders finally manage to peacefully secure Syria and Libya, these people with refugee status are supposed to return. There will no longer be a well-founded fear of being persecuted and there will no longer be a serious threat of general harm, which is the basis of subsidiary protection. Then, unless they have another reason or authorization to stay, they cannot remain, but will be called upon to leave. Bosnians who found refuge in Germany were returned after the Bosnian war was over.

The present crisis is partly the result of the very uneven distribution within the EU (and in general within Europe) of the asylum seekers, which insulates the crisis to a few states.

DIANA SZÁNTÓ

Director at Artemisszió Foundation

What we are actually going through is a major crisis of global capitalism. This so-called global migration crisis is just an external side effect.

Let me give an example from Sierra Leone, a small country in West Africa. We never hear of it nowadays in Europe, simply because Sierra Leone an refugees are not coming here in big numbers. Sierra Leone is an example of what happens when society has to be rebuilt with western aid. In this case, the state did not fail by itself. Foreign actors completely took over the economy of the country and weakened it. The country is democratic, but privatization and the expropriation of national wealth is an on-going challenge which has been unchanged since the dictatorship. I worked there in 2008 when the country was just emerging from the war. Back then, nobody spoke about migration. Today everybody wants to leave. I don't know if it's very scientific, but there is a moment in life and in the life of societies – when there is just no hope that tomorrow is going to be better.

From 2009 until 2012, 1.2 million people's property has been expropriated by international companies that are not paying taxes because they are relying on tax allowances. The five major mining companies that are expropriating the land are not paying taxes because they are not making a profit. And there is, of course, a migration crisis inside the country because people are moving to the city from rural areas. Two million people live in a city built to accommodate 200,000, which consequently causes an economic crisis.

Every single aspect of what I have mentioned can be reproduced globally in any post-war society. If we are creating peace, which will be followed by the same injustice, it's not going to be a lasting peace. In the long run, we have to make sure that we are revising our economic practices, rules, and regulations to create specific economic circumstances under which thousands and thousands of people will not be pushed away from their homes.

PÁL NYÍRI

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Are people moving now because suddenly they have no hope? Is it hope or something different?

There is an interesting anthropological concept called "capacity to aspire" that can be useful to consider here. These days, people are more capable of aspiring to accomplish things that would have been unimaginable about twenty years ago. Because of social media, people can imagine other ways, easier ways, of living. And it is this comparison to those other ways of living that fragments hope. So thirty years ago, people from Sierra Leone did not move because it was easier to accept their fates.

We are shocked when witnessing the current migration wave to Europe, but the fact is people

have always moved. There is nothing extraordinary about it. Instead of asking why do people move, we could ask why do they stay where they are, and this would be an equally legitimate starting point for the discussion. Migration to Europe in the current form has existed more or less since the 1970s, reaching its peak in the 1990s, coinciding with the Chinese migration to the former Soviet Union. This has to do with the establishment of the common European migration space, which meant that people could move easily from one state to another.

Of course, we still need to ask why it is that we are seeing this particular migration intensified at this particular time, from these specific places to these destinations. One of the reasons is the collapse of the states and subsequent deterioration of living conditions (e.g., with Syria becoming increasingly uninhabitable). At the same time, Europe remains a place where people can lead a more liveable life.

The other factor is that compared to the early 1990s when I began my research on illegal immigration to Europe, it has in some ways become much easier thanks to the accessibility of new communication technologies and social media. The opportunity costs of migration have decreased because people can get much better information faster and at a much lower cost. This means that smuggling infrastructures are struggling to maintain their usefulness. Many more people can operate on their own.

It is also important to ask why people do not go elsewhere.

The European migration situation is very peculiar. Since the end of WWII, especially since the 1970s, the European migration system has operated under the false pretences that migrants can be separated into groups where some are subjects of humanitarian concern and others are economic migrants. The latter are to be admitted in very limited numbers upon demonstrating proper qualifications, and strictly as a matter of free choice from the individuals. Their claims are assessed on a case-by-case basis by state authorities.

Neither the Asian nor the American migration systems operate on the same sort of principle. So, for example, you can ask why the migrants cannot move to the Middle East or to China. Well, they cannot because those migration systems do not fully recognize the idea of freedom of movement; they consider migration to be a matter of state-to-state agreements, which is a path that some of the European countries would now prefer to take.

What we observe now is interesting because it is a corollary of this fictional separation between the humanitarian flow of refugees and a discretionary flow of economic migrants. Now, we can see just how difficult it is to make a distinction between these two flows. And some governments have removed the mask of humanitarian concern for individuals. What is equally important, the migrants themselves have taken off this mask of deserving refugees. They don't think proof that they have been persecuted is necessary, and seem to be operating under the principle that moving to a country where they can live a better life is some sort of human right. It is a very interesting development that we have not seen anywhere else before. The question I wrestled with now is how this dilemma is going to proceed? Who is going to emerge victorious from this particular conjunction?

A number of European countries do realize that their pretence as non-destination countries of migration is untenable, simply because of demographic reasons. Germany in particular is motivated by the recognition that they need to add to their working population. Since there is a population that is literally dying to get in, why not accept them?

The situation in the Central European countries is particularly interesting as they are experiencing this mounting humanitarian concern for the first time in recent history. This is not something they have ordinarily witnessed because they have not been a sight of massive influx from distant places ravaged by crises like Africa. But when people are confronted with this reality, thrown forcibly into their lives, thrust under their noses, they cannot deny their human interest, their humanity.

ORSOLYA JENEY

Director, Amnesty International Hungary

Here are a few facts to consider: there are 19.5 million refugees globally.

Only a tenth of the 1.15 million most vulnerable refugees are being resettled. 86% of refugees are presently hosted in developing countries while UN refugee appeals remain chronically and severely underfunded.

The crisis appears insurmountable at times, but there are methods which we could introduce and, in the process, make the seemingly impossible a feasible reality.

First and foremost, we must prioritize saving lives. No one should have to die crossing a border, and yet almost 7,000 people drowned in the Mediterranean alone in the two years since the first big shipwreck in October 2013. To avoid this we need to open safe routes for refugees, allowing

people to reunite with their relatives and giving refugees visas so they do not have to spend their life-savings and risk drowning to reach safety. People fleeing persecution or wars should be allowed to cross borders, with or without travel documents. Pushing people back and putting up massive fences only forces them to take more dangerous routes to safety.

Administratively, strong refugee systems need to be set up allowing people to apply for asylum, treating their refugee claims fairly, providing basics like education and healthcare, and resettling the most vulnerable of all. This last point of resettlement, for some reason controversial to some, is a vital solution for the most defenceless refugees – including torture survivors and people with serious medical problems.

Cruel notions and policies also need to be discouraged and governments need to stop blaming refugees and migrants for economic and social problems. Instead all this xenophobia and racial discrimination needs to be combatted. In part, this is a reaction from media bias which presented the “problems of the refugees” as the “problems of the enemy.” The ominous nature of this “enemy” points out the stereotypical and prejudiced beliefs that it may encourage. We have to have account- ability for politicians who attempt to capitalize on these waves of distrust and unease, and to praise those sober voices extolling the virtues of aiding the neediest. As a practical example of how governments can help, all countries should investigate and prosecute trafficking gangs who exploit refugees and migrants. It seems like a simple request, but if this was fully enforced, the extent of assistance required by refugees could diminish as well.

None of these solutions are impossible to achieve if politicians listen to the millions of people saying “refugees welcome,” and put solidarity and compassion above petty wrangling over who should host a few thousand refugees.

JÓZSEF BÖRÖCZ

Professor, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

Far too few people are asking the question: What if the current state of things in Europe is not a short-term problem, but the new norm?

What if what we are witnessing is a new, creative adjustment to the astonishing continued global hegemony of the US and the EU? The reason I am asking this is that the global media seem to suggest that people who cross state borders are completely destitute in all possible senses of the word. (Asylum laws more or less force them to act like that in their interactions with the authorities.) We assume that their decisions to move have no other moral, political, social or cultural component but a “raw” and final quest for survival, and that they made their decision on a completely isolated, individual basis. But, is that assumption warranted?

What if what we see is the emergence of a new kind of alternative, cross-border social organization of early-21st century, hyper-modern, global life? Why would European societies want to oppose such a development?

What about the issue of the future political and social organization of the groups of people currently on the move? Everybody seems to assume that the millions of people are not, and will never, transform themselves into a political force. What if they find charismatic leaders who speak in a new voice, with new messages? What will those new messages be? How would such sociopolitical developments transform their own societies—as well as western Europe? In flatly opposing the idea of accepting even one such family, how are the Visegrád states positioning themselves vis-a-vis such a development?

MUQTAR JAMA

Intercultural mediator at the Hungarian Association for migrants MENEDEK

Political instability, poor economic conditions, civil conflict, and the 2011 Arab Spring protest that swept through the Middle East and North Africa, are all factors contributing to the radical reshaping of the regions political and security environment.

Now being added to the list of consequences is the massive outflows of refugees to Europe. It is not a migrant crisis as some call it; it is a refugee crisis, a matter of modern civilization, and Europe has the humanitarian and moral obligation to assist these people in need. What is really required in Europe is solidarity and concerted efforts to find acceptable and lasting solutions to this crisis. The establishment of new asylum systems and the promotion of protection-sensitive management of mixed migration movements should be the key priorities.

To be clear, the situation in Syria is the most dramatic humanitarian disaster facing the world today, and it will remain to be extremely challenging and unpredictable. This crisis cannot be solved with an external monetary influx, and it will not simply go away without testing the strength and fortitude of European unity and hospitality. The political landscape will also be, if it has not already been, tested before the process and crisis comes to an end.

