

GEOPOLITICS: NEEDS OF MIGRANTS, REFUGEES, AND ASYLUM SEEKERS IN EUROPE

ALBERT PERSAUD

THE CENTRE FOR APPLIED RESEARCH AND EVALUATION INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION
(CAREIF), LONDON

Europe is struggling to cope with the large-scale influx of migrants making their way across the Mediterranean to Europe, the largest since the aftermath of World War II. It has sparked a crisis as countries struggle to cope with the influx. At the same time, it is creating divisions within the European Union (EU) over how best to resettle refugees. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in 2015 more than 380,000 migrants and refugees landed on Europe's southern shores as compared to 216,000 arrivals in 2014. They were fleeing persecution, poverty, and conflicts raging beyond the continent's borders. The number of deaths can only be estimated. The refugee crisis has created a disproportionate burden on some countries, particularly Greece and Italy. Germany has been more liberal in accepting migrants and promises to accept about one million refugees over the next 12 months. Other countries have begun to take a more humanitarian approach albeit slow and narrow in practicality.

Key words: Geopolitics; Refugees; Public health; Globalization; Brexit.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Albert Persaud, The Centre for Applied Research and Evaluation International Foundation (CAREIF), Centre for Psychiatry Wolfson Institute of Preventive Medicine, Barts and The London School of Medicine & Dentistry, Queen Mary University of London, Old Anatomy Building, Charterhouse Square, London EC1M 6BQ, England. Email: albert.persaud@careif.org

GLOBAL CONFLICT

The year 2014 marked the 100th anniversary of the First “Great” World War (1914-1918). At the time, it was one of the largest ever with 70 million military personnel and ended with over nine million combatant and seven million civilian deaths. The Second World War (1939-1945) followed and was the deadliest war in human history involving 100 million people and 30 countries. It resulted in 60 million deaths, including eight million deaths in the Holocaust. Armed conflict in the world has remained with us, for example, Vietnam, the Falklands, Bosnia, Iraq, Myanmar, Kashmir, the Sudan, Yemen, and now the Syrian civil war. However, at the beginning of the 21st century, the September 11th (2001) attack in New York was a crucial moment in the history of conflict. Often referred to as 9/11, it involved a series of coordinated attacks by Al-Qaeda, killing 3,000 people and injuring over 6,000 people. Until that time, an attack of such scale on the United States of America was unthinkable. The United States responded with the “War on Terror” and, under United States Joint Forces Command, invaded Afghanistan to defeat the Taliban which sheltered Al-Qaeda. A short time later, the USA invaded Iraq in search of “Weapons of Mass Destruction” (WMD).

In December 2010, the Arab Spring began in Tunisia. It started a series of nonviolent protests and eventually violent demonstrations that spread across the Middle East. It mostly in-

volved young people yearning for a new dawn of democracy and freedom. Many hoped that it would bring a reform in governance, but instead it brought a violent crackdown by the oppressive governments on those who dared to speak out and protest. Conflict escalated, most notably in Egypt and Libya, becoming the precursor of the current Syrian conflict. The chaos in Iraq, Egypt, Libya, and Syria created a vacuum that allowed terrorist organizations like DAESH (also known as ISIS, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIL, Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) to recruit and flourish, to impose their barbaric ideology, and to export it across the globe. Beyond the Middle East, Europe became its target.

REFUGEES, ASYLUM SEEKERS, AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE

War, conflicts, and major natural disasters carry with them largely invisible, often crippling, mental scars that can impact millions of lives; they often create large numbers of refugees,¹ asylum seekers,² and internally displaced people.³ In 2015 the number of refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced people globally reached 65.3 million, equivalent to the population of France or the United Kingdom (World Bank, 2016). Many fled the brutality of their own governments or terrorist groups like DAESH, Taliban, Boko Haram, and Al Qaeda. Of these, 21.3 million were refugees; among them 51% were under the age of 18 years. Three countries accounted for 54% of refugees — Somalia 1.1 million, Afghanistan 2.7 million, and Syria 4.9 million. Each day, conflict forced 34,000 people to flee their homes. Displaced people were primarily hosted by the globe's poorest countries — 39% in the Middle East and North Africa, 29% in Africa, 14% in Asia and the Pacific, 12% in the Americas, and 6% in Europe. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2016) reported a record 98,400 asylum requests from unaccompanied or separated minors and 32,000 refugees gained citizenship in 28 countries.

While the current crisis is severe, over the past 25 years the majority of refugees and internally displaced people under UNHCR's mandate can be traced to just a few conflicts in the following areas: Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Sudan, Colombia, the former Yugoslavia, and the regions between Asia and Europe known as the Caucasus (UNHCR, 2016). Historically, refugees flee to the neighbors of their country of origin; however, the responsibility for hosting has not been shared evenly across continents. About 15 countries have consistently hosted the majority of refugees. At the end of 2015, Syria's neighbors, Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan hosted 27% of all refugees worldwide. Afghanistan's neighbors, Pakistan, and Iran, hosted 16%; and Sudan's neighbors, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia, hosted 7%.

LATIN AMERICA AND NORTH AMERICA

For nearly a hundred years, migration from Latin American countries, particularly from Mexico, to the United States (primarily) and Canada has been a persistent social phenomenon. Initially, it was prompted by the need for workers to build North American railroads and, later, by the need for agricultural workers. Mexican migrant agricultural workers were highly desirable

for their hard work ethic and willingness to work for far lower wages than U.S. nationals (Durand, Massey, & Charvet, 2000). During the second half of the 20th century, economic and sociopolitical factors in Mexico, Central, and South America such as unemployment, governmental instability and corruption, social disintegration, and civil wars were the main drivers of the increasing migration. Hispanic migration over the last five decades has been characterized by the so-called “undocumented” migration. Unlike migrant workers of the past, these undocumented or illegal migrants often remain in the USA for many years, working mostly in low-paying sectors. Absence of a legal status contributes to their marginalization and discrimination.

In 2013, Mexicans constituted the largest Hispanic subgroup (33 million) in the USA, representing 63% of the total Hispanic population. Other Latino groups include Cuban/Caribbean, Puerto Rican, Central American (the largest subgroup coming from El Salvador), and South American (the largest subgroup coming from Colombia). Between 2000 and 2010, the Puerto Rican subgroup grew by 36%, Cuban by 44% (many escaping from Cuba by sea), and others 22%. Of interest, the elderly Latino subpopulation is currently one of the largest segments of the U.S. “baby-boomers” generation. It is also worth noting that Latin America has migration issues from within. For example, there are an estimated 900,000 to 1.2 million undocumented individuals of Haitian origin living in the Dominican Republic, many of whom are stateless or at risk of statelessness.

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC REGION

Only 20 Asian countries have adhered to the 1967 protocol following the 1951 Refugee Convention. The region is home to 7.7 million people, more than half of whom are refugees. The remaining population includes 1.9 million internally displaced people and 1.4 million stateless persons. The majority of the refugees originate from Afghanistan and Myanmar. The Afghan refugee situation has become dramatically protracted. The majority are living in Iran and Pakistan, which have generously hosted them for over three decades. The situation in Myanmar is just as delicate. For several decades now, people from different ethnic groups have been fleeing to avoid conflict and violence. Currently, an estimated 500,000 refugees are in the jurisdiction of neighboring countries such as the Karen and Karenni in Thailand, Chins in Malaysia, Rohingyas in Bangladesh, and other large urban centers. There are over 400,000 internally displaced people in Myanmar, which makes up more than half of the population of the Kachin and Rakhine states. This includes over 140,000 people displaced during intercommunal violence two years ago, many of whom have undetermined citizenship status.

Approximately 63% of the 3.5 million refugees live outside camps, mainly in urban environments where they are virtually unprotected and vulnerable to a host of stressors. Those living in camps lack the freedom to relocate and many do not possess documentation, risking detention and deportation. Detention practices and other forms of restrictive asylum policies continue to spread, limiting the refugees’ access to basic services and the labor market. The consequences are predictable, leading to exploitation and abuse. Women and adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to the actions of sexual predators. In view of this situation, many refugees and their families risk their lives crossing the sea in search of protection. The UNHCR has documented these regular departures, particularly in the Bay of Bengal in the Bangladesh-Myanmar border area.

AFRICA

The massive number of internally displaced people caused by conflict, violence, and human rights abuses are likely to continue to affect many African countries in years to come. The number of displaced in the Central African Republic (611,000), South Sudan (1.5 million in 2013, 200,000 in 2014), and Yemen (85,000) is likely to grow in the years ahead. The renewed fighting in the Democratic Republic of Congo, initially displacing one million people, has brought the total number of internally displaced people in that country to 2.8 million (UNHCR, 2016).

In recent years, protection established by several African nations has been challenged, making it difficult for human rights advocates to access people in need of international protection. In Southern Africa, an increase in mixed migratory movements has led to growing hostility toward refugees, putting pressure on asylum and protection space.

A significant portion of Mali's population (267,000) remains internally and externally displaced. The insurgency in the federal states of Adamawa, Borno, and Kano in north-eastern Nigeria has displaced many people, forcing more than 650,000 to flee their homes within the country and an estimated 70,000 to take refuge across its borders with Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.

EUROPE MIGRANT CRISIS

Europe is struggling to cope with the large-scale arrival of migrants making their way across the Mediterranean into Europe, an issue the region has not faced since the aftermath of World War II (BBC, 2016). As countries struggle to address the volume of migrants, a humanitarian crisis has emerged. This has created divisions in the European Union over how best to deal with the crisis and resettle displaced people. With tensions running high, Europe's leaders remain divided on how best to respond. A disproportionate burden is being placed on some countries, particularly Greece and Italy.

Squalid conditions in makeshift refugee camps and the heartbreaking photograph of a drowned Syrian toddler have put the global spotlight on Europe's refugee crisis. Many refugee camps are running short of food and lack basic health care. Women and children have been victims of human trafficking, rape, and other abuses. These dangers have not stopped refugees from making desperate bids to reach Europe. In 2015 more than a million migrants crossed the Mediterranean sea to Europe, many fleeing the war in Syria. Most had traveled the short route between Turkey and Greece, about a five mile distance at its closest point. However, this route was closed in March 2016 when the EU signed a three billion Euro (\$3.3 bn; £2.3 bn) deal with Turkey to stop the movement of migrants across its borders to Europe. This has resulted in a shift of migrants to Libya where the crossing to Europe is much more hazardous with its greater distance and unpredictable water currents. Even still, figures up to August 2016 from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) report in excess of 107,000 refugees arriving in Italy, more than 11,000 intercepted by the Libyan coast guard and more than 3,000 having died en route, many of whom were children and unaccompanied young people. However, the true number of migrant deaths will never be known, because tracking is minimal at best or nonexistent. The only protection for migrants willing to risk their lives are European Nations' navies and coast guards, rescue

ships commissioned by humanitarian organizations, and commercial vessels operating under the code of maritime law for assisting boats in distress.

European reaction to this influx of migrants has challenged its liberal foundations with a rising tide of nationalist sentiments. There have been over 300 terrorism-associated deaths on mainland Europe. Very few of these deaths have been linked to migrants fleeing conflict, but instead, the majority of perpetrators are nationals of countries that have been most affected, mainly France, Belgium, and Germany. Despite this reality, migrants have experienced violent attacks across the EU. Hate speech, arson, and physical violence are commonly reported, accompanied by a resurgence of right-wing anti-immigrant political views. This has been further fueled by EU politicians' rhetoric on keeping Europe "Christian." Too often, politicians use anti-refugee, xenophobic, racist expressions to chase approval ratings and votes, unfortunately contributing to a rise of violence against ethnic minority nationals, including a serious rise in anti-Semitic attacks.

Terrorism fears in Europe have led to punitive crackdowns on garments worn by women. In France the full-face veil, like the burka, is banned; conservatives in Germany want a ban on the full-face veil as a security measure; in Bulgaria the National Assembly has approved the first step to ban veils that partially cover the face; in Denmark the populist party cited security concerns in proposing a burka ban, and in Austria the far-right party has promised a burka ban if it wins the election.

The EU proposed a scheme to relocate 160,000 migrants for distribution among EU nations with binding quotas to ease the burden on those countries most affected. However, this proposal was not fully supported by EU governments, with Eastern European countries opposing the scheme for two reasons: (a) many of their voters are virulently opposed to Muslim immigration, and (b) refugee admissions are believed to be a sovereign national decision. Britain is exempt due to its historic opt-out on justice matters. Ironically, the testimony of aid workers and EU officials revealed that the scheme is widely opposed by migrants who have no desire to be "relocated" to poorer Eastern European states when they would rather go to Germany or Sweden. Perhaps surprisingly, a recent Amnesty International Global Survey (2016) found that the vast majority of EU citizens (80%) would welcome refugees with open arms, with many even prepared to take them into their own homes, with Germany and the UK being at the top of the list.

GEOPOLITICS, UNITED KINGDOM, AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

The United Kingdom has been an active partner in the changing face of geopolitics, shaping foreign policy in different regions of the world. In 2016, two defining events subsequently reset the UK's relationship with Europe and the global arena. On June 23rd, the people of the United Kingdom voted in an EU referendum on whether to stay in or leave the EU. More than 33 million UK citizens voted in the referendum, with the national turnout at 72%. The result was 52% to 48% in favor of the UK leaving the EU (Brexit). A range of emotions were unleashed following the outcome. Unsurprisingly, the media went into a frenzy. However, amid the chaos a series of political calculations regarding deals and predictions were being made.

The outcome of the referendum delves deeper than UK citizens' desire to "take back control," a successful slogan coined by those who campaigned to leave. The defining issues were control of migration into the country, Parliament's right of sovereignty, and a stop to the ever-

increasing financial contribution to the EU. The UK previously contributed £10 billion per year, the second largest contributor to the EU budget, only to see its money spent by unaccountable bureaucrats.

Both the UK and EU seem to have sleepwalked into Brexit. No preparative measures were taken in anticipation of the result. The withdrawal of one of the EU's largest member countries (UK) means the loss of an EU country serving on the United Nations Security Council, with only France remaining. The Brexit implication could also have a wider knock-on effect for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) through its transatlantic relationship. This leaves France as the only large and capable military force in the EU, weakening wider European political stability and Europe's position in the international world.

Brexit will add to the divisions in Europe and amplify its security weaknesses. Should the EU fall apart, there would be serious concerns in Washington D.C. given Russia's repositioning of its military strength in Eastern Europe as seen in the hostilities in the Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. Russia's military and political backing of Assad's Syrian regime has further strained its relationship with Washington. Brexit could not have happened at a better time for Russia as it counters UN sanctions for the annexation of Crimea.

July 6th 2016 marked the publication of the Iraq Inquiry's Chilcot Report (Chilcot, 2016) published seven years after the inquiry was first announced. The report consists of both a summary and a detailed account broken up into 12 volumes regarding the UK's involvement in the Iraq war. It spans almost a decade of UK government policy decisions between 2001 and 2009. The document stated that peaceful options for disarmament had not been exhausted, the threat posed by the Iraqi regime was deliberately exaggerated, and intelligence regarding the certain threat posed by Iraq's weapons of mass destruction were not justified. The UK Prime Minister sought to make the case for military action to Members of Parliament and the public in the build-up to the invasion in 2002 and 2003. Invasion and regime change seemed to be the only objectives, with no evidence of a postwar strategy for Iraq that would include economic and societal reconstruction. During the conflict in Iraq, 179 British servicemen perished. Thousands of Iraqi civilians were subject to the same fate, this followed by a brutal sectarian war.

The UK government, like the public, is battle fatigued. This sentiment was clearly displayed during the debate in the House of Commons (2013) on the use of chemical weapons in Syria and whether or not to intervene militarily. Parliament ultimately decided not to intervene. There were concerns about the chemical weapon attacks in Syria, but Members of Parliament (MPs), heeding the lessons learned from Iraq, worked with the international community in search of a solution to the conflict. Over time, the situation in Syria has become worse with sustained interventions by coalition forces. The siege of Aleppo served as a poignant reminder of the Syrian government's brutality in which Russia has both been complicit and participated.

The British public is very sober in its assessment of the various conflicts in which its military has participated. They witnessed the invasion and occupation of Iraq that led to an insurgency and civil war. Intervention in Afghanistan seems unlikely to end the violence and produce a stable, enduring government. Even without invading or occupying Libya, participation in toppling its regime left that country in chaos. They have seen the regular repatriation of British soldiers from Iraq and Afghanistan and want no further participation in foreign conflicts. Syria is now one of the most chaotic, violent, and destructive places on the planet and its problems seem to defy a solution with or without intervention. Despite its sad legacy of entanglements overseas,

the British remain a compassionate people, readily giving aid to countries in need and a UK government providing the world's second largest aid budget of £12.2 billion (The Department for International Development, DFID, 2016) equivalent to 0.7% of gross national income.

ONGOING GLOBAL CONFLICT

The threat of deadly conflict was diminished after the cold war. Since 9/11, there has been a serious escalation, with worsening humanitarian consequences, spreading across Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, South Sudan, Yemen, Chad, Libya, Burundi, Turkey, Ukraine, Myanmar, Columbia, Mali, Republic of Congo (Center for Preventive Action, 2017). No relief appears to be in sight. The diplomatic standoff between the United States and Russia on finding a way to end the carnage in Syria, in particular Aleppo, is truly disconcerting. The majority of conflict stems from brutal dictators or extremist groups like DAESH and other similar jihadist groups, whose doctrines and ideologies are founded on sectarianism and legitimacy enforced by brutality and violence. Interestingly, some dictators find favor amongst Western and other global leaders, conferring an appearance of legitimacy. Saddam Hussein, Colonel Gaddafi, Robert Mugabe, Kim Jong-un are but a few examples. The consequence is an ever greater flow of refugees heading for safety, including toward Europe.

MENTAL HEALTH, PUBLIC HEALTH, AND CULTURE

During the past several decades, there has been a steadily increasing recognition of the importance of cultural influences on the individual's general health and, in particular, mental health. Culture impacts practically all aspects of mental illness and, thus, culturally relevant care is needed for people of diverse ethnic, racial, social, and cultural backgrounds. From a social perspective, the world has witnessed rapid and significant changes magnified by political crises and an explosion of information disseminated through the global media. Social media has amplified the global media and created its own media outlets. Countries throughout the world are becoming multiethnic and polycultural in nature (World Association of Cultural Psychiatry, WACP, 2016). It is evidenced by the massive migration phenomena both within and between nations worldwide. The implications (and consequences) of migrations in statistical, human, and clinical terms urgently require in-depth examination of their precipitating factors and actions to be taken to improve the cultural competence of health and mental health professionals. Comprehensive medical and psychiatric care should respect identities and beliefs, and wholly consider the ethnic, racial, and cultural background of each and every immigrant person.

At the heart of this is the need to respect and protect an individual's cultural, religious, and spiritual identity, especially after the long ordeal of the migration journey and its traumatic sequelae, paying attention to the acculturative processes and providing protection to avoid or prevent coercion and fear-inducing procedures. Behaviors or traits that support resilience are key components of the immigrants' survival and ability to adapt to new social conditions.

We have to make sure that all basic health care is provided to migrants, with a clear emphasis on the immediacy of physical care, for example, injuries from violence, war, rape, malnu-

trition, fractures, pregnancy and childbirth, basic immunizations, chronic medical conditions. Also emotional and psychological care has to be provided to alleviate the effects of torture, violence, rapes, deaths, traumatic stress. There is an urgent need to create a reservoir of cultural understanding and recognition of the importance of cultural influences on life and mental health.

Governments of countries receiving migrants should act with promptness and fairness in assessing, screening, and deciding on the legal status of migrants. Prompt decisions on refugee and asylum status must be made with humanity and dignity. The host populations must be reassured, their fears and concerns addressed, and their leaders encouraged to become actively involved in assisting with constructive resettlement programs. One of the greatest challenges for providers of health care to refugees and asylum seekers is to determine the cultural framework necessary to understand the meanings behind expressions of distress and perceptions of illness. From there, we can proceed with the clinical process of making assessments and decisions. Cultural competence is an intervention that seeks to better understand cultural expressions of distress and thus choose the appropriate interventions.

Over the course of globalization and the movement of people across nations it has become vital that policy makers, general health carers, and mental health professionals are aware of the different needs of the patients they provide care for. The rising tide of global migration means that, increasingly, practitioners and patients will come from different cultures. The inclusion of cultural psychiatry and psychotherapy is therefore a matter of growing relevance. Everyone must be trained on migration, mental health, and transcultural issues in psychiatry and psychotherapy. Education should be provided in a systematic way, making use of the best evidence. Scientific forums should share and encourage research into this relatively new field of study. Emphasis must be placed on creating national branches or sections of social/cultural psychiatry and psychotherapy. In so doing, we will create the cultural competence to better care for immigrants, ethnic minority groups, refugees, and asylum seekers that would at the same time preserve their dignity.

It is sad to be reminded that mankind continues to resort to brutality in settling political disputes and ideological differences. In the 21st century, we find ourselves caught up in these global conflagrations with no relief in sight. As in the past, they are often triggered by romantic, idealized views of the past or incited by skewed interpretations of sacred religious or philosophical texts and teachings (The Centre for Applied Research and Evaluation International Foundation, CAREIF, 2016).

NOTES

1. A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her home country and is unable or unwilling to return due to fear of persecution. The 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees gave refugees legal protection under the international refugee law. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is mandated to respond to refugee needs.
2. Asylum-seekers are those who have made a claim that they are refugees and are in the process of waiting for it to be accepted or rejected. "Stateless" people are not considered as a national by any state ("de jure") or do not enjoy fundamental rights in their homeland ("de facto").
3. An internally displaced person (IDP) is someone who was forced to flee his/her home but who did not cross a state border. IDPs benefit from the legal protection of international human rights law and, in armed conflict, international humanitarian law.

REFERENCES

- Amnesty International Global Survey. (2016). *Refugees welcome index*. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/05/refugees-welcome-survey-results-2016/>
- BBC. (2016). *Europe migrant crisis*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32395181>
- Center for Preventive Action. (2017). *Global Conflict Tracker*. Retrieved from <http://www.cfr.org/global/global-conflict-tracker/p32137#!>
- Chilcot, J. (2016). *Statement by Sir John Chilcot: 6 July 2016. The Iraq inquiry*. Retrieved from <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/247010/2016-09-06-sir-john-chilcots-public-statement.pdf>
- Durand, J., Massey, D. S., & Charvet, F. (2000). Changing geography of Mexican immigration to the United States: 1910-1996. *Social Science Quarterly*, 81(1), 1-15.
- House of Commons. (2013). *Syria and the use of chemical weapons*. Retrieved from <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm130829/debtext/130829-0001.htm>
- International Organization for Migration [IOM]. (2016). IOM Libya brief. Retrieved from <https://www.iom.int/countries/libya>
- The Centre for Applied Research and Evaluation – International Foundation. (2016). *Careif position statement on stigma*. Retrieved from <http://careif.org/careif-position-statement-on-stigma/>
- The Department for International Development (DFID). (2016). *Statistics on international development: 2016*. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statistics-on-international-development-2016>
- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2016). *Global trends: Forced displacement in 2015*. Retrieved from <https://s3.amazonaws.com/unhcrsharedmedia/2016/2016-06-20-global-trends/2016-06-14-Global-Trends-2015.pdf>
- World Association of Cultural Psychiatry (WACP). (2016). *Déclaration sur la crise mondiale des migrants* [Declaration for the world migrant crisis]. Retrieved from <http://www.recherche-clinique-psy.com/spip.php?article246>
- World Bank. (2016). *Forcibly displaced: Toward a development approach supporting refugees, the internally displaced, and their hosts*. Washington, DC: World Bank Group.