

Displacement and Emplacement of People in Our World: a brief reflection

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According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, 'at least 79.5 million people around the world have been forced to flee their home, among them are nearly 26 million refugees, around half of them are under the age of 18'.² Now in 2021, an increasing influx of forced migration and displacement continues in our world.

This is a brief reflection about understanding the history of different forms of human migration including forced migration. I argue, standing in solidarity with fellow humans in times of crisis is not new; and that humanitarian protection is a hallmark of our modern civilisation. This historical progress and human rights principle need to be in our thoughts and should inform our positive actions for supporting all forced migrants today.

Looking at Europe, forced migration has a long history, but it has almost been 'forgotten' in the populist talks for political convenience. In a comprehensive study about the history of immigrants to Britain, Winder (2004) writes: "from Huguenot weavers and Indian shopkeepers to South African dentists, from Polish fighter pilots to Jamaican fisherman, from refugee orphans to Russian aristocrats all put under one single category the bloody foreigners". Moreover, Winder also makes a positive suggestion, that is, the term 'British' should be used as an inclusive socio-political umbrella to embrace and encourage different communities both more established and new communities to feel included and equal and their contributions valued, regardless of when they have arrived or settled in Britain.

Well, refugee arrival often after painful and dangerous journeys is one thing, but their successful settlement and integration within the host society is quite another huge task. As someone with a first-hand refugee experience, and a Migration Studies scholar, I know for sure, that social integration is a slow and complex processes, and it is like a busy junction, and it requires lots of positive thinking, negotiations, and efforts from all parties.

Many Migration Studies scholars who have studied the lived experience of migrants in Britain found that right type of reception policy, right advice-training, at the right time are the keys for newcomers to making successful and positive settlement and finding right employment early. Therefore, free, and timely, access to initial trainings including acquiring English language proficiency is necessary to help the migrant's successful integration process into British society. However, a lack of clarity of responsibility between central and local government often leads to a shortage of good quality English language provision, for example, for refugee mothers. These shortcomings in turn would contribute to create a lose - lose economic situation as the migrants would enter the job market much later and thus, they remain dependent on welfare services. In

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² <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html> (accessed June 2021)

most cases the refugees do also form self-help groups and associations and they do put their own hard work and innovative plans against unwelcome attitudes, bad bureaucracy, or poor policies and eventually they manage to emplace themselves in the new society. The refugees also rely on good hearted local community's volunteers such as church groups, for example, a well-known charity in Peckham called Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers.³ There are some more established refugee support agencies operating as NGOs, some examples include: the Refugee Council, Refugee Action, the British Red Cross, Renaisi and Cara.⁴

It is always useful to have a glance at the history of human movements. This is to help us to better understand the past events and hopefully learn some good lessons, and more importantly do a better job managing the current forced displacement of millions of people. Modern history of human movements, encompassing both forced and voluntary types, could be put into the following five broad categories since the 17th century:

- 1.** As two classic refugee cases show, the Huguenots in the 17th century were facing religious persecution and defined as the first 'classic' refugees in Europe. They crossed the English Channel and sought protection and settled in England. Similarly some 20,000 non-conformists also known as "pilgrim fathers" who were pushed out of England for religious reasons managed to build a new home in the USA and even called it "New England" (Winder 2004). Here, important progress was made within modern nation states: "the absences of religion persecution became the hallmark of civilized states" (Zolberg et.al 1989:8).
- 2.** 10-20 million slaves from Africa were forced to serve the early capitalist system in the Americas and in Europe. This was a tragic forced movement of humans across land and sea.
- 3.** A further 5 million temporary workers also joined this slave workforce from China and India. This was partially forced with no or little rights to settle and make a home of their own.
- 4.** 60 million migrants from Europe went and settled mainly in the United States of America (USA), Australia, Latin America and some other places like South Africa. This was mostly voluntary movement with the promise of building new homes. The Unites States of America (USA) is indeed a home for millions from migrant backgrounds, but this does not mean the USA's national borders are now, in 2021, more open to new migrants and refugees.
- 5.** The fifth movement, which could be described as the age of modern mass migration and perhaps the beginning of globalisation in the aftermath of the WW1 in the 1920s and the end of WW2 in the 1950s. This period is also very important for refugee problem to become legalised, internationalised, and controlled from above, and a UN agency then

³ <http://www.sdacas.org.uk/> (accessed June 2021)

⁴ <https://renaisi.com/about-us/>; <https://www.cara.ngo/> (accessed June 2021)

was assigned in 1951 to protect refugees through the UNHCR (Hathaway 2005; Hayter 2004; Roche, O.I.A 1965).⁵

On reflection all the different categories of forced migration, displacement, and migration in general are integral parts of our history. Apart from natural causes, the most common and well recorded cause of forced migration are the ongoing conflicts and wars which force people to flee the war zones. Every human deserves a safe place to call home or build a new home in order to live, work, and be productive, and happy in this World.

References:

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⁵The Definition of a Refugee: International legal protection of refugees' centres on a person meeting the criteria for refugee status as laid down in the *1951 Refugee Convention*. Under Article 1(A)2, the term "refugee" shall apply to any person who:

"...owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it" (http://www.geneva-academy.ch/RULAC/international_refugee_law.php), (accessed June 2021)