EUROPE AND THE MEDITERRANEAN CRISES: TRAPPED BETWEEN PREJUDICE AND SOLIDARITY

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MIGRATION & CRISES

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At a time of unprecedented mass displacements across the world, migrants and refugees have come to occupy a central place on the international agenda, as well as in the media and public sphere. This research programme focuses on the relationship between migration and crises, both in terms of conflict and disaster-induced displacements that are occurring in the short and long-term; as well as the crises that have been newly introduced by particular migration, border and integration policies that have fallen short in terms of protecting the human rights and dignity of those on the move. The project focuses on displacement in different geographical regions across the world, with an understanding that these contemporary crises have not emerged out of a vacuum, but are located within particular historical, geopolitical, environmental and cultural contexts. The programme examines the human costs of these crises, as well as the new forms of solidarity that have developed.
Europe and the Mediterranean Crises: Trapped Between Prejudice and Solidarity

Valeria Bello

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Summary

International conflicts and instabilities in Middle East, Central Asia and Northern African countries have involved a high human cost in terms of refugee crises and the displacement of people both in these areas and beyond. These situations, combined with the hardening of border policies of States worldwide and in Europe, in particular, have left no other options to persons than embarking on perilous journeys across the vast Mediterranean region by both land and sea. This policy report aims to contribute evidence-based findings to suggest to governments more constructive ways of dealing with these migratory crises. In actual fact, some of the challenges that States perceive when identifying the strategies to manage the situation seem to be based on obsoleted ideas concerning our societies. These could indeed be much more inclusive towards newcomers than what political and legal frameworks have actually allowed until now.
According to the research developed in recent years on this topic, it is possible to formulate and strongly encourage all governments to follow these three main recommendations:

1) Guarantee refuge and aspirations to people independent of nationality. The right to shelter and aspirations that people can hold in their lives should not depend on nationality.

2) Create safe and regular channels of migration. Harder border policies will not prevent access to Europe but will only boost the activities of smugglers and human traffickers.

3) Frame migration policies around the concept of inclusion and intercultural values.

The exclusion of migrants and the neglect of their right to a shelter and aspirations of a better life will not decrease prejudice, but strengthen its lines.

Aims and Objectives

In light of UN discussions and other high-level discussions on the current refugee crisis in the Mediterranean and beyond, this policy report examines the human cost of conflicts and instabilities in these regions. It will therefore analyze this phenomenon with certain specific lenses. Firstly, it will consider the current situation in a historical perspective. In such a light, the report will look at the past twenty-five years to situate the present perception of the refugee crisis as the consequence of a longstanding displacement of millions of individuals from Africa and Asia that international and regional conflicts and instabilities have entailed since the 1990s. As a consequence of these challenges, despite all the physical and economic difficulties that crossing the Mediterranean entails, some have searched and still attempt to find shelter in Europe. The arrival of thousands of these forced migrants has generated what is now known as a “refugee crisis” that, until recently, European strategies seem to have fallen short to deal with. The second outlook will highlight why some of the risk perceptions that the European governments take into account when considering how to respond to this situation are a consequence of perceived threats that indeed do not benefit either destination countries nor migrants. Consequently, this report will show why European states seem to be trapped between prejudice and solidarity.
Currently, there are only a few works addressing the complex issue of how refugee crises determined by conflicts and instabilities have involved additional human insecurity because of discrimination and prejudice towards migrants (Buzan et al., 1998; Huysmans, 2007; Lazaridis and Wadia, 2015). However, even less considered is the expression of solidarity and positive interventions that have also taken place and that could possibly represent best examples to follow and encourage in Europe. This policy report aims to elucidate these dynamics in order to suggest useful measures to smoothen root causes of political and social tensions at global, regional, national and local levels.

The “Refugee” Crises Across the Mediterranean

Despite common thoughts and understandings, it is difficult to distinguish one singular “refugee crisis” in the Mediterranean. In fact, there have occurred several flows of forced movements as a consequence of conflicts in the Middle East, Central Asia and Northern African countries since the early 1990s and these have entailed a variety of displacements both in these regions and across the Mediterranean. Therefore, identifying a singular “Mediterranean Crisis” means to neglect these manifold situations of forced migrants fleeing not only war but also hunger and fear of persecution and who are escaping from diverse lands devastated by conflicts or other political, economical or environmental instabilities. Moreover, it denotes a systematic disregard of the causes of these challenges, which must be considered as global and not only regional or local. The different sources of these global and regional challenges are important to take into account in order to contribute to both eliminating these causes in the short, medium and long run, and establishing peaceful international relations. Indeed, this is the only way forward to ensure that human security is in place everywhere, both in countries in crisis and in more stables places, and for a long-term perspective.

In addition, it is crucial to guarantee that no discriminatory policy takes place when deciding who has the right to shelter in order to prevent that further hate crimes, if fuelled by discrimination and the rise of extremism, which, in all their different and diverse fashions, are always fed by hate, anger, deprivation, lack of opportunities and non-inclusive forms of education.
For all these reasons, this report will use the plural concept of “Mediterranean Crises” to depict a series of emergencies, including political, economic and moral crises, that have been happening in the area since the end of the Cold War and that forced movements produced by conflicts and instabilities in the broad Mediterranean region have only contributed to amplifying.

Historical Perspective

At the end of the 1990s, international politics ceased to be framed exclusively around the interests, strategies and the geo-political spheres of influence of the two contrasting superpowers, the liberal United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The end of the Cold War allowed the formation of new regional and hegemonic aspirations.

Amongst the first conflicts of the post-Cold War period, the year 1990 first saw Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait and, as a consequence, the US intervention in Iraq. These intertwined conflicts entailed the first displacement crises in Middle East and Central Asia after the end of the Cold War. Roughly 10.5 million persons were displaced in the area if one counts, along with those people - both nationals and migrants - who fled from Iraq and Kuwait, those 1 million Yemeni migrants who were repatriated from a variety of places when their country sided with Iraq from one side, and the Afghan refugees who had fled their country in 1979, after the USSR intervention, and who were returning to Afghanistan when the Soviet Union collapsed (Castles, de Haas and Miller, 2013; Bello, 2017a), on the other.

Therefore, not all of these displaced people held Iraqi or Kuwaiti citizenship; many of them either were immigrants in Kuwait or went to work in Iraq after the end of the Iran-Iraq conflict, when the production of crude oil in the country started again (Castles, de Haas and Miller, 2013). These migrants were forced to move because of the Gulf conflict of 1990-1991 as well as nationals. Those who could went back to their countries of origin. Others were simply displaced in the region. Only some – those who could travel further – engaged in longer journeys across the Mediterranean, hoping in better possibilities than those offered in refugee camps settled in the Middle East, Northern Africa and Central Asia.

Of the 7,700,000 individuals in total who reached Western European countries between 1990 and 1995, only roughly one million (almost
14% of the total number of migrants to the EU) were from one of the Northern African, Middle East or Central Asian countries either concerned or destabilised by these two conflicts (Bello, 2017a; in addition, see table 1). The trend was similar in the subsequent five years, even though in Europe the figure of migrant inflows from these regions rose to 16% of the overall number of migrants. In specific terms, a total of two million individuals reached Europe from these areas in the entire decade of the 1990s (Abel and Sander, 2014; Bello, 2017a). Indeed, most of those who were forced to move were either internally or regionally displaced.

With subsequent wars and consequent crises, numbers have changed but not the trends; independent of the political and geo-strategic impact and results of these conflicts, they all had an extremely high human cost (Stokes 2007). “At the end of 2006, Afghanistan remained the biggest global source of refugees, with 2.1 million (21 per cent of the global refugee population) in 71 different asylum countries. Iraq came second with 1.5 million refugees, mainly in Jordan and Syria” (Castles, de Haas and Miller, 2013: 142). According to UNHCR, the Afghanistan war has displaced almost 4 million persons – the vast majority in the same region – and has been the world’s main source of “refugees” until the tensions in Syria deteriorated in 2014 (UNHCR, 2014).
Although UNHCR counts refugees, returned refugees, internally displaced persons and other persons of concern, this figure does not count the 3 million Afghan refugees who were forced to move in 1979 after the USSR’s intervention in Afghanistan and who found “refuge” in camps in Iran and Pakistan and were sent back in the early 1990s, when the USSR collapsed. This is because the “more recent” Afghanistan war is considered a different war from the civil war that started in the country in the first half of the 20th century and that became little by little first a regional and then an international conflict (Fielden and Goodhand, 2001). Nonetheless, for the Afghan people, the war has never stopped (Bello, 2017a). Yet again, numbers change whether one counts only refugees from a country in war or also all those displaced because of the conflicts, including regional migrants who reside in a war zone and other people in areas or conditions that are destabilised because of the confrontations.

UNHCR in most cases only mentions refugees, as its mandate is to protect this particular category of migrants. Nonetheless, it often includes in its statistics asylum-seekers and internally displaced people. To be specific, “refugees” are only those who have been already granted the status of refugees by those institutional apparatus that people have eventually had the luck to reach places where they have been able to seek asylum. Those who can actually claim the status but are still awaiting its confirmation are asylum-seekers. But many do not even reach this point; yet, they are forced to move because of those same conflicts. They are all displaced, either internally or externally. However, all those who were migrants in Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan and Syria during the war also had to flee from their places of residence, but they will not be regarded as refugees or possible asylum-seekers, as they do not hold the nationality of the country which is actually concerned by the violence.

From 2014, the situation worsened with the upsurge in violence in both Iraq and Syria, which are now the newest top countries in terms of origin of forced movements of people. Again, most of these persons are displaced internally or regionally, in the Middle East, Northern Africa and Central Asia, while only a few, those who can afford the travel – both physically and economically – will eventually reach the coast of Europe. According to recent UNHCR’s data (UNHCR 2016a), almost 8 million Syrians are internally displaced; while, 1.2 million are in Lebanon and 1.5 million in Turkey.

Despite the increasing number of Syrians who seek refuge in Europe, at March 2016, only less than 1 million persons could actually apply for asylum in Europe and the vast majority of them, 300,000 are not in an EU country but in Serbia and Montenegro. In Germany, according
to UNHCR, there are currently 200,000 Syrian asylum-seekers roughly; in Sweden, 100,000 (UNHCR, 2016a). However, these are asylum-seekers: persons who still possess the papers to prove their status and have the “right” nationality to seek asylum. Their sad destiny is often that of staying in camps or refugee centres in prison-like conditions until their case is decided. As in the past, these refugee centres can become later, at some point in time, the targets of prejudiced people, as it has already happened in the past (Bello, 2014). What happens with the rest of those who are forced to move?

“Perceived-Risks” Perspective

Once they reach Europe, they need to go through border controls and only very few of them will still have the fate of being left documented or willing to be documented. Many will have lost their documents or had them stolen along the way, or will discover their documentation not to be the ‘right one’ for a variety of reasons. In addition to the case of those who were migrants originating from a country in war but not nationals of the country itself and, consequently, can-
not seek asylum, other are de jure stateless because the country in which they live do not recognise them as “worth” documenting (in Syria there are currently 160,000 stateless individuals).\(^1\) Many are de facto stateless and for this reason they cannot satisfy the conditions established by European member states in order to enter their territory or seek asylum. And yet, these forced migrants see the Mediterranean as a possible bridge towards a safer life in Europe, where they think they can find improved opportunities and better standards of living. As a matter of fact, many do not fulfil the criteria for seeking asylum and legal channels to issue a visa are extremely difficult, if not made impossible.

Consequently, European countries have witnessed an increase in irregular crossings of borders, to which they have responded with a substantial and continuous securitization of border policies and controls (Buscaglia, 2013; Koser 2007; Lazaridis and Wadia, 2015). However, this strategy of inurement has only made the access through regular channels even more difficult (Avdan, 2012).

As a consequence, both smugglers and human traffickers, along with organized crime, have found lucrative opportunities as a consequence of the hardening of border policies (Collyer, Düvell and

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1. UNHCR (2016b)
Europe and the Mediterranean Crises: Trapped Between Prejudice and Solidarity

For years, in mainstream media, the description of irregular journeys has been depicted together with criminal activities of smugglers, human traffickers and organized crime in general and this has, as some have highlighted (Lazaridis and Wadia, 2015), contributed to generating a nexus between crime and migration. This situation has gone so far that undocumented migrants are regarded as criminals even if they have only committed an administrative felony (Stumpf, 2006). Despite the evident unfair management of this humanitarian crisis, with undocumented migrants treated as criminals and, as such, detained in prison-like conditions, this situation is not even questioned in the vast majority of cases, even though policy controls have also informed governments of the evident and worrying lack of respect of basic human rights in these centres (Lazaridis and Wadia, 2015).

Europe between Prejudice and Solidarity

In the second half of 2015, because of the escalating conflict in Syria, with thousands of women and children looking for shelter in Europe, and the conjunction of an increased role of social media in dealing with the issue, a great part of the public opinion has suddenly realized that those who seek refuge in Europe through these dangerous journeys are not criminals but, in most cases, desperate people fleeing from lands devastated by war and civil conflicts. The sad photo of a Syrian child, washed ashore in Turkey, has contributed to partly changing European public opinion.

Forced migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers are no longer concepts used only by specialists and stakeholders in the field, but part of common vocabulary in both the press and everyday language. However, not all citizens agree on “the responsibility to protect” (United Nations, 2005) and, even less, the necessity to provide refuge; and not all of them have put aside the connection between security issues and irregular migration. Still a considerable amount of individuals and mainly some populist and far-right movements and parties regard migrants as “invaders”, who, according to these extremists, will worsen the conditions of their countries and their people for a variety of reasons.

This phenomenon is tied with another security concern, terrorism, which has recently added igniting material to this situation (Lazaridis and Wadia, 2015; Bouchad and Samad, 2016; Cochrane, 2015). Par-
particularly as a consequence of the 9/11 attacks and subsequent episodes in several other places, including Madrid, Amsterdam, London and Paris, to mention only the most notorious to European public opinion, also regular migrants or “second-generation migrants” of Muslim faith – who are often not even migrants, as they hold the citizenship of the state – are regarded as security threats (Abbas, 2007; Kabir, 2007; Strabac and Listhaug, 2008). However, it would be worth studying why the “Western” public has not been concerned when similar episodes have happened in other places of the world, such as Ankara in March 2016. This fact by itself shows how there exist frames of the world as a planet that shares different feelings of post-national belonging, by which people feel closer to others even though they hold different nationalities. However, for some citizens this phenomenon is not universalistic, but seems to be limited to certain nationalities (Bello, 2017; Hedetoft and Hjort, 2002). There is a sort of international xenophobia that creates prejudiced attitudes towards those perceived as “outsiders” of this frame of the world that holds post-national solidarity. There is a perception in both some governments and societies’ members that those who are not from the same “ethnic” or even more specifically “civilizational” component of the majority of the country can potentially represent a threat to its immediate and long-term security. This has also hardened
security policies and measures within countries, contributing to an increase of the generalized risk perception of citizens (Beck, 1992). This generalized risk perception demands more security measures, in a self-perpetuating process of the securitization of migration in Europe (Huysmans, 2007) and of the “construction of the unease” more generally (Bigo, 2002).

These two different perceived threats, which migrants allegedly pose, together generate a hard type of prejudice. Anti-Muslim xenophobia is not the only prejudice that European citizens hold, as prejudice formed on the basis of skin colours – also known as biological racism – is, unfortunately, still an existing form of discrimination. Cultural, religious and biological varieties of racisms are not only the manifestation of new forms of fascism (Balibar, 2007) but also an expression of different radicalizations of the same old phenomena: “an antipathy accompanied by a faulty generalization” (Pettegrew, 1980: 821).

What has made the phenomena upsurge drastically is that, from the 1990s, international migratory trends from the Middle East and from various regions of the African continent to Europe have been constantly increasing for a variety of reasons: climate change, wars, conflicts, economic hardship and the search of a different life with improved opportunities. The factors for which people are willing to move have meanwhile not decreased. Instead, due to new instabilities in these regions, other migrants, more often than not other forced-migrants, have joined the ranks of those who seek a safe life in Europe. Both scholars and activists have fought for years against a vocabulary implicitly linking migration and crime by asking to change the labels from “illegal” to “undocumented” migrants – to set the distances between an administrative and a criminal felony – and focus the discourses from the illegality of persons to the irregular crossings of borders (Koser, 2007; Stumpf, 2006).

Together with migratory trends, for some time also prejudice has increased everywhere, with few exceptions (Strabac and Listhaug, 2008). This hard type of prejudice can indeed constitute an actual security concern more globally, as the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has highlighted (Ki-moon, 2012) and has pushed the UN towards an innovative approach to international security, in particular through the development of the concept of Intercultural Dialogue (Bello and Bloom, 2017). Intercultural values have proven to be amongst the strongest determinants of positive attitudes towards migrants in European countries (Bello, 2017b), along with a country framework inspired by politics of inclusion rather than exclusion (Bello, 2016).
Again, it seems that two different interpretations of the world are arising in Europe: those who wish to express solidarity to migrants and those who consider that the only way to keep Europe safe from a fatal destiny is to send them back to their devastated lands, together with their problems.

Some think the first group includes those who are from the left, younger, well-educated and, for many years, this has been accepted as a solid truth, substantiated by research (Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010); whereas those prejudiced against immigrants were conservative, older and less-educated. More recently, though, it has emerged that previously acknowledged determinants of prejudice are becoming less and less important (Bello, 2017b). Other factors are becoming more important, such as the inclusiveness of the society itself, which is able to affect individuals’ attitudes to a good extent (Bello, 2016). If a society shows inclusive processes of integration of migrants, respectful of their cultures and rights, people will be less prejudiced towards them. Another important aspect is not so much the level of individual education but the type of education that individuals receive, if framed around cosmopolitanism and self-transcendence or conservatism (Davidov and Meuleman, 2012).

Therefore, both the role and the responsibility of the state in increasing or decreasing prejudice through public discourses and policy-
making needs to be taken into account. Extremist individuals who are very much prejudiced towards outsiders are not growing in numbers anymore (see table 2) but those who are indeed prejudiced mainly belong to categories of people and parties who are not educated towards intercultural values and cosmopolitan solidarity (Bello, 2017b; Bello, 2016).

Simultaneously, the economic crisis has been particularly severe in the Mediterranean countries that have actually been the main places of arrival of migrants in these last two decades in Europe. This has entailed a political and economic climate that has boosted the lines of both populist parties and populist claims in some discourses of standard parties, sometimes even in extremely subtle ways and fashions (Art, 2011).

The global financial crisis that has developed from the collapse of the American banking system S in 2007/2008, (International Monetary Fund, 2009; Schwartz, 2012) has weakened/reduces the sustainability of the European Welfare State System, particularly in Southern Europe (Hemerijck, 2013; Himanen, 2013). In Europe, work conditions, health and education systems have been harshly affected by recent anti-crisis policies (Castells, Caraça and Cardoso, 2013). Governments have cut funds to the public health system, and in Greece, Italy, Spain, and Portugal, in spite of strict fiscal austerity, economies continue to recede; as measures of containment of public expenditure, the two sectors of health-care systems (Karanikolos et al., 2013; Correia, Dussault and Pontes, 2015; Bello, 2017a) and public education (Lebeau et al, 2011) have received the harshest cuts.

For these reasons, citizens’ discontent has also increased and many people believe that the presence of migrants worsen public schools and the health-care system (Bloemraad, Korteveg and Yurdakul, 2008; Schaeffer 2013). Yet, with the exception of two EU countries - Greece and Cyprus - in all other EU member states at least two thirds of the societies are positively disposed towards migrants (Bello, 2017a; see also table 2). Although the number of prejudiced people has increased in a few countries recently, in most European states the trends are exactly the opposite and positive attitudes have intensified from 2002 to 2012 and still in 2014 positive variations were registered in most cases (see table 2).
Conclusions and Recommendations

If one considers these findings, it is clear that a minimum of two thirds of all European citizens would like to express solidarity to migrants in general, and we are not simply speaking of refugees. If one specifies that help goes to refugees only, probably also part of those prejudiced persons will be in favour of expressions of solidarity. This in part explains why the terminology is currently focusing on refugees only. What does prevent European states to follow this desire of more general solidarity of most European peoples is perhaps the fact that governments consider prejudice as more problematic than solidarity.

However, it is not likely that, by showing stricter attitudes towards migrants, people will become less prejudiced. The more countries show inclusive patterns of integration of newcomers and approaches inspired by solidarity, the more positively this affects the perceptions of our societies. We would therefore stress the following recommendations to governments in Europe:

1) Guarantee refuge and aspirations to people independent of nationality.

Although conflicts are amongst the main causes of forced movements to Europe, currently known as the “Mediterranean Refugee Crises”, those displaced are not only nationals of war zones. There are more people affected by conflicts than those identified as asylum-seekers. The right to a shelter and aspirations that people can hold in their lives should not depend on nationality. Despite the importance of protecting refugees, governments should start acknowledge that everyone has the right to hold aspirations for improving their own lives and, as a consequence, possible regular channels of migration need to be created.

2) Create safe and regular channels of migration.

Even though the number of migrants has increased, Europe is not the main destination. Most people are internally displaced and others have moved in the same region. The current inequity of border policies has not prevented people to access Europe but has only created lucrative opportunities for smugglers and human traffickers.

3) Frame migration policies around the concept of inclusion and intercultural values.
The exclusion of migrants and the neglect of their right to a shelter and aspirations of a better life will not decrease prejudice but strengthen its lines. Positive attitudes toward migrants depend to a larger extent on education towards intercultural values and on countries’ own approach towards migrants than on individual vulnerabilities. Inclusive approaches towards the integration of migrants would help foster tolerance and solidarity. Therefore, showing stricter policies towards undocumented migrants or not responding positively to the solidarity movement of European citizens towards refugees and asylum-seekers is counterproductive and will not help to reduce prejudice. On the contrary, it is likely to produce the opposite: more citizens would start sharing the idea that migration is something regretful in itself if their governments do not reflect citizens’ expression of solidarity and concern towards the current worrying situations at European borders.

References


Table 1: Relevant International Migrations Flows from and to Middle East and Central Asia (1990-1995)*

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* Variations between the two most recent years of survey submission.