

Adapting Ourselves and the Other in an Evolving World

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Abstract

There are issues that make you mostly to think. There are issues that make you mostly to feel. Migration issue is one of those rare issues that make you to think, to feel and to act. Recent months migration has acquired a vast dynamic in some Greek Islands and northern frontiers as huge numbers of refugees from Syria and Afghanistan enter literary every day.¹ The demands of this moving population in shelter food water and schooling resembles to a huge natural catastrophe. According to every sociocultural and geopolitical analysis, this trend will continue for years to come and is happening into a society in a turmoil because of its own financial and social crisis. As it was written “with the refugee crisis on the top of everyone’s social agenda, there is a population especially feeling the impacts of displacement and violence: women.” According to some official data there are currently 60 million people displaced from their homes as refugees. And 80% of those people are women and children.² With conflict as a constant reality in our world, it is women and children who feel the brunt of the violence and it is academic community, activists, local and international societies and institutions who must feel the urge for those women and children to create and participate in sustainable networks of their development. Having as a given our actual interference and participation into the antiracist and pro-refugees movement in Greece, we are discussing some of the approaches related to women and children we traced in the border line area of Eidomeni, and we compare them to such programs as the Jordan’s Zaatari refugee camp, INTERSOS, or Najlala’s knitting workshops and charity sales in Turkey. There is no such thing as a program able to solve everything in such a complicated and hard issue. Yet where there is true need, and this is a case like that, there should be any possible effort securing that wellbeing of refugee women and children, and the safety of them and of the rest of the world, will not be omitted from our perspectives and efforts.

Key Words: Immigration, Education, Rights, Inclusion

¹ <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>

² <http://mashable.com/sgs/>

Introduction

Greece as Case Study: A society in Transformation

«A «Foreigner». - who can realize the burden of that word»³

The transition of a mono-cultural society into a multi-cultural reality carries a variety of functions in social, financial and cultural field. (Adler 1975; Allport & Gordon 1962) Those functions, never completely liberated from the hegemonic discourses, are at the same time related to the acceptance or the disapproval of the *other*: That acceptance or disapproval, having to do with the perception of the self and the other (and thus with the multiple notion of identity) is involved into the socio-psychological strategies the groups create in order to adjust or not in an evolving world.

Greek society, during and after the 90s, (under the influence of major geopolitical and financial changes) rapidly evolved from a society that used to send immigrants abroad into a society that had to receive immigrants within. This huge step from «human export» into «human import» had as a result the need to adapt a hegemonic «monocultural» and ethnocentric, traditional framework into a multicultural reality. (Bourdieu & Swartz 1977; Bien, 2005) In the various social and cultural dynamics that were created and appeared the recent decades, the strongest one in ideological level was xenophobia, and in practical level was the absence of «proper», or at least functional, structures to receive, to sustain, to educate, to include people.

Many of these refugees who migrate nowadays due to war are women and children (International Migration Outlook 2007, Organization for the Economic Cooperation and Development Publications: OECD 2007, OECD Publications, 2004) that will have to adjust in concentration camps where their own socio-religious framework will exclude them from taking initiatives, despite the fact women will have the burden to sustain their children, and were they might be endangered. They also have to adjust into local societies with a different culture, being a new parameter in financial poverty and social exclusion, that will affect them and society in general.

In this framework it is extremely important to develop major programs to enhance education and socio-psychological aid in the benefit of women and children (Parekh, 1986; Sarup, 1992) and in the benefit of international ethics, and interests as well that must confront fundamentalism even now that it is a bit late. In order to achieve that we must enrich our knowledge, ideas, and practices in respect to the actual field.

The Subgroups and Their Needs

According to some official data there are currently 60 million people displaced from their homes as refugees. And 80% of those people are women and children⁴. With conflict as a constant reality in our world, it is women and children who feel the brunt of the violence and it is academic community, activists, local and international societies and institutions who must feel the urge for those women and children to create and participate in sustainable networks of their development.

According to United Nation's High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) "in the current situation where people are 'on the move', ensuring the identification of and support to Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) in accordance with their best interests is a particular challenge. In most countries, UASC are reluctant to be identified as such, as this would delay their onward movement. Some UASC state, for the same reason, that they are adults. The 'top' nationalities of UASC in Europe are Syrians, Afghans and Eritreans with significant variations between different transit countries.

³ Albert Camus, in his Notes 1940, republished 2014, *Athens: Politeia*.

⁴ <http://mashable.com/sgs/>

The majority of the UASC are boys between the age of 14 to 17 years, but there has been an increase in the percentage of girls. As Caroline Brothers pointed in New York Times in 8/27/2009⁵, using examples of children that became victims of exploitation in Greece and elsewhere «thousands of boys from Afghanistan cross Europe all alone the recent years. Some of them are only 12 years old!» The same wave locates Blance Tax⁶, general executive in the United Nations pointing that within a year it was more than -doubled the percentage of the children that seek asylum in European Countries.

These refugee realities are brutal and they carry conflicts that target and have as primary victims those segments of population that could sustain the fabric of a community even in the move. If you target a woman, if you rape a child, if you attack a woman or her child, you devastate her family and tear apart the broader social structure, even in times of need.

The first issue we must realize is a tough one and even solidarity movements avoid to address it. The women and children are endangered not just of War, not Just of xenophobia and its version of Arabophobia. They are also endangered inside of their communities because of actual circumstances and because of cultural parameters forming what a woman or a child is or should be. According to some data under question "the practice of providing accommodations in large tents, the lack of gender-separate sanitary facilities, premises that cannot be locked, the lack of safe havens for women and girls — to name just a few spatial factors — increases the vulnerability of women and children in the camps. This situation plays into the hands of those men who assign women a subordinate role and treat women traveling alone as 'wild game'.⁷

So there is a growing urge to create a protected environment (Luhmann, 1990) in order those women and children to be able to take initiatives and transcend social exclusion. Only then their migration will have the meaning of a new life in a better environment.

The Question is: Would this be considered as a violation to their ethics? And should these ethics transcend the ethics of the receiving countries and the very Declaration of Human Rights? There is an important discussion here that we should make.

Communalism vs Human Rights

«It's so easy people to support those who suffer, but it is so difficult people to support those who think!» as Oscar Wilde (2007) wrote. If we transcend any kind of convenient sentimentalism and really root to defend the human rights globally, up to the extent we can, we may realize that any use of the term 'culture' in a static way, and every interpretation of the social differences exclusively as cultural differences, it consists an option of racism. Because how can we define racism if not as an ideological representation of the social contradictions as natural orders?

When we think its commonsensical to avoid asking any kind of cultural adaptation 'because the culture of the immigrants should be respected', then we treat this culture not as a social phenomenon in constant evolution but as a religious aspect, in other words as a natural law! This perception is the foundation stone of the communalisms even when these communalisms are in fight. It is the very same argument after all that ethnocentric communalism uses, declaring national culture as a stable and as mono-cultural culture throughout times.

The borderline where these adaptations should be asked is anything related to the violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Forced Marriage, Wife's Abuse, Pedophilia, clitoris cut, deprivation of the girls from schooling or studying, deprivation of

⁵ <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/28/world/asia/28afghankids.html>

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/events/future-of-gender-equality-2015/files/report_forum_gender_equality_en.pdf

⁷ <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/6527/migrants-rape-germany>

women from social participation, cannot be tolerated in any Western Country (in fact in any Country), even for 'religious proposes'. Otherwise the multicultural rhetoric functions in a paternalistic way and is being deprived from its very content, defending exclusively the 'one culture' that the hegemonic subgroup (such as the male or ultra-religious) has imposed to the other segments of a certain culture.

This phenomenon of 'distance' between the local culture and some aspects of the immigrant or refugee culture is one of the main reasons why philosophers and social scientists (Radtke, 1999) claim that the dominant version of inter-culturality is related more to the needs of local culture instead of the minority needs. Because through the mentality of distance, of 'not involvement', the members of the hegemonic local culture hold exclusively their privileges, while they reclaim the universal humanitarianism as exclusively their own characteristic. Zizek (1997) points that this version of inter-culturality reproduces the power relations in planetary level, leaving the victims in their 'cultural fate' without exploring the geopolitical and social reasons of this fate.

One more parameter worth mentioning is that this notion of 'distance', this notion of the immigrant or minority culture as a stable natural law, unable to change even when violates human rights, reinforces the ultra-right wing globally, despite the fact ultra-right wing also violates human rights, fact that proves their hypocrisy and their selective use of human and democratic values.

In conclusion, any kind of fetishistic approach, any kind of a 'folklore like' appeal into a major political issue, leads to the disarming of the much needed political analysis and solutions. This is the case with the 'politically correct' humanitarianism that approaches phenomena like hyper realistic religious aspects cut off from the actual social, cultural and financial circumstances that produce them.

Planning the Programs

Forced migration is a global issue that causes political conflict, economic hardship, social disruption, lack of health infrastructure and other risks pertaining to health and the well-being of individuals. Despite the fact approximately 51% of the refugees are women (from now on in some cases they will be referred as RW), and if we add children we have an even higher percentage, refugee women, more than men, face a number of challenges within forced migration and resettlement such as exposure to sexual violence and unequal access to humanitarian assistance.⁸ This unequal access to the most vulnerable segment of refugee population must and could be stopped with the integration of Refugee Women (and through them children) and with a change of attitude. According to United Nation's High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The attitude of individual staff members has been identified universally by both multilateral and bilateral organizations as the major obstacle to implementation of policies and guidelines on behalf of women in mainstreaming issues related to refugee women. As the Beijing Conference underscores, attitudes sustained by what is still a predominantly male establishment must be changed in order to ensure further progress.

Thus some steps that should be made is to create specialized staff to identify opportunities and barriers in field implementation, as well as additional funding. It is important as we may see later in that draft note to find key figures from within in this effort. According to UNCHR well-targeted and expanded People-Oriented Planning (POP) training relies, to a significant extent on that need for specialized staff. A suggestion on a policy of recruiting only women in relation to children should also be considered. In general any program regarding women should consist of a. actual integration of the target groups, b.

⁸ Global Consultations, 2002; UNHCR, 2001.

physical protection and c. human rights training, d. policy compliance of implementing partners and e. allocation of sufficient resources for implementation. Regarding children should consist on a. a safe and able to offer the basic needs and accepting environment, b. In an effort to not alienate them from their own culture (it might be regarded as aggressive strategy or cultural imperialism otherwise in the camps!) thus RW must have the role of the main educator, c. On socio-psychological support circles, having as a participation criterion the age and 4. access to an enriched education regardless of the gender.

Also the collection of disaggregated statistics which will give more precise planning information to meet specific needs. A further recommendation that food distribution be placed in the hands of refugee women has been developed into an action-oriented research project under the management of the Program and Technical Support Section (PTSS) which will assess the conditions necessary to ensure the success of such distribution and its impact on family level food security.

Furthermore, the very effort to make those women and children feel secure enough and capable to take their lives in their own hands will enrich their world perspective and will make them less vulnerable to religious totalitarian voices. Yet this should be very district and not influenced by geopolitical goals and cultural imperialism of any kind. But it should be influenced by the need and the right to protect the entire population (locals and immigrants) and condemn terrorism through education and human interaction.

Displaced people, asylum seekers, living in exile, are confronted with complexities and uncertainties about their future. Adults, for example, are in need of opportunities that will help them gain knowledge and skills for a healthy life away from criminal activities and violence. Girls and women are the most susceptible to sexual abuse and exploitation in refugee camps. In many cases, girls turn to sex for money in order to support the family (Robinson & Alpar 2009). For that reason, women refugees are a vulnerable group that must have protection, especially in the camps. Initiatives should be made inside the camps, regardless if camps themselves are an imposed and not positive reality at all.

The fact that women make up two-thirds of the world's non-literate populations has been a cause for concern. To ensure a voice for refugee women in the regional preparatory meetings and in the actual planning, it would be an important step that requires education and decision making to build their team within respecting their otherness (Unheimlich). Refugee Women should go through a primary education to understand their Human Rights and Law Protection in the new context. Also, regarding physical protection the UNCHR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) Guidelines on Preventing and Responding to Sexual Violence against Refugees have received international praise and indeed were cited as a model in the Beijing Global Platform of Action. A new training module for Interviewing Applicants for Refugee Status includes a specific chapter and training video on refugee women. A manual on rights awareness training is also under development. It is important to explain the status of a female child as well, knowing that as mothers they know more than they can express in their environment.

According to reports sixty per cent of the women interviewed expressed feelings of insecurity, and one in three were too scared or overwhelmed to leave their homes. Thus a psychological support in an interpersonal basis and then in a well-protected circle to be able to express themselves is also needed. F.i. in Jordan's Zaatari refugee camp, INTERSOS, in coordination with United Nation' Women, established a 'safe place' under the name of 'Women and Girl's Oasis' in November 2012 which was funded by the Government of Netherlands. Refugee women and girls could meet and receive assistance out of the standardized family control system (unwomen.org). On the one hand, this system allows Syrian refugee women to work and receive 'cash for work scheme', and, on the other, it allows them to engage with a peer-to-peer support mechanism and empowerment process.

Moreover, this safe place supports women's growth allowing them to develop personally and socially; they narrate to each other the stories of violence and abuse they experienced in the Syrian conflict, allowing them to re-build confidence, self-esteem and self-reliance. The activities provided to women encompass tailoring, hairdressing, drawing, English classes, mosaic and handcraft workshops and football for girls.

When a structure of their own will be ready we may set up a network connecting those women with local market. The finances might and should be used in order to sustain the schooling they should offer in their children. To corroborate that women's economic empowerment is a prerequisite to sustainable development is fundamental.

The Needs of the Host Communities

Host communities also need massive support. Many of these women's difficulties and rising tensions reflect more general concerns in the communities around them. The social and psychological and financial status of the people are at stake and they also are in a process of alienating from their own traditional environment that goes through blistering changes. Programs must not overlook that fact! There is an interesting paradigm that reveals to us how important is to find key figures that belong to the same culture as WR in order to offer education and construct a network or a woman structure to communicate and interact with locals. In Turkey a Syrian woman Najlaa invested the full amount of help she received in materials for products and, together with the 18 women, began knitting workshops in her home. Having study psychology, she was also able to combine these with psychosocial activities on weekends, allowing the women to deepen their relationship and share their hopes, worries and dreams.

Word soon spread and, in an effort to create a sustainable business model, Najlaa sought approval from Kilis Governorate to hold a charity sale that would help more women to join the community and enable them to earn extra cash to support their families. In January 2013, the first sale, fully supported by the Governorate, was held in Kilis. In just over a year, the knitting group alone has grown to support 45 women, among the centre's 260 participants. Eighteen trainers now offer workshops in hairdressing, Turkish and Arabic, and sewing. The women have also been able to find new premises. This helped not just RW but also local women!

After all, social support, regardless if you are a refugee or a host, is an important factor in reducing the many challenges that women face. Social support is defined as the perception or experience that one is loved, cared for, esteemed, valued and a part of a social group (Wills, 1991). The literature shows that it can have positive impact on both mental and physical health by reducing the severity of the situation and enhancing the well-being of the individual in general. One form of social support is involving women in work that helps in promoting their satisfaction level and the feeling of being valued. The connection of RW and Local Women could be essential.

Resource allocation for ongoing activities and particularly for new initiatives and pilot projects remain a difficulty in times of scarce resources, yet it is a struggle worth giving.

An Effort Worth Doing

According to the Program On the Child Well Being, the keys to lifetime wellbeing starts with the assurance of a safe, low-stress environment. Although it is hard when their life is in a huge turmoil, fundamental Human Rights should not depend on life transitions and these women and children should not be deprived from them.

Our aim, since we address the education of the 21st century, is to learn, enrich and understand how we can, as educators and social scientists, create a foundation that could intervene in those camps and create a safe and supporting environment changing little by

little their perspectives for themselves and the world, and thus their ambitions and needs. For Instance, it is of high importance to research under an interdisciplinary approach how those women can create unions to get themselves protected and active and at the same time able to be involved in the education of the children offering to them a creative and humanitarian view of the world. And at the same time how they can gain money from local markets creating their own products in order to finance their unions and schools. It is not a new born idea. Microfinances proved that money spend in female hands, for instance in India, return to the family and the community. Now is the time to adjust this given in a creative way and under renewed theoretical and practical approaches in Europe and its new refugee oriented reality.

As we already mentioned usually, worldwide, intercultural education is explored either through a hegemonic cynicism that wants to adapt its needs to 'local' ethnocentric and financial needs, either through a simplistic sentimentalism, that deals with it in a general, theoretical «humanitarian» basis, unable to locate the differentiations, the true status and the true needs of the «other», of the specific «education» and the certain «society».

Islamic refugee women and children from non-westernized countries face a number of challenges in adapting to their new environment, especially when that new country, is westernized and further more deals with its own huge obstacles. As international surveys claim⁹ “Refugees are primarily women and children, so it is important that women be in their best health because they usually bear the responsibility of caring for each other and children, often in very difficult situations. To interfere inside the concentration camps and help them organize themselves is a huge first step. This can happen: In Greece in the 90s we built networks in Thracian villages where Muslim women were able to create their own unions and produce local products to finance them and their family. Yet this can happen with immigrants or refugees also: “In Waitako, at the request of women in the local Somali community, a number of initiatives were taken to increase their opportunities for physical activity.

In a survey made by Canada Dept of National Health and Welfare entitled *Isolated, Afraid and Forgotten: The Service Delivery Needs and Realities of Immigrant and Refugee Women Who Are Battered* (MacLeod, L. & Shin, M. 1990) it was pointed the necessity for information about rights and laws to reach these women, the creation of a supportive network, the opportunity to discuss and reassess beliefs and assumptions with women and men who understand their culture and can communicate in their language, subsidized language-training classes with training allowances and free child care facilities, culturally sensitive child care facilities, more job-training courses, affordable housing, and services in the woman's language. Current services in Canada include immigrant women's programs; immigrant family counseling services; settlement/multicultural or ethnically specific organizations; transition houses and other services for battered women; and mainstream legal, health, and social services. The analysis concluded that these women need more culturally sensitive mainstream services, and involvement in the development and operation of services for immigrant and refugee women who are abused.

And organizations like REWA (Refugee Women Alliance) and Immigrant Refugee Women's Program¹⁰ articulate their proposals, yet within a different context than this nowadays Greece and southern Europe in general faces. Some of their experiences and solutions are quite useful yet local reality must create parallel new ones. The added vulnerability and isolation that immigration or refugee experiences impose on women complicate the reality of domestic or camp assault.

9 Pauline B. Guerin, Roda Omar Diiriye, Callie Corrigan BspExSc & Bernard Guerin, *Physical Activity Programs for Refugee Somali Women: Working Out in a New Country*.

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.583.9471&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

¹⁰ <http://www.irwp.net/> 1/12/16

Having that in mind we consider to start by truly collecting, exposing and briefly analyzing some data of reality. And to continue by listening the actual people and communities, gathering practical information in order to articulate useful proposals with the help of the experts. In a second level we must engage the kind of team of social scientists and workers they actually need in order to build the self and the group within and build their children training or the training and care of unaccompanied children in the camps, gaining some self-respect and some money. And parallel, in a third level, we must make them able, with our support, to promote themselves and their products in the local market, creating a framework of friendly shops, making able to finance their family and their structures inside the camp.

This method, family oriented and scalable by its own nature, should address as Irwin Redlener (2007) puts it the range of nutrition, health, environmental, and cognitive supports to healthy development and effective learning” for both children and women. Thus it should be multistakeholder engaging a network of social scientists like psychologists and educators to help those women and children construct a different self and collective image, community-based organizations to help them to create/participate in their own schools in mini scales, in order offer a better education, also to gain access to the internal hierarchy of the camp if not demand for a separate one if necessary, and business to help them gain access to local market, selling their products.

There is no such thing as a program able to solve everything in such a complicated and hard issue. And yet there are indeed issues that make you to think, to feel and to act in order to make the world, even in the slightest, a better and more safe place. Having as a given this is an issue like that, let us make any possible effort as scientist educators and citizens to contribute to such an effort.

Conclusion

As rightfully it is said every research about the Other is a research about the Self. About the limits, the values, the strength, the meaning of the human being. Any program concerning the vast refugee crisis in ethnocentric societies like the European ones, should be considered as a field of renegotiation between a monocultural “past” and a multicultural reality that have to invent “bridges”. It is not important right now if the bridges we must try to invent are big or small. As people say in the Balkans: “*small bridge, big bridge, someone will pass over!*”

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