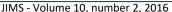# THEMATIC ARTICLES: INSIDE THE REFUGEES' CRISIS

Forced Migration in the Middle East: The Palestinian and Syrian Refugee Experience

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Abstract. Forced migration in the Middle East has a long history, going back to, at least, the early days of the 20th century. This paper looks at the experience of two populations, the Palestinian refugees, who experienced their initial displacement in the mid-20th century, and the current day growing population of Syrian refugees. This latter group constitutes the largest group of displaced people since the Second World War. This paper uses the experience of both of these groups to explore the impact that forced migration has had on the host countries and the region at large. It looks at the economic, cultural and political impact of forced migration and concludes that, in the long-term, forced migration, although extremely disruptive to all involved, has a net benefit on the host countries. It also explores lack of regional coping mechanisms, and proposes that the terms "crisis" and "guests" should be replaced when discussing forced migrations.

Keywords: *migration, Middle East, refugees, politics, culture*

For decades, the Middle East has been the scene of forced migration. As Martin (2001) indicates in her paper, forced migration itself "has many causes and takes many forms. People leave because of persecution, human rights violations, repression, conflict and… in a growing number of cases people are driven from their homes by government and insurgent groups intent on depopulating or shifting the ethnic, religious or other composition of an area." It is the latter part of that description, of government forces displacing people, that this paper will be referring to when it discusses forced migration. This phenomenon of violent mass displacement has become one of the defining features of the Middle East. In 1915, Armenians experienced a genocide that killed hundreds of thousands, with some estimating that up to a million were killed and as stated by Bloxham (2003) more

than two-thirds of those deported. Forced migration[1] continued throughout the century, with the displacement of the Palestinians from the wars with Israel in the 1940s, and then in the 1960s creating a refugee population that still has not been officially settled decades later, forcing the populations into generations of permanent impermanence (Sayigh, 2005). Forced migration has continued into the 21st century, with Syria's civil war creating the largest number of refugees since World War II, with an estimated 4.6 million forced to flee the country (UN, 2016). This paper will take these experiences of these two groups and use them as touchstones for a better understanding of the impact that forced migration has had on the region and beyond.

As can be expected, this history of forced migration has had a big impact on the entire Middle East, on its cultures, and especially on the politics of the region. Each time there is extensive forced migration, it changes the relationships among the countries, and has a deep impact on the individual countries involved. Labor markets are changed, both in the home country of the forcibly migrated, and the host country. Typically, the host country benefits as it receives a large influx of new workers. It also improves the institutional and political health of the country as existing institutions and the political system are forced to cope with the influx of refugees. Admittedly, it can take a long time for the country to adjust, but in the long run the country is better for it. Additionally, the host country's culture is enriched by the increase in diversity that the displaced people bring with them through their own cultures. Furthermore, cross-cultural political relationships are strengthened in the long run as the countries have to learn to work together to handle the major displacement of people. However, as will be shown, the lack of regional coping mechanisms has made the plight of the forced migrants even worse.

Naturally these benefits do not come without a price. The migrants themselves suffer some of the worst trauma that people can ever experience. All the countries involved are greatly disrupted politically and socially, and in cases similar to Syria, the whole region can become unstable. Culturally, the host country will be disrupted as mentioned above, and although increased diversity will make the home country stronger in the long run, not everyone will be happy to see this change, as the country's identity will be in flux. This is especially true as handling

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[1] In this paper, "forced migration," "forcibly displaced" will be considered synonymous as will also "the forcibly displaced" and "refugee(s)."

the influx of refugees can force countries to question their identity of being traditionally open to all comers, as is happening in the European Union countries (Szabo, 2015). However, in total, forced migration ultimately strengthens the countries that host the forcibly displaced.

Labor

It is impossible to have large numbers of people move from one country to various other countries without the labor market being profoundly impacted. As can be expected, the home country loses out since thousands of workers are forced to flee the country. For the host country, the picture can be more nuanced, and the benefits more uncertain, as a huge number of workers suddenly flood their domestic labor market. Such a sudden influx will always be disruptive as these new workers are not instantly absorbed into the new society, and this creates a burden on the existing institutions. This, in turn, can lead a host country to question the wisdom of opening their borders to the refugees. However, the net effect is beneficial to the host countries as the new labor pool ultimately makes the economy stronger.

A prime example of this is what has happened in Turkey following the influx of close to 2.5 million refugees fleeing the Syrian conflict. Turkey has spent billions of euros[2] to accommodate them; economically, this inflow of refugees into Turkey has had a net benefit. The refugees have displaced Turkish workers in some areas, notably in the unskilled, informal, and part-time work sectors, they have also been the catalyst for an increase in formal employment for the Turkish, an increase in demand for higher-quality work, which is then filled by the Turkish, and an increase in the average wages of the Turkish employees employed in the formal sector. Although the net benefit is positive for Turkey, labor market dynamics have shifted. Women in particular have been negatively impacted by the influx of refugees, as they have been forced out of the informal labor market, and have not seen a corresponding uptick in employment in the formal sector (GSDRC, 2016).

The Turkish experience highlights a fact that other host countries need to keep in mind: that for the host countries to experience the full benefit of the influx of refugees, the refugees need to be quickly integrated into the labor market on a

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[2]For more detail, please look at http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/future-development/posts/2015/09/16-economic-impact-refugees-cali

formal level, as this will have the effect of giving the refugees the protection of a stable situation (Fargues, 2009). If this does not happen, the refugees will end up in the informal market, which, although it provides some form of employment, is ultimately less beneficial to both the refugees, and the economy of the host country. The refugees have an insecure form of employment, and the host country does not have access to tax revenue that would otherwise be generated by the work of the refugees.

Politics

Political disruption is impossible to avoid when it comes to forced migration. It is political upheaval that often leads to forced migration, and it is political upheaval that results from forced migration. A prime example of this is the political upheaval that led to the forced migration of thousands of Palestinian refugees following the war with Israel in 1948, following the creation of the state (regional political upheaval in and of itself) and the 1967 war. Many of these refugees are still living in camps, primarily in Jordan.[3] What makes these refugees particularly unique is that most of them are descendants of the original refugees who fled decades before. As indicated by Goldberg (2012), the exact number of how many of them are still alive today is uncertain, but it is probably a few tens of thousands. As the question of their ultimate fate is still undecided, they exist in a state of permanent impermanence as mentioned in the introduction.

The question of what to do with the Palestinian refugees is one of the main sticking points in the ongoing political dispute between Israel and the Palestinians, as the Palestinian authorities assert the right of return, saying that the Palestinian refugees should be allowed to return to Israel. Israeli authorities see this as a non-starter as it would dramatically change the demographics of the country, making the Jewish population a minority.[4] Of course there are more than one factor that keeps the political dispute between Israel and the Palestinian alive, but the fact that the Palestinian and Israeli authorities have opposing, non-negotiable positions means that it can be argued that the presence of the refugees is doing its part to keep the political situation from being completely settled (Sontag, 2001).

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[3]For more information, please see http://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/jordan
[4]For more information, please see
http://prrn.mcgill.ca/background/background_resolving.htm

However, it is not all negative and in some regards, forced migration can have a positive effect on the political process. Although the net effect in the long-term, as said above is positive, the short-term burden can be great, and can put a huge strain on the institutional and fiscal resources of the host countries. The forced migration from Syria has had perhaps the greatest political impact of any forced migration in recent history. Neighboring countries have accepted many of the millions displaced, but as the conflict keeps going, the neighboring countries are feeling the strain. This is particularly true for the host countries that are underdeveloped economically in comparison to the other countries in the region. Jordan and Lebanon, in particular, have both expressed concern over the burden being placed on their institutions, with Jordan recently saying that, without additional international aid, they will soon be at the breaking point.[5]

To solve this, Jordan says that it needs international aid and this highlights, perhaps non-intuitively, the positive political impact that forced migration can have. Forced migration forces a change in the politics of the host country, as the institutions are forced to adapt to the added strain on them, and the refugee policy is forced to adapt as well. At a regional level, host countries are compelled to reach out to their neighbors and work to share the (hopefully) short-term burden of hosting the refugees. To properly share the burden of forced migration, especially on the scale created by the Syrian conflict, close cooperation is required. Not all the countries in the region are at the same economic level, and thus have different capabilities for hosting refugees. To equitably share the burden, other countries in the region, such as Saudi Arabia, would need to step up. And to ensure this, the countries need to talk to each other, and this leads to ties being forged and strengthened. These ties then can be used in the future to further international cooperation on other regional challenges that will arise.

In the long-term, new ties can be forged between the home country of the forcibly migrated, and the host countries. This can come about as the host countries and the home country work together to settle the conflict that has resulted in the forced migration, also from the shift in demographics. The conflict in Syria has effectively spread out the Syrian population. Where once upon

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[5]For more information, please see
https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2016/2/2/jordan-reaching-breaking-point-over-syrian-refugee-influx

a time the vast majority of Syrians lived in Syria, there are now millions living in neighboring countries. Although, now their ties to their homeland are strained at best, they still remain. In the future, these personal ties will continue to exist, and will create points of commonality between the host countries, and the home countries. For example, assuming that conflict in Syria is eventually settled, Syria, and the countries hosting Syrian refugees, will work together to ensure that the ties between them remain strong so that the Syrians abroad can either return to Syria, or at least have easier travel to and from Syria to visit family, and to deal with other personal interests in Syria. In brief, although greatly disruptive in the short-term, forced migration can lead to an improved political situation as existing systems are forced to adapt to the new reality, and to forge new and strengthen existing political ties among countries.

Culture

Culturally speaking, forced migration changes everything, especially when it is a large scale forced displacement. In the Middle East, the countries, except for Israel, have a lot in common culturally, sharing common languages, cultures of hospitality, and a common religion, Islam. Of course there are internal division within Islam, most significantly between Shia and Sunni branches of Islam, but it is still a commonality. Thus when Syrian refugees, for example, flee to Jordan, it is not as culturally disruptive as it could be.

In the long run, cultural mixing and diversity make a country stronger. Although forced migration is far more disruptive than the slower, lower key regular levels of migration, there is no reason that in the long run, this disruption should not be offset by the benefits that come from increased diversity. Diversity makes a country less insular and more outward focused. It also fosters a culture that is more accepting of differences; this means that more people from more backgrounds will feel welcome in the country. This will, in turn, boost the reputation of the country abroad and increase it's standing in the world community.

At a domestic level, varying worldviews and ideas meet and are exchanged. Perspectives on challenges of all sorts are more wide-ranging and stronger, meaning that more compelling solutions to challenges facing a society can be created. Instead of having only a handful of ways of doing something, a culturally diverse country will have dozens, if not hundreds. At the practical level, people who

have survived being forcibly migrated have had to think creatively, and call upon a will and a drive to survive and succeed that other communities typically do not. A society, a country, and community can only benefit from harnessing those forces.

However, while mixing cultures is good for a country in the long run, in the short run it can prove to be fractious. In Turkey, for example, where the home culture and the migrant cultures are more different than in other parts of the Middle East, the reception has been different as the cultural differences are more profound. Syria and Turkey, although sharing religious similarities, linguistically and demographically they have significant differences. As the social and political pressures have increased due to the continual inflow of refugees, anti-immigrant and anti-Arab sentiments have surfaced more and more within Turkish society (Özden, 2013). This growing hostility creates a level of social/cultural tension within Turkish society. This is further exacerbated by the fact that the refugees are viewed as guests within the country. This means that they are expected to be there only temporarily, and are viewed as outsiders, even if only benignly. Add to it the fact that Turkey has taken a stance opposing the Assad regime, and it is not difficult to see how opposition to the regime could become opposition and hostility to Syrians in general.

This is an important point to keep in mind. Typically, the forcibly migrated are viewed as strangers within the host country and their situation, as mentioned before, is viewed as being temporary. Of course, it is assumed that some of the migrants will be integrated into the host country, but the assumption is that the majority of them will return to their home country, ideally through the mechanisms created by the closer political ties between the home country and the host country. However, this puts the refugees in the position of being outsiders. Just as a personal guest is not viewed as being part of the household they are visiting, the forcibly migrated are not viewed as being full-fledged members of the society of the host country.

However, this does not mean that they do not have a cultural impact on their host countries. They bring with them the culture of their home countries, and they add to the diversity of their host country. Normally the migrants reject the culture of the host country, but their children, if they end up settling in the host country, adopt the culture of the new country. Although this can lead to intra-familial conflict, it does indicate that some cultural mixing is going on. If

the families end up migrating back to their home country, they often find that both them and their home country have changed, further adding to the cultural mixing (Roizblatt and Pilowsky, 1996).

Furthermore, there is a cost to diversity, and that is that it can change the cultural identity of a country, and this has caused some tension in parts of the world that have been receiving Syrian migrants. With forced migration in the Middle East, the biggest cultural impact has been felt outside of the region. Millions of refugees have fled the Middle East entirely, migrating to Europe. Traditionally, Europe and the European Union have been fairly open to migrants. However, as the influx of the forcibly migrated increases, opposition to their presence has increased. Several countries in the European Union have taken the dramatic step of closing their borders to refugees or re-imposing border controls after years without.[6,7] Traditionally tolerant countries like Sweden have also have seen social movements arise that have opposed the presence of the migrants. Magnusson (2015) reported the story as one of shifting attitudes:

> It is the latest sign of the major change in sentiment sweeping across Scandinavia's biggest economy as the Sweden Democrats—a party with neo-Nazi roots—forces itself into the mainstream of Swedish politics…. forcing it [the government] to form a pact with the core opposition parties in an effort to prevent the Sweden Democrats from disrupting lawmaking. But voters are signaling they want the group to have a bigger say. And after Sweden's generous asylum policies led to a surge in refugee flows from war zones in the Middle East, the government's political clout has waned. Its budget pact with the opposition fell apart in October and both the coalition and the main opposition parties have since been forced to tighten their stance on immigration.

One of the concerns is cultural in general. Unlike in the Middle East, European cultures, broadly speaking, are historically quite different from Middle Eastern cultures and significant proportions of the population in Europe fear the transformative influence that a large number of migrants will have on Europe. This in turn has led to a serious rethinking about what it means to be European, and whether or not European policy towards the Middle East needs to be rethought (Szabo, 2015).

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[6] For more information, please see http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34556682
[7] For more information, please see http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34242123

Adding to the complexity of the situation are the fears regarding security. With all those people displaced, moving from one country to the next, forced migration raises genuine and serious concerns regarding the security of the host countries. The fear is that, under the guise of being refugees, terrorist organizations and/or criminals will infiltrate the host countries, and do harm against the host country. How a host country can balance openness to refugees, as well as the security of its people is a major challenge; one that each host country is grappling with in different ways? Bertossi and Milkop (2008) summarize it nicely in the opening of their paper:

> One country declares a state of emergency because of the presence of undocumented immigrants in its territorial waters. Another dispatches asylum seekers to offshore islands in foreign jurisdictions before considering their applications. Genetic testing is seen as a proper tool for coping with possible abuses of family reunification laws. To paraphrase Shakespeare, there are serious problems in the "kingdom" of international migration and migration policies.

Additionally, the host countries only need to look at another country in the Middle East that is experiencing conflict and a large outflow of refugees, Iraq, to see how it could turn ugly. As Lischer (2008) puts it when discussing the Iraqi refugee challenge:

> As this crisis demonstrates, displacement can expand and intensify violence during a civil war. In addition, refugee flows increase the risk that conflict will spread across international borders. In some cases, refugee militarization can lead to international war and regional destabilization. Even if the displaced Iraqis do not join militant groups, their mere presence will exacerbate political tensions.

Is it any wonder that countries in the region, and beyond, are worried about the forced migrants coming into their countries? Existential questions about national identity aside, neighboring host countries face the prospect that by opening their borders to refugees, they are opening their borders to the conflict that started it all. However, in the same article Lischer (2008) proposes a multi-faceted solution that can reduce the chances of this happening, and that can be applied to the Syrian refugee challenge: First, provide a massive infusion of humanitarian aid. Second, resist the temptation to build camps to house the displaced. Third, do not return the displaced people home against their will. Fourth, expand and expedite the resettlement process.

This latter recommendation is not very feasible at the moment, but it points to the ideal solution to the whole challenge, the outcome that would assuage the concerns of everyone, forced migrants, regional leaders, as well as the average citizens, who are anxious about what changing demographics of their neighborhoods means for the identity of their countries- peaceful repatriation of the refugees. It would not end the fact that demographics in Europe have, and are, changing, but it would at least put an end to the so-called "refugee invasion"[8] of Europe (Calì and Sekkarie, 2015). Politically speaking, this is much more achievable vis-à-vis the Syrian forced migrants, than for the Palestinians. It would entail ending the conflict, a massive challenge, but once that was done, there would be no major barrier, such as exists with the Palestinians, towards eventual peaceful repatriation. Naturally, this assumes that the sectarian aspects of the Syrian civil war are adequately addressed in any peace treaties, and that there are minimal disputes at the communal level. It has happened with the Balkans, so one can hope that it would happen in Syria as well.

Conceptual Changes

Of all the different categories of people, such as citizen and foreigner; forced migration has had the greatest impact on how the term "refugee" is considered. Historically, refugees are considered to be temporary visitors to the host country. They would flee a conflict, or be forcibly removed from the country, but the thought in the back of everyone's mind was that one day, fairly soon, they would be allowed to return. No host country thought that it would be permanent.

However, the Palestinian situation changed it. As mentioned above, Jordan, for example, is hosting fourth and fifth generation refugees. At one time, that would be unthinkable. How could someone who was not even born at the time for the original forcible displacement is considered a refugee? And yet, it is the reality. The same may soon be said regarding the forcibly displaced from

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[8]The Brookings Institution frames it like this (from 2015): "Let's first put things into perspective. This year up until July the EU received for asylum (including Syrians and others). Since January 2012 the number has been 1.9 million, which makes the size of the "swarms" and "invasion" of "marauder" asylum seekers equivalent to a mere 0.37 percent of the EU population."

Syria. The conflict there has been grinding on for years, with no end in sight. If the host countries have not thought about it yet, they may soon want to—how will they handle a permanent influx of forcibly displaced Syrian refugees?

What the world community has now is a different category of people, someone who is not officially a permanent resident, but is not a citizen either. The new category is one of the noncitizen that is trapped in a dangerous situation. For some this status is temporary, the emergency will pass, but for many more, they are a part of the permanently impermanent, to paraphrase Sayigh. This is a category of people who are particularly vulnerable, and to quote Weerasinghe et al. (2015), stakeholders within the international community have recognized that existing legal and institutional frameworks for protecting forced migrants are inadequate to address the diversity of movements and needs—that they are an at-risk population requiring tailored responses.

Part of this risk comes from the fact that they are not considered to be immigrants to a new country; they are not expected to stay. Thus, there are few if any mechanisms in place to provide long-term support. At the same time, there is no mechanism for them to return to their homeland, or, as with the Syrian refugees, it would be fatal for them to return. Thus they are stuck in limbo, a limbo that for all intents and purposes is permanent, especially with the Palestinians, where their existence in a state of the permanent impermanence is practically institutionalized. One could actually argue that the existence of UNRWA, an agency dedicated to providing them assistance does institutionalize their status.

The political reality has spilled over into the social realm as well. Turkey talks about the Syrian refugees as "guests." At first, everyone felt sympathy for their plight, and was willing to help them out. However, the dynamic has changed. To extend the metaphor, the guests cannot go home right away, and no one knows what to do about it. Resources are starting to get stretched and they wish that their neighbors would help out more. However, at the same time, the neighboring countries are dealing with the same problem, and are feeling stretched as well. Society is being forced to consider the idea that their 'guests' might be here to stay. If that is the case, should they still be considered guests? How does a society accommodate them, when they may not want to be fully integrated, but cannot leave whenever they want? It is a tricky situation with no clear social solution.

Symptom and Consequence

When it comes to the question of what are the forces behind forced migration vis-à-vis the state, it is generally safe to blame the state for the forced migration. As Adamson (2006) puts it: "The population flows of refugees and exiles produced by forced migration have, as often as not, been the product of state action rather than of non-state or market forces."The examples of forced migration that this paper has touched upon, the 20th century displacement of the Palestinians and the 21st century displacement of Syrian refugees, serve to illustrate the two sides of this force. The Palestinian experience is an example of forced migration as a consequence of state building, and the Syrian refugee experience is an example of forced migration as a consequence of state in the process of collapsing, or at the very least, extreme political upheaval.

It is not the objective of this paper to argue whether or not the Israeli government of the late 1940s set out to deliberately expel the Palestinians as part of their state building plans. Moreover, the data is simply not very clear, and historians continue to argue how much of the displacement was spontaneous, and how much was a result of policy (Laipson, 2002). However, it did happen as a consequence of their state building agenda (Adamson, 2006). Part of this state building involved defending itself from aggression on the part of its neighbors. The ensuing conflict resulted in the displacement of a large number of Palestinians. Officially these Palestinians, and their descendants are still displaced until a political solution can be reached, and this has remained a major sticking point in the negotiations with Israeli regarding a Palestinian state (Sontag, 2001).

This continual displacement of the Palestinians who have been forcibly migrated has served Israel's state building ends. Israel was founded as a Jewish state, and for that state identity to remain secure, it needs the country to remain predominantly Jewish and this means that the Palestinian[9] refugees cannot return to their land of origin, especially now as the population has grown from around 750,000 give or take, in 1948[10] to well over 5 million.[11]

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[9]For more information, please see http://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees

[10] This number is a 1950 number. In 1948 UN General Progress report put the original number at 711,000 and a 1950 Final Report of the United Nations Economic Survey Mission for the Middle East outs the number at 726,000. All told this constituted about 85 percent of the total Palestinian population. For more information, please see http://www.badil.org/phocadownloadpap/Badil_docs/publications/Q&A-en.pdf

The Syrian conflict is, on the other hand, a side effect of a state that is, for all intents and purposes, collapsing. The government is currently embroiled in a multi-faction civil war, as well as a conflict with an outside force, the Islamic State. Officially, it has not collapsed, but the Assad regime does not have complete control, and seems to be losing ground every day. It is this conflict that is responsible for the refugees that have fled the country. Although the forced migration of refugees from Syria is not a consequence of a complete collapse of the state, it is a consequence of the breakdown of the state. The conflict began with a revolt against the Assad government and the initial refugees were fleeing this conflict. Later on, other refugees ended up fleeing attacks by the government on civilians, and as no government should be attacking its people (Fahim and Saad, 2013), one can argue that the refugees were fleeing a failed government. As the Islamic State got involved, and as later Russia, as well as other countries, became embroiled in the conflict, present day refugees could now be said to be fleeing a generalized state of war. Was the initial forced migration a consequence of state collapse? No, but it was a consequence of the failing government, and a severe collapse of law and order, as evidenced by the fact that government security forces responded to protests with violent crackdowns.

Regional Coping Mechanisms

The Middle East, as a region, does not have legal asylum mechanism. As alluded to above, it has a culture of hospitality, whereby people forcibly displaced are welcome to seek shelter and aid. However, this means that there is an absence of formal mechanism to provide support for them. What has resulted is a patchwork of inventiveness, and some intervention by UN agencies. The most well known of these is United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, known by its acronym UNRWA. This agency's primary task is to provide institutional level support to Palestinian refugees in the camps. Of course, it cannot do everything and thus the refugees are forced to improvise. One of these most dangerous forms of improvisation that they have embarked on is being smuggled out of the Middle East. As Anderson (2015) article highlights:

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[11]For more information, please see
http://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/unrwa_in_figures_2015.pdf

Before the Syrian civil war began, there were 70,000 Palestinians living in Ain al-Hilweh, which occupies less than one square mile of land. But the devastating conflict has prompted another flood of Syrians and Palestinians living in Syria: The camp's population is now estimated to have ballooned by another 10,000 people. Given the brutal conditions there, many of its residents are seizing the opportunity to hire people like Zeinab to provide them with passage to Europe. As the influx of refugees seeking asylum in Europe grows, so does the refugee smuggling industry, now said to be a $26 billion per year business. Over 300,000 migrants are reported to have crossed the Mediterranean Sea into Europe, and the number keeps growing.

Of course it is extremely dangerous thing to do. They face death along the route, and a very uncertain future in Europe. As they are Palestinians, they face deportation, as many of the destination countries' policies are to not accept them. That is even if the smugglers send them on their way. Many have simply had their money taken, and then the people smugglers leave them behind. However, they have a lot of motivation. The Palestinian refugee camps are very underdeveloped, economically speaking (Perdigon, 2015). Poverty is one of the most enduring characteristics of the camps and it is one of the strongest motivators for the refugees to take extreme measures to improve their lot in life. Additionally, not only are the living conditions harsh in the Palestinian refugee camps; with the civil war in nearby Syria, the camps have become a refuge of sorts for Syrian refugees as well. This, in turn, has attracted the attention of the Islamic State and others, effectively bringing the Syrian civil war to the Palestinians.

The Syrian forced migrants has adopted people smuggling, but they have adopted other means of improvisation to aid in their survival. One of these methods is taking advantage of religious social networks (Akcapar, 2006)[12]. This

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[12]Akcapar relates a fascinating side story to the larger narrative of forcibly displaced people in the Middle East. Before the Syrian civil war, the largest number of people seeking asylum in Turkey were from Iran. A surprising characteristic of many of these asylum seekers is that they were Christian converts, both Catholic and Protestant. The conversions took place both in Iran and in Turkey, which was being used as a country of transit on to the West. This is extraordinary as Turkey is 99 percent Muslim. However, these converts were using their conversion as migration strategy. As a persecuted minority in Iran, the converts, predominantly Shi'a could not be deported back to Iran as they risked death. Additionally, the conversion gave them access to a whole new social network that could provide support and connections to the West and this seems to be the appeal for a number of the converts.

strategy is neatly illustrated by the experience of the Syrian Christians. Christians, in general, in the Middle East have been hit particularly hard by forced migration. Religious leaders are abducted, and sometimes murdered, and across the Middle East, thousands of Christians are fleeing their homes. Syrian Christians compose tens of thousands of the forced migrants escaping the civil war in Syria. In rebel held areas of Syria, no outward show of Christianity is tolerated. Other refugees have described being forced to pay a heavy tax of money and/or property. If they resist, they face the prospect of being killed. As Flamini (2013) goes on to report:

> The reality is that the Christian population in the Middle East is shrinking at a faster rate than ever before, through emigration and wholesale killing, as well as a lower birthrate than its Muslim counterpart… Migrants can come back, of course, but rarely do. Sixty-three percent of Arab Americans are descendants of Christian immigrants.

How are they escaping? Chances are it is very similar to what the Iranian Christians did in the past. That is to say that they are leveraging their connections with their Christian social networks to escape to the West.

The fact that no real, formal coping mechanisms have developed in the Middle East is a serious problem for the region. As the Syrian forced migrant experience demonstrates, having a culture of hospitality is not enough. Nearby countries will take the brunt of the influx of migrants, and if they are fortunate, like Turkey, they will be economically healthy enough to be able to handle it. If they are not as robust, like Jordan or Lebanon, they will soon reach the breaking point, and if they do break, it will only add to the already existing instability. This lack of formal coping mechanisms have, in opinion of this author, compelled many of the forcibly displaced to risk abuse and death to try to reach Europe through the avenue of people smugglers (US Fact Sheet, 2006)[13], instead of being able to take

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However, it seems just as clear that for others the conversion came about from interest in Christianity. Regardless of the initial reasons for converting, all of these Christian refugees used their new connections to aid them in their journey.

[13]The popular press commonly confuses human trafficking and human smuggling as there is a lot of overlap between the two. According to the United States Department, human smuggling is the facilitation, transportation, attempted transportation or illegal entry of a person(s) across an international border, in violation of one or more countries laws, either clandestinely or through deception, such as the use of fraudulent documents. Human smuggling, also known as trafficking in persons (TIP) can be compared to a modern day

advantage of a regional mechanism for safer transport away from the violence. Instead, the forced migrants are left to fend for themselves, and do the best they can to reach safety.

This also demonstrates a failure on the part of the host countries to recognize the value of the migrants. As illustrated in previous sections, the refugees result in a net benefit to their host countries. Farsighted regional leaders would have looked at history, seen the patterns, and have instituted coping mechanism to allow host countries to quickly integrate the refugees into the society of the host country, but still make it easy for them to leave when life calms down in their country of origin. Additional coping mechanisms would have allowed the host countries to quickly call upon the resources of other regional countries, so that no one country got overwhelmed. One can hope that the Syrian forced migrant experience will demonstrate the need for such mechanisms and when the next mass forced migration happens, the region will be better prepared.

A Crisis?

In the press, it is not uncommon to hear the condition of the Palestinian refugees as well as the Syrian refugee story as being described as a "crisis". However, is this the best way to describe it? The Merriam-Webster dictionary (2015) defines "crisis" as "a difficult or dangerous situation that needs serious attention." It goes on to say that it is "a situation that has reached a critical phase." The word also carries with it the implication that something is short-term and urgent. It also means that it is something that can be taken care fairly quickly. A crisis is a turning point, something that comes, and then is gone. The plight of both the Palestinian refugees and the Syrian refugees is urgent, but is it short-term, something that will pass quickly? No. The Palestinian refugees have been refugees for 60+ years. That is an extremely long time for something to be at a "critical phase". The Syrian conflict has been going on since 2011 with no clear end in sight, and with more and more players getting embroiled in it. This will only lead to further forced migration out of Syria, and a continuation of the refugee tragedy.

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form of slavery. It involves the exploitation of people through force, coercion, threat, and deception and includes human rights abuses such as debt bondage, deprivation of liberty, and lack of control over freedom and labor. Trafficking can be for purposes of sexual exploitation or labor exploitation.

"Crisis" is the wrong term to use to try to understand what is going on when forced migration occurs. It is understandable that it is used, because it has a sense of urgency to it, and it is an emotive word, containing within it a call to action. However, it is misleading as it does not prepare people to engage for the long-term and, more importantly, to think of long-term solutions. As Adamson underlines (2006), could this be one of the reasons that regional coping mechanisms were never set up, even though forced migration in the Middle East has been occurring the since at least the early 20th century?

Of course it is impossible to say one way or another, but what can be said is that forced migration demands a different type of analytical lens; the reason is forced migration is a systemic problem, not a short-term disaster that will be around and then disappear. Forced migration, as just mentioned, has been going on in the region for so long that it has become practically a part of the fabric that makes up the Middle East. It is an occurrence that is made up of crises. When violence breaks out in a Palestinian refugee camp, which is a crisis. When a boat filled with refugees capsizes off the coast of Europe that is a crisis (Al [Jazeera], 2016). When a population has been displaced for decades, when a 6-year-old civil war keeps producing thousands of forced migrants that is something else entirely. It is a systemic calamity.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary (2015) defines "calamity" as "a state of deep distress or misery caused by major misfortune or loss; an event that causes great harm and suffering." The Palestinian refugees are in a perpetual state of deep distress and misery. The civil war in Syria is an ongoing event that produces great harm and suffering, and the everyday experience of the Syrian refugees trying to make it to safety is one of the miseries caused by the greatest of misfortunes and loss – the destruction of their homes and those they care about.

Understanding forced migration, as a calamity would mentally prepare policy makers by giving them a sense of the enormity of the challenge. It would make them consider the fact that it is not a short-term disaster but a long-term phenomenon that will require long-term solutions and long-term planning; not only to ameliorate the current crisis, but also to prepare for the possibility of more forced migrations in the future.

Additionally, the host countries need to revise the way that they think of the refugees themselves. Instead of thinking along the lines of the people being in their country for the short-term, as "guests" so to speak, and providing the

refugees with assistance that is designed to provide aid only in the short-term, it would be better to begin to think of them as exiles, not the sense of being barred punitively, but in the sense of being compelled to leave by circumstances, an involuntary exile. Exiles never know exactly if, or when, they could return. It could be tomorrow, or it could be 20 years in the future. By thinking of the forced migrants as exiles, host countries would be incentivized to develop flexible instruments to provide aid and flexible policies towards hosting them as they could be there for a long time or for only a short while.

Conclusion

One can hope that this shift in thinking will force the regional policy makers to consider the long-term benefits to the host countries having migrants. Of course, an increase in migration will be disruptive to a host country, and forced migration even more so. However, in the long run, forced migration is a net benefit to the country. Economically, it makes the host country more prosperous, culturally, it is enriching, and politically, it makes the system more robust and the institutions more flexible. Internationally, countries in the region are forced to cooperate to not only share the initial burden of created by the forced migration, but to address the underlying factors that created it in the first place. This has the effect of strengthening existing ties, and creating new ones.

However, forced migration is not without its costs. The greatest cost is born by the forced migrants themselves, as they have to go through some of the harshest trauma that people can experience, and without a clear idea of when it will end. The host countries face social and political disruption created by the influx of migrants, and if it continues long enough, they face the prospect of a shifting national identity that can lead to internal political changes, as people may resist this change. Additionally, the host countries, by opening their borders to the migrants run the risk of inadvertently spreading conflict, if the refugees become militarized or the combatants follow them to the host country.

Despite these costs, and one by now would hope that the region would have got frustrated enough to do something to prevent them[14], the Middle East has

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[14] Perhaps forced migrations have become something like genocide. After every genocide the world seems to collectively say "never again!" but several years later another is happening.

seen multiple incidences of forced migration in the last two centuries. Traditionally, cultural hospitality has been the mechanism by which the refugees are aided, and this has meant that neighboring countries were willing to host the refugees, and this led to an absence of regional coping mechanisms. The presence of a Palestinian population living in several generations of official impermanence, and the tragedies lived out on a daily basis by the Syrian refuges is an indication that the region needs to rethink how it addresses forced migration.

One way is to stop thinking of forced migration as a crisis, as this carries the idea that it is temporary, and think of it as a calamity. This term carries with it the notion that is something serious with long-term and significant consequences. Another way is to think of the refugees, not as transient guests, but as involuntary exiles that may be away from their home for an unknown span of time. This would preserve the culture of hospitality, but combine it with long-term thinking about how best to express that hospitality, so that when the next forced migration occurs, it may actually be a short-term crisis, and not a calamity with no end in sight.

Future Study

More research needs to be done on the social attitudes that host countries have towards refugees. How do the citizens of the countries view refugees? Are they considered outsiders? What about in places like Jordan, where Palestinian refugees have been there for generations? Do the societies view them as a part of the national fabric? In Lebanon the refugees have not been able to integrate much into the country. Is it the same in Jordan, or has the fact that the population is so large meant that they have been integrated more? How extensive is the viewpoint that forced migrants are guests? Does it extend beyond Turkey, or is it unique to Turkey? Additional study needs to be done to see how open the regional policy makers would to redefining the way that refugees are viewed, not as transients, but more as exiles. Lastly, more research needs to be done on how long it takes for host countries to receive the benefits of hosting migrants.

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