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They are here already, what do we do now?

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Abstract

The History and the literature have proven that policy of social integration is an essential tool of the modern state to cope with mass waves of immigrants. Such strategy has a positive influence not only on the wellbeing of the immigrant, but also on the host society, reinforcing democratic values and strengthens the social fabric.

Using Lazarus & Folkman transactional model of stress and coping to analyze the current situation in Europe, this paper argues that the way the situation is perceived by the host states affect their ability to create conditions that will enable optimal cognitive decision-making and adequate social integration practices implementation. It is all about governments' point of view of the current mass immigration as a threat, or as a challenge offering opportunities. The Israeli case is presented in this paper to demonstrate this argument. Based on the Israeli experience with mass-migration waves basic requirements for successful immigrant integration are suggested.

Introduction

The refugee crisis in Europe is still in the headlines, and the numbers of people entering the region break new records every month. Over a million asylum seekers requested for refuge in the countries of the European Union (EU) in the course of 2015. This mass migration brought to the old continent new-old waves of fear and concern.

The world has long been witness to mass immigration waves; the refugee crisis from the former Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, refugees from behind the collapsing Iron Curtain, emigration from Mexico to the USA and from Africa to South Europe- if to mention just a few. They all, accompanied by old fears and opposition among the hosting society. Each wave arouses a desire to close the gates and fend off the newcomers just as happened when waves of refugees flooded Europe during the Second World War

Despite attempts to learn from the past – for example, the 1951 Refugee Convention signed by many countries – it always seems that the stage of drawing conclusions is delayed. This time, the rapid speed of the population transfer and its transnational character mislead into thinking that there is nothing to be learned from past experience. Yes, the current waves are faster and more immediate and technologically interconnected something unknown in the past but as in the past it is still poverty, persecution and wars that have transformed the current immigration into waves. This was already discerned by Giorgio Agamben in 1995 ¹ who claimed that:

"What is essential is that each and every time refugees no longer represent individual cases but rather a mass phenomenon"

And numbers are important; waves of refugees with their large scope are always seem more threatening than one individual (or a small group) that ask for our help and our protection.

An excellent example can be found in Israel experience, in a comparison between two instances of coping with non-Jewish refugees; one of hundreds refugees and one with thousands refugees. The first was in the late 70's, when 68 Vietnamese refugees escaped in boats at the end of the war there. They were collected by Israel ships and received asylum and Israeli citizenship. As a symbolic act the government had decided to give asylum to a second group with almost 200 refugees from Vietnamese refugee camps. The groups received a royal welcome and the Absorption Minister at the time took pains to tell them, in Hebrew and French, "We smile at you and extend a welcoming hand and safe haven . . . We did everything to enable you to integrate here and to create happy, productive lives for yourselves" ².

The second instance took place in the recent decade when refugees began to enter Israel from Eritrea and Sudan in relatively large waves. Until the construction of the fence on the border with Egypt, which was designed to halt the refugee flow and succeeded in doing so, more than 50,000 refugees arrived, and most of whom were from Eritrea. Eritrea was defined by the UNHCR as a dictatorial state in which human rights are consistently violated, a place to which fleeing citizens must not be returned. Also, the world's countries recognize almost 90% of the asylum seekers coming from Eritrea as actual refugees. Nevertheless, Israel's attitude toward them in the 2000s was completely different than its treatment of the Vietnamese refugees in the 1970s. The Eritreans did not receive a royal welcome. They were granted temporary group protection visas, not work visas. Despite the time that has elapsed since their arrival, their requests for asylum were not considered. They are constantly under threat of being sent to the Holot detention facility. This flow of immigrants, as opposed to the immigrants of the late 1970s, was perceived as threatening. They were not even defined as refugees, but as "infiltrators"³. Thus, it seems, size does matter!

In this context, the fear aroused by the refugee wave from Africa to Israel, does not differ from the fear aroused even more intensely in Europe with the arrival of the latest refugee flood.

This is so even though history teaches us that large immigration waves, even of refugees, do not necessarily harm the host society. In fact, the contrary is often true, as seen when we study the distant past and examine the impact of Jewish refugee groups who reached the United States, or the Catholic Irish immigrants who fled from famine⁴.

These groups, who came to stay, left their positive mark on American society's economy, cultural life and more. Furthermore, even today, countries encourage various groups to come, out of the understanding that they can contribute to the local economy. This is certainly true when we invite labor immigrants and skilled immigrants to fill a labor-market niche that the local workforce cannot supply. Meanwhile, refugees who already live among us could fill these same jobs, especially when taking into consideration that large groups contain diversity of skills

The main difference between inviting foreign workers and offering the same positions to refugees in our society is, of course, the sense of control held by governments. The illusion of full control has certainly not been proven by past experience. For example, temporary workers who came from Turkey to Germany have not returned to their own country as an organized group. Thus, too, Israel's Population & Migration Authority reports about 14,000 undocumented labor immigrants together with about 100,000 labor immigrants who arrived on a tourist visa and then remained as workers⁵. Nevertheless, labor migration is perceived by governments as managed and controlled, while the status of refugees is unclear – will they leave eventually, or will they stay for good?

Coping Methods

Thus, mass immigration waves stimulate stress on a national level. According to the Lazarus & Folkman model^{6,7,8} the way people deal with stressors contains two elements. The first is an appraisal of the situation as being threatening and damaging or as a challenge, the second is the appraisal of the situation as controlled or not. The coping mechanisms will be expressed in one of two ways: cognitive coping with solving or changing and bettering the problematic situation, or emotion-focused coping. The goal of the latter method is merely to regulate the emotional response to a problem, without changing anything in reality.

It is not surprising that there is a close connection between one's choice of behavior, and one's appraisal of a situation. Appraisal of a situation as a challenge will lead to solution-focused cognitive coping, while appraisal of a situation as threatening or harmful leads to emotion-focused coping. This latter method does not contribute to solving a problem, and even creates damage of its own. It is easy to see how a model dealing with coping with personal stressors, is also appropriate for national stressors.

Everything begins and ends with the governmental "state of mind." For example, today's Israel that is not able to cope with an immigration of 50,000 refugees from Africa, successfully coped in the past with Jewish mass immigration waves, despite the difficulties that accompanied them. If formerly was said that "size does matter," it turns out that the level of the desirability of the immigrants – whether from

ideological or economic reasons – changes the picture completely. Suddenly, size becomes an advantage.

In the 1950s, the number of immigrants from North Africa, Asia and Romania to Israel almost doubled Israel population at the time. In the 1990s, about a million immigrants arrived in Israel from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) and from Ethiopia⁹. The immigration waves of the 1990s, like those of the 1950s, were not easy. This was a heterogeneous immigration, highly educated on one hand but steeped in Soviet culture on the other. The FSU immigration also contained subgroups from traditional societies such as those from the Caucasus Mountains. Finally, a large immigrant group from Ethiopia arrived at the same time.

However, these immigration waves were perceived as a challenge. Although they were not planned and there was no control over numbers or timing of the newcomers, the perception of the decision-makers was that of challenge and control. Immigration of Jews to Israel is perceived as ideological, out of the belief that Israel is the national home for Jews from all over the world – even if it may also be fueled by economic considerations¹⁰. The Law of Return, designed to legislate Jewish immigration, define exactly who is eligible and what special privileges are involved. By contrast, the Law of Entry to Israel, which deals with non-Jewish immigration, states that the Interior Minister has the authority to decide requests on a case-by-case basis. In contrast to the Law of Entry, the Law of Return involves regulated and planned governmental policy. Thus, the coping method used for social integration of the massive immigration waves of the 1950s and 1990s was solution-oriented and cognitive.

When countries such as Canada or Australia encourage immigration of certain groups based on defined criteria and a point system, we view those who come as desirable immigrants whom we invite to join us. But the words “desired” or “wanted” are not sufficient as we also invite foreign workers, but, we expect them to come for a short-term, limited time period. Therefore, the “desirable, wanted immigrants” are those who come as part of a desirable, long-term immigration process. Then, all efforts will be made to integrate or naturalize them out of the hope that they will become part of tomorrow’s society. This does not resemble the

position of refugees. The status of refugees, as Agamben ¹ says, is blurred and uncertain:

"Even in the best of cases, the status of the refugee is always considered a temporary condition that should lead either to naturalization or to repatriation."

Therefore, refugee immigration constitutes the greatest threat. The social integration of refugees, whether for only a few years or permanently, stems from an appraisal of the situation as threatening and damaging, involving a sense of loss of control. This tends to lead to emotional-based coping mechanisms.

The EU countries, like many other countries in the world including Israel that face intense refugees' immigration issues, mainly confront issues of entrance or non-entrance to their borders ¹¹. They are also busy with formal rules and procedures regarding the way an individual receive refugee status, time schedules, where the refugee will live and how he will support himself during the period in which his request for refugee-status will be discussed. The question of borders, who is entitled to enter and who is not, and the discussion of bureaucratic processes – all these creates a system that gives a sense of control over the process. Thus it is easier to get caught up in discussions on these issues.

By contrast, actions geared toward integration of refugee-immigrants are much less salient in governments' discussions. These integration processes should include issues involving social capital, networking, standard of living, education and civil participation, local language acquisition, cultural and behavioral codes, employment opportunities and more. But, the fear that their naturalization will have a negative impact on the host society, the lack of clarity regarding how much time they will remain and the definition of the whole situation as a threat, lead to an absence of planned, systematic coping mechanisms and focuses only on emotions of fear and animosity. Thus the results are esoteric, disorganized activities and a fragmented outlook. Many years later, societies pay a heavy price for choosing this mode of behavior. If governments want to minimize these future prices they need to pull themselves together and regain control.

Whether the people remain for only a few years or actually become naturalized, there are at least three necessary elements for them to lead successful lives in the

host country: (1) acquisition of the language, (2) familiarity with the local culture and its social codes, and (3) satisfactory occupational integration. Avoid coping with these integration issues is damaging the society ability to cope with short time refugees and serve to spoil the critical, initial period of the immigrant-state relationship, of those that will permanently stay, in which the foundation for the person's eventual integration is first established.

Acculturation, optimal integration of immigrants depends on the intensity of the newcomer's inclination to preserve the identity and culture of the country of origin, and his willingness for reciprocal relations and interactions with members of the target society¹². According to Berry's scenarios (Berry, 1997), the absorbing society may find itself hosting a large group that chooses strategies of separation and marginalization, instead of integration which will enable them to become an integral part of the society and identify with its values.

The must minimum requirements for integration

Even countries that cannot or do not want to invest in the full integration of the immigrant (because "he'll soon return to his own country") must still invest in at least the three critical elements of short- or long-term integration.

1. Language acquisition

The ability to communicate with one's surroundings is an urgent prerequisite. Inadequate acquisition of the local language and lack of regulated support in acquiring it, leads to difficulties in understanding what is being said which, in turns, breeds frustration. These, in turn, lead to estrangement and disconnection, and high drop-out rates from schools or other frameworks¹³. This will also damages opportunities and integration within the labor market and lose of fulfilment of immigrants' rights. In case where the person remains permanently in the host country, knowledge of the local language is strongly correlated with perceptions of belonging, identification, and identity¹⁴. The early years in which the immigrant resides in the host county, are the most critical years for forming a sense of belonging and identification. Lack of acquiring the language in a regulated, guided process may encourage a tendency toward separation and lack of identification with the absorbing society and its culture.

2. Intercultural encounter and social codes

Similar to language acquisition, there is also great importance attached to the intercultural encounter and familiarity with prevailing social codes, whether the person remains in the country temporarily or for the long term. The cultural distance between the current refugee groups and the local residents, requires bridging and mutual acquaintance. The immigration process is defined as a “crisis period,” even when the immigrant functioned normally before immigration¹⁵. The “crisis” appellation is all the more so, when the immigrants are actually refugees. The immigrant encounters an unfamiliar system of borders and boundaries, and s/he must undergo a process of learning and adjustment. Behavior that deviates from the local norms intensifies the sense of being a stereotypical outsider, and increases mutual suspicions between the refugee and the local people. Gender relationships are an excellent example of behaviors that may be accepted or even lauded in the society of origin, but totally rejected and unacceptable by the absorbing society. Cultural distance and behavior viewed as unsuitable or improper constitute a hothouse for the growth of racism and hatred of the stranger.

Various studies even draw attention to the fact that immigrants are often ignorant of the codes and norms that characterize the labor market. For example, they may be unaware of effective methods for searching for work, writing resumes, how to dress for the work interview, and how to present their abilities and advantages to the potential employer¹⁶.

3. Employment training and guidance

When refugees and immigrants are not able to make a living in an organized fashion, they tend to concentrate in large metropolises. This is a global phenomenon, mainly because large metropolises offer a relatively wide variety of work options.

“Secondary employment” tends to attract people who are unable to work in a legally regulated work environment. Studies¹⁷ have found that weak immigrants tend to concentrate in areas with more work opportunities and social networks.

The tendency of immigrants/foreigners to live in ethnic communal enclaves is a universal one. One of the reasons for this is that it lowers the costs of the transition. According to Chiswick (2000)¹⁸, ethnic concentrations tend to take form in poor neighborhoods where housing is cheaper. Thus it happens that the lowest socioeconomic strata in society (immigrants) are the ones to pay the highest price in terms of employment, social integration, and urban life¹⁹.

The existence of immigrant concentrations in cities/neighborhoods has many consequences on the quality of life of the local residents, in the following domains: housing, infrastructure, transportation, sense of personal security of the residents, and increase in racist incidents, to name a few. Employment guidance, together with appropriate geographic dispersal, can help avert refugee concentration in weak metropolis neighborhoods. Also, the return of these refugees to their own countries can be greatly eased by pre-planned vocational training that takes into account not only the refugees' need to make a living during their stay in the host country but also the nature of the labor market in the country of origin.

In summary

The Israeli poet Mosh Ben-Harosh²⁰ successfully expresses the feelings of the immigrant who feels out of place in the absorbing society. Ben-Harosh came to Israel with his parents from Morocco when he was twelve. In his poem *Immigrant*, he describes with clear-headed hindsight the innocence of a boy brought to a new land without yet understanding the significance of the big change in his life:

"He is twelve years old / In the airport / Standing next to his mother / Fearful / Happy / Still doesn't know / That everything he does from now on / Will be a blunder"
(free translation, cited in Rogani, 2012)

The perceptions of governments vis-a-vis mass immigration have not yet been documented in poetry. However, clearly the states' decision makers are the central players in choosing the coping mechanisms to deal with the impacts of great immigration waves. In order to maintain a modern state as a liberal entity that promotes democratic and humanity values, while simultaneously assisting refugees that reach its shores, the immigration-wave phenomenon must be viewed by government policy and decision-makers as a challenge, not a threat.

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