

PEACE IN PROGRESS

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Refugees
Welcome

ICIP

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INTRODUCTION

Solidarity above all

Sabina Puig

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While the European Union (EU) reaches agreements to return refugees to countries with such poor human rights records as Turkey or Afghanistan; while the vast majority of European countries show an embarrassing reluctance to resettle people in need of protection; while the discourse of xenophobic parties seems to be making significant inroads; in short, while many institutions are failing us as defenders of fundamental rights and freedoms, a segment of the population is taking action to advocate, above all, principles of solidarity. They work with few resources, little media attention and little chance to achieve a political impact; but forcefully, creatively, nonviolently and with the conviction that international human rights treaties are still fully in force – all of them.

This *Peace in Progress* monograph aims to give visibility to this solidarity activism, along with the peaceful social protests that strive to counter the discourse of fear and confront political decisions that establish unacceptable limits on legal and ethical safeguards with regard to human rights.

The first article, by journalist and ICIP board member Carme Colomina, gives us an overview of the situation. First of all, it shows how EU countries have not been able to reach agreement on how to deal with the arrival in Europe of people fleeing violence from a perspective based on human rights, a fundamental and founding cornerstone of the EU. Furthermore, it shows how Europe is also physically splitting up with the construction of new physical walls in what was supposed to be a common space. And, finally, it shows the rift between a considerable part of public opinion, much more favorable to the resettlement of refugees, and government policies.

“ While many institutions are failing us as defenders of fundamental rights and freedoms, a segment of the population is taking action to advocate principles of solidarity ”

In the second article, researcher Xavier Alcalde points out the importance of choosing our words carefully since each one carries its own weight and an inappropriate use of language can lead to a widespread misinterpretation of reality. More specifically, the author, like many other researchers and activists, reflects on whether “refugee crisis” is the most adequate term to use to refer to the situation at hand.

The following two articles aim to highlight some of the many acts of solidarity carried out in favor of the displaced population. Some of them have begun recently while others have been carried out for years because, unfortunately, migration and the search for asylum are nothing new.

Journalist Cristina Mas takes us to the refugee camps in Greece, which she has visited recently, to tell us about the “three rings of solidarity”: refugees themselves who help each other on the road to exile; the residents of towns where refugees arrive; and the volunteers and NGO workers who have mobilized to provide them with the support they need. She goes on to explain that grassroots actions, from these three rings, contrast “with the policies of governments that have done nothing but build walls and fences, militarize the streets, and fill the Mediterranean with warships.”

“ Solidarity activism and peaceful social protests strive to counter the discourse of fear and confront political decisions that establish unacceptable limits on legal and ethical

safeguards with regard to human rights ”

Activists Lídia Ucher and Jara Henar offer a wide panorama of different types of networks and action campaigns across Europe in favor of migration policies based on the dignity and human rights inherent to all people. These networks and campaigns call for a humanitarian response that saves lives, safe and legal routes that prevent more deaths, the closure of immigration detention centers where so many abuses are being committed, effective protection of the right to asylum, adequate resettlement, etc. People have also organized around initiatives that are more focused on analyzing the causes of this crisis, breaking stereotypes about foreigners, publicizing the situation they are in, and proposing solutions.

Regarding this last point, our monograph on solidarity with refugees aims precisely to emphasize the importance of education, both in and out of school, in order to break stereotypes about displaced persons, create empathy, and avoid a drift towards xenophobia, which is already apparent in certain European countries. That is what Cécile Barbeito, researcher at the School of Peace Culture and ICIP board member, does in the fifth and last article.

Finally, in order to have the vision of a person who left his job and country to help with the rescue and assistance of people trying to reach Europe by sea routes, we interviewed Essam Daod, a Palestinian doctor and founder of the NGO Humanity Crew. He explains the enormous difficulties encountered by those working to assist refugees arriving in Greece, but also the enormous satisfaction of dedicating oneself to those most in need and contributing to changing the current situation.

Preparing the “Recommendations” section for this issue was particularly difficult precisely because of the great diversity and amount of valuable resources and the impossibility to include them all. We hope they will serve as a springboard leading to other initiatives, websites, publications, films and reflections that are equally necessary and interesting for our readers.

Photography (CC) : Han Soete. Protest in favor of “Safe passage” in Brussels, 27th February 2016

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Europe splits over refugees: policies vs. public opinion

Carme Colomina

Journalist

In August 2015, German Chancellor Angela Merkel claimed that the Dublin regulation “does not work” and that “a common response for the whole of Europe” was needed to face the arrival of refugees to EU territory. Shortly after, the European Commissioner for Migration, Dimitris Avramópulos, declared that “the old Dublin has died”. Nevertheless, until this day, the European Union continues to be incapable of deciding on a real common asylum policy. The European reply to the hundreds of thousands of persons, who have risked their lives, trying to reach EU territory, has been marked by urgency, unilateralism and populist speeches. Never before, there has been such a clear lack of leadership in the Union. The German Chancellor has lost the consensus which had previously given her a position of hegemonic power inside the EU. Even in the worst moments of the economic and financial crisis, with the Eurozone split into two uneven halves of debtor and creditor countries, Merkel could always count on a reduced group of governments which assumed and defended her austerity policies, some even more fiercely than the Chancellor herself. On the other hand, the decision of Berlin, taken in the summer of 2015, to open the door to the arrival of refugees from the war in Syria, hoping that most European partners would act accordingly and show solidarity with the German gesture, has ended up isolating Merkel, leaving her weakened both at home and in the Union. As a consequence, there has been no European reply.

While the political speeches spoke of, in the best of cases, the “migration crisis” or “humanitarian crisis”, if not directly using the populist right wing’s arguments that have taken the upper hand, even in countries with a long tradition of welcoming refugees, a new wall has been built around the European Union. And it has been built precisely by those who were the first ones to bring down the Iron Curtain. Hungary has

closed its borders with fences of barbed and razor wire, in order to “stop the invasion” and “crime”, and to preserve “the European Christian values”. Since the month of July, a new law authorises summary expulsions of immigrants, who are transferred to the border without even a study of their cases. New patrols have been deployed in an authentic man hunt along the fences, built on the Hungarian border with Serbia and Croatia.

“ The European reply to the hundreds of thousands of persons, who have risked their lives, trying to reach EU territory, has been marked by urgency, unilateralism and populist speeches ”

The internal division among EU member states also led to the temporary reintroduction of border control, thus suspending the Schengen Agreement for the free movement of persons. The European Commission was left alone, defending a plan to spread the rehousing of 160,000 refugees over all its member states, which could not be applied due to the opposition of some countries. Today, according to figures, published by the EU executive late September, only 5,651 persons have been hosted so far, the main load being carried by six countries. In Lebanon – a country of just over six million inhabitants, there are currently 1,200,000 Syrian refugees, of whom 70% live below the poverty threshold, according to UNHCR. The European Union, facing only a tiny part of the worldwide humanitarian crisis, posed by a total of 60 million displaced persons, has seen how some of its fundamental pillars, such as freedom of movement, were staggering when it was necessary to pronounce a joint response to this emergency.

What has been the Union’s solution? Outsourcing political and humanitarian responsibilities. Brussels decided to put itself in the hands of Turkey, a country each day further away from the democratic standards, but committing to accept the return of migrants who reached the Greek coast in exchange of 3 billion Euros. This treaty,

described by Amnesty International as a “historic blow for human rights”, has been replicated without any problem by the EU in the agreement, recently signed with Afghanistan, for the deportation of migrants and asylum seekers who fail to regularise their situation and would see themselves forced to return to a country with an on-going covert civil war. NGOs in the region have warned against the fact that the forced return of hundreds of thousands of Afghans, already started from Pakistan, can cause a severe humanitarian crisis and more political instability in the southern border areas of the country.

“ The Mediterranean Sea is world’s most dangerous border to cross; the European responsibility in the deaths in the Mediterranean is undeniable ”

Concern and commitment

In the Eurobarometer of last spring¹, presented by the European Commission, immigration remains the main concern for 48% of the EU citizens (10 points lower than during the previous wave, at the end of 2015), followed by terrorism (39%). Nevertheless, a large majority of Europeans (67%) showed themselves in favour of a common immigration policy for the Union. While the Estonians (with 73%), the Danes (with 71%) and Czechs, Latvians and Hungarians (67%) were, according to the Eurobarometer, the nationalities where immigration was most perceived as a problem, the Spanish (34%) and Portuguese (17%) are on the opposite side of this ranking. However, expressing this concern does not mean that there is no will to be involved. Last May, Amnesty International published its new Refugees Welcome Index², revealing how the governmental policies are not always in line with the public opinion. According to this study, one in ten people worldwide would be ready to shelter a refugee in their home. This percentage increases to 29% in the UK and 20% in Greece but, on the other hand, is as low as 3% in Poland. Support for access to asylum is especially intense in Spain (78% strongly agree), Germany (69% strongly agree) and Greece (64% strongly agree). In

general, a large majority of the people, participating in the survey, would like their government to offer refugees more help. The index uncovered the “shameful manner in which governments have played with the lives of people who are trying to escape war and repression, adopting short term policies” – according to Amnesty International’s secretary general, Salil Shetty – but also the disparity of opinions, causing an internal split in the EU, divided on differences in immigration and asylum policies.

“ ”

The Mediterranean Sea is, according to a report from the International Organisation for Migration, world’s most dangerous border to cross, and the European responsibility in these deaths is undeniable. The inability to react forcefully before a tragedy that has been lasting for years, the disarray in the discussions on funds and resources for rescue operations in the Mediterranean, the indifference towards every recent cry for help of the Italian and Greek governments, the inhumane conditions in many asylum and detention centres, and the insistence in the use of security arguments, rather than pushing through rules for shared hosting, are parts of this European failure.

1. Eurobarometer presented by the European Comission

2. Refugees Welcome Index, Amnesty International

Photography (CC) : Irene Colell Fotografia

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Why the refugee crisis is not a refugee crisis

Xavier Alcalde

COSMOS, Scuola Normale Superiore

In the context of the European research project “Collective action and the refugee crisis”¹, I have spent several months interviewing activists who work on the denunciation, solidarity and support of migrants and refugees²: in Barcelona, Madrid, and along the Spanish southern border; in Calais and in the entire region of Pas-de-Calais, and in Paris. And, finally, in Brussels. In Barcelona I have spoken to, among others, people from organizations such as Stop Mare Mortum, SOS Racisme, EICA, Fotomovimiento, activists in the districts of Raval and Sagrada Família, and others with no specific affiliation. I have also spoken to several people linked to institutional politics, in reference to political parties that are concerned about this issue as well as the Barcelona City Council. Even though they do not all share the same analysis of the causes and solutions, there is one point on which they unanimously agree: the refugee crisis is not actually a crisis of refugees.

This term, popularized by the media in the spring and summer of 2015, is still the expression most often used to refer to the increase in the number of people that have been coming to the European Union in recent times seeking asylum. Since then, the vast majority of stakeholders, including politicians, NGOs, international organizations, journalists and university professors in a variety of disciplines have used the expression again and again. And they continue to do so. Oftentimes, when we hear or read it, we know instinctively that we do not like it, but we may not be able to explain exactly why not. As we shall see, there are many complementary answers. Some of the criticisms focus on the word “crisis”; others, on the concept of “refugee”; others still, on the combination of the two words; and others, on the absence of alternative words that explicitly state the causes and those responsible for this situation.

“ Even though not everyone shares an analysis of the causes and solutions, there is one issue where the agreement is practically unanimous: the refugee crisis is not actually a crisis of refugees ”

First of all, the word “crisis” has negative connotations and is alarmist, negatively predisposing the listener or reader. Nobody likes crises; they are something that must be fought. Furthermore, they incorporate an element of quantity. There are too many (or, depending on the issue, too few). From this perspective, one must make a great mental effort to realize that the presence of people from other countries is an opportunity for the host society. Abdelraouf, a Sudanese engineer who has been in Calais (France) for over a year, trying to reach the United Kingdom, explained it to me graphically: “British and French authorities are foregoing ten thousand teachers of Arabic.” In Grand-Synthe and Norres-Fontes, nearby towns where activists have sometimes enjoyed the complicity of municipal authorities, I was told of activities in schools, where refugees shared their experiences in war or during their journey to Europe, as well as the methods of nonviolent conflict resolution that are created in the camps: an invaluable potential wealth that the word “crisis” makes hard to see.

Moreover, the dominant perspective in published opinion is totally Eurocentric. Thus, if we compare the circumstances in Europe with the number of displaced persons and refugees, for example, in the Middle Eastern countries, the situation in Europe would not be considered a crisis. Given the number of refugees in Lebanon or Jordan ³, how can we talk about a refugee crisis in Europe? Again, we have first- and second-class people in a world where what matters is what happens in the West. Thus, we only react to attacks occurring in France or Belgium, ignoring the fact that the vast majority of jihadist attacks occur in Muslim countries. Activists are well aware of this, as are the people who survive in the camps and who often come from cultures in which hospitality is an essential part of interacting with foreigners.

“ A great mental effort must be made to realize that the presence of people who come from other countries is an opportunity for the host country. An invaluable potential wealth that the word “crisis” makes hard to see ”

Those who have worked as volunteers in some of the refugee camps admit the existence of a crisis at a humanitarian level. From this perspective, the focus is placed on the migration, asylum and reception policies of the countries of the European Union. It is these policies that would be in crisis since they are not able to deal with the arrival of refugees in an effective and dignified manner. Often, in the pursuit of selfish and myopic interests, the borders have been outsourced to countries like Morocco or Turkey (but also to France, in the case of the United Kingdom, which is not part of the Schengen agreement) without dissuading those who flee war. Thus, as a result of certain policies, refugees pile up in makeshift camps, with a real need for humanitarian aid, which is partially covered by volunteers coming from many different places. For activists, the situation is obvious. In the words of Natàlia, a volunteer in refugee camps in various countries and a Stop Mare Mortum activist: “We are doing the humanitarian work that states and the European Union should be doing.”

In situations of crisis, the present is transformed, becoming unstable and dangerous. There is a sudden change in matters that are economic, political, social, environmental, related to security, etc. It is a change that is both abrupt and inevitable, and it becomes an emergency. In our case, the situation is somewhat different because the causes of this humanitarian emergency are well known: wars, mainly. Thus, we must relate issues such as the arms trade with the emergence and development of armed conflict, as well as their effects in human terms. What is interesting about making this connection is that, suddenly, there are culprits. In other words, the humanitarian emergency is not a natural and unpredictable phenomenon, but the consequence of very specific policies ⁴.

Perhaps the problem is that we do not think of refugees as actors, as subjects, but as objects, as something that affects us. If we change the focus it will be easier to appreciate that they are people who have needs and rights... and that they are not too different from us. Thus they remind us of a capacity for empathy that perhaps we had forgotten. From this perspective, refugees put us in front of a mirror. So maybe we are facing a crisis, but of values. The fact that politicians and institutions are not dealing humanely with people who are fleeing from contexts where it is literally no longer possible to live in a dignified manner proves that the values that Europeans traditionally have purportedly exported around the world are presently in crisis. And yet refugees are still coming to Europe. It is therefore an opportunity to correct policies that are completely misguided and even to save the European project.

“ The humanitarian emergency is not a natural and unpredictable phenomenon, but the consequence of very specific policies ”

Another term that is very popular (especially in French-speaking countries) is “migration crisis.” In this sense, many activists criticize the distinction between refugees and migrants. On a legal level, the difference has consequences because refugees have more rights than migrants, who are at the expense of what each state decides. Therefore, institutions are more interested in labeling these people as migrants (bad, because they have freely decided to come – as if that were a crime!) so they can return them to their countries of origin without violating international law. However, if they are refugees (good, since they come because they have no choice), there is a duty to take them in and offer them all the benefits provided by the right to asylum. In an attempt to overcome this distinction, activists of the Migreurop network, among others, have proposed the term “exiles,” which has caught on in English and in French (exilés) and which does not distinguish whether the causes that have forced people to leave their homes are economic or political (or environmental, etc.).

In short, language matters. Words are not neutral and what we call things is important. In this case, the term “refugee crisis” is not the most appropriate. On the contrary, we must use wording that contextualizes the situation of refugees, assuming our responsibilities and taking into account the causes that have made them leave their homes and countries. We must emphasize that they are active subjects who therefore have rights. Like us. Furthermore, we must overcome Eurocentric perspectives and seek a more global approach, keeping in mind that, given the interdependent relations of our time, what we do has consequences. In other words, the increase in the arrival of refugees since the spring of 2015 was not an unpredictable situation, but largely a result of Western policies carried out in previous years. Hopefully, by calling things by their name, we will be able to find solutions within our possibilities, which are unlimited ⁵.

1. The European research project “Collective Action and the Refugee Crisis” is part of the ERC Advanced Grant Project “Mobilizing for Democracy,” directed by Donatella della Porta.
2. Following the usage of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in this text the word “refugee” denotes those who qualify to apply for asylum and thus to obtain the legal status of refugee.
3. According to the United Nations, in Lebanon there are more than one million refugees from Syria, in addition to more than 450 000 Palestinians. And there are 630 000 Syrians, in addition to over two million Palestinians and 200 000 Iraqis, among the refugees living in Jordan. However, according to other estimates, the numbers are much higher.
4. For example, the military operation Mare Nostrum rescued 150 000 people between October 2013 and October 2014. It was clear that the end of this mission would result in an increase in the number of deaths in the Mediterranean. It was thought that this would stop immigrants from risking their lives. But that was not the case. Furthermore, treaties such as those of Dublin or Touquet have resulted in an artificial concentration of refugees in places like Idomeni or Calais, causing tensions at the local level that a truly supportive European policy would have largely mitigated.

5. In this sense, I argue that it was feasible to take in, in a supportive and fair manner, all the people seeking asylum in the EU last year. According to Eurostat data, the average of European asylum requests per 100 000 people was 260 in 2015. This means that it would have been enough if every town of 5 000 inhabitants had taken in 13 people, i.e. four families.

Photography : UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

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Solidarity, with S for Survival

Cristina Mas

Journalist

Boban Minic, the Radio Sarajevo journalist who refused to leave the Bosnian capital during the war, says that the world is divided into two kinds of people: those who have lived through war and those who haven't. And, he adds, there is yet another classification: those who had never left their city until, one day, they emigrated.

There may be empathy, solidarity, understanding, a desire to help... -fortunately, there is a lot of all that, even though it doesn't make the headlines-. But it is difficult to put oneself in a refugee's shoes. Trying to imagine how someone must feel after losing almost everything. Home, work, family, friends... a safety net which - like those of us here today - they thought would always be there. The only thing they drag along with them is the backpack of defeat, fear, the uncertainty of exile, the weight of broken dreams. They have lost everything except life... and the strength to keep on going. They are driven by a firm decision: they do not give up; they are willing to start over again, from scratch. Some do it for their children; others, to resume their studies, to keep a cause alive... or simply out of an instinct for survival. Everyone has their own reason for not throwing in the towel and this is what accompanies them on a journey that becomes somewhat of a Darwinian obstacle course where only the strongest survive: those that are more capable of adapting to an increasingly hostile environment.

In the makeshift refugee camp in Idomeni, Greece, the Syrian Arab refugees elected a committee of twelve men and women to coordinate protests (there were small handwritten signs everywhere calling people to demonstrate two or three times a week) and negotiate with the Greek and Macedonian authorities. "Merkel said that all the Syrian refugees would be resettled in Germany and, when we were halfway there, they blocked our way. The European governments are the ones who have put us in this situation," El Mahdi, one of their members, reminded me. A cook from Aleppo, his eyes

were stinging from the tear gas fired at them by the Macedonian army. Family, neighborhood, community and friendship ties become real lifesavers in extreme situations and they are the first tool for solidarity that serves as a refuge, weak but essential. Teachers (Syrians, Iraqis and Kurds) volunteer at “schools” improvised by charitable organizations. They are parents who kill time making toys or barbecues out of pieces of wire fencing (made in Spain, by the way: Melilla has proven useful to test many things). They are grandchildren who push grandparents in wheelchairs for thousands of kilometers. They are the friends of Mustafa, a young man from Deir el Zor (in eastern Syria) who lost his left leg in an attack three years ago, who have not abandoned him for a single moment on his journey through Syria, Turkey, Lesbos and Athens, until he reached Idomeni, where the door was slammed in his face. And they still have enough strength to get excited about FC Barcelona games and can recite the following Sunday’s lineup by heart. “I’m slow, but I’m patient... and there is always someone who helps me,” said the young Syrian student of English philology, leaning on his crutches, 2 700 kilometers from home.

“ There is a great contrast between the reaction from below and the policies of governments that have done nothing but build walls and fences, militarize the streets, and fill the Mediterranean with warships ”

The second ring of solidarity is formed by the people in the trenches, on the front line of arrival. People like Emilia Kamvisi, who, at 84 and with a pension of less than 400 euros, would go down to the beach in front of her house on the Greek island of Lesbos every day to help people that had been transported in dinghies from Turkey: “Seeing how they arrived made us very sad and very angry: scared, wet, with children who were soaking wet and crying. Every day we went down to the bench on the beach to sit with them, to keep them company. Six, seven, eight boats would arrive: we couldn’t speak but we embraced and kissed,” she explained a few months ago. And she remembered her

mother, who had also arrived as a refugee after the expulsion of Greeks from Turkey in the 1920s. The Nobel Peace Prize passed the candidacy of the people of Lesbos by, which symbolized this welcoming spirit. But we will always have Lefteris Partsalis's photograph, which went viral, where Emilia –sitting on that same old bench facing the sea – is bottle-feeding a newly arrived baby in the presence of the infant's mother, who is smiling broadly. The grandmother, with her two friends and the fishermen on the island, gave faces to the thousands of young people, workers, and others who went out on a limb to rescue shipwreck survivors: to heal them; to embrace them; to provide them with dry clothing, a cup of hot tea, food, water, and transport; or simply just to listen to them.

“ It is the states which have painted refugees as a threat to our security and coexistence, and it is the states which are responsible for a suffering that is absurd and entirely avoidable ”

The third ring consists of the international mobilization of volunteers and NGO personnel, who have been leaving destinations in Africa, the Middle East and Asia for cities and towns that are closer to home. It hasn't been easy and many things can be criticized, but the most important thing is the contrast of this reaction from below with the policies of governments that have done nothing but build walls and fences, militarize the streets and fill the Mediterranean with warships.

We must not forget that, in fact, solidarity was the initial reaction last summer, even in countries like Austria, where subsequently the extreme right has grown strong. Because it is government policies, criminalization, the explosive cocktail of immigration-Islam-terrorism that have deluded a sector of public opinion in Europe and have fueled extremist speeches which now resound uninhibited in parts of the continent. It is the states which have painted refugees as a threat to our security and coexistence. And they are responsible, in the first instance, for a suffering that is absurd and entirely avoidable, that leads us all into a spiral of hate. Faced with this situation, we can only

advocate solidarity and ask ourselves whether, deep down, the walls that are being erected are also imprisoning us.

Photography : Emilia Kamvisi, at her house in Lesbos, holding the picture that turned her into an icon of solidarity with the refugees. XAVIER BERTRAL / ARA

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IN DEPTH

Citizen mobilisations across Europe

Lídia Ucher / Jara Henar

Lídia Ucher, Journalist, ComuniCambio Network / Jara Henar, Political scientist, Alianza por la Solidaridad

The migration crisis within the European Union (EU) and its borders is being managed under the umbrella of the European Agenda on Migration¹. Different civil society organisations share complaints on the vision of both the Agenda and the way the crisis is handled: the emphasis on security, particularly on the fight against irregular migration and the reinforcement of the external borders, does not solve the crisis nor is it compatible with a human rights approach. On the contrary, it clearly demonstrates the contradiction between the “Europe of rights” and “Fortress Europe”.

Issues such as the recognition of these contradictions at the level of the EU and its member states, the lack of coherence between speeches and the existing policies or the perception that, even though they could be avoided, deaths in the Mediterranean have been increasing exponentially over the last years², have generated many expressions of protest against the European administration. They have triggered citizen mobilisations and solidarity towards the migrants and refugees who suffer the consequences of the European border regime.

In this article, we want to mention some of these expressions of solidarity. We do not pretend to be exhaustive, since there is a large number of networks and actions, all very different in terms of age, continuity, objectives and motivations, methods used or dimension (local, national, transnational...). We find it important to start by pointing out that migrants and refugees are the people who put their bodies and lives at risk to defend the freedom of movement and fight for their rights. They are the first ones to organise themselves and put solidarity into practice, be it at the place of origin, during

transit, or at destination, thereby demonstrating that they are active agents and entrepreneurs, and not mere objects or numbers.

“ The claims of many organisations range from more humanitarian approaches to more political ones, such as the demand to stop the war on migrants or the claim for safe and legal routes ”

It is also necessary to say that support is not something new, nor exclusive property of the European civil society: [Afrique Europe Interact](#), [Boats for People](#), [Borderline Europe](#), [Caminando Fronteras](#) ³, [No Borders Morocco](#), [Voix des migrants](#), [Watch The Med](#) or [Welcome to Europe](#) are platforms and campaigns where activists from different backgrounds have been joining over the last years to support migrants in transit, claim their rights and protest against the European border regime. Networking is an important part of their scope, each one within its own specific area. For example, the organisation Caminando Fronteras saw the light in 2002 in Morocco to give support to sub-Saharan immigrants in transit on their way to Europe; Welcome to Europe provides contacts and advice to refugees and migrants on their journey to and through different European countries; and Watch The Med is an online mapping platform for the tracking of deaths and migrants' rights violations on the EU sea borders.

It's interesting to see how support during the crossing of the sea is approached from different perspectives. For example, “[Watch The Med AlarmPhone](#)” is a telephone alarm line, created since the great shipwrecks in October 2013 ⁴, self-managed by civil society on both sides of the Mediterranean. It works nonstop to give support to the rescue of refugees and migrants in peril at sea.

Within the light of the clearly inadequate resources allocated by the EU to the rescue of persons trying to cross the Mediterranean, other organizations have started sea rescue operations with their own boats: [Médecins Sans Frontières](#), [ProActiva Open Arms](#) ⁵, [Save the Children](#), [Sea Watch](#) or [Sos Méditerranée](#) are some examples. Their claims towards

Europe are diverse and range from more humanitarian approaches, focussing on the need to organise large-scale search and rescue missions, to more political ones, such as the demand to stop the war on migrants or the claim for safe and legal routes.

“ We see numerous protest campaigns and actions against the retention, detention and the wait for deportation of migrants and refugees in internment camps or centres ”

This request for safe and legal routes, as an alternative for the current European border regime, is strongly supported by a variety of different groups, such as the European platforms Volonteurope⁶ or the platform of the second-level NGO CONCORD⁷, and organisations like Amnesty International⁸. In the Catalan area, the network Stop Mare Mortum also supports this alternative. As its statement indicates, it calls for measures such as the extension of the refugee concept, which should include all persons in a situation of economic and social vulnerability. It also demands to finish with the outsourcing of border security to third countries and to put an end to arms trade. It calls as well for the permanent closure of the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders, FRONTEX.

Another criticism with regards to the border regime has to do with the time of arrival, also wrongly known as “hosting”. We see numerous protest campaigns and actions against the retention, detention and the wait for deportation of migrants and refugees in internment camps or centres. The network of African, European, Maghreb and Middle-Eastern organisations Migreurop, for example, together with the campaign Close the camps, takes a worldwide approach in the mapping of isolation camps for foreigners in Europe. They give visibility to the conditions of detention and the abuses and violations of the detainee’s rights committed in these centres and they request their permanent closure. In the same line, in Catalonia, the campaign Tanquem els CIE (Close the CIE) which is, together with SOS Racisme⁹ and Migra Studium¹⁰, part of Tancarem el CIE (We’ll close the CIE) has a networking relationship with the campaign CIEs NO.

Regarding the situation of retention on the Greek islands and peninsula, numerous initiatives have been started in a wide range of areas. For example, some months ago, Payasos en Rebeldía (Clowns in Rebellion) denounced the situation in Idomeni camp with their campaign #RisascontraMuros (Laughs against Walls). Stop Mare Mortum, from its side, collaborates with a group of lawyers to offer legal assistance to people who are detained or blocked in Greece and are unable to request asylum or to enter in the resettlement processes proposed in the EU-Turkey agreement. Meanwhile, over a period of several months, the Greek NGO ActionAid Hellas has done research on the so-called “refugee camps” of Lesbos, Schisto and Skaramaga, demonstrating how the EU and Greece fail to meet their obligations with regard to the protection and promotion of human and refugees’ rights for the people arriving in Greece ¹¹.

“ When facing a transforming world, the readiness of the citizens to get to know each other, obtain deeper knowledge of the causes, share experiences and find solutions reaches much further than inactive politics ”

Finally, we need to remember that actions of self-organisation, solidarity and mobilisation are not limited to people on the move: they take place every day in our cities, organised by many different collectives, organisations and networks. In this sense, we want to highlight the work of groups supporting persons in situations of extreme vulnerability, such as the numerous asylum seekers who live in a legal limbo for years, waiting for the resolution of their request by the Spanish State; persons finding themselves in an irregular administrative situation ¹², wrongly identified as economic migrants; or other persons, excluded from the system, suffering in a terrible way from the impact of the migration policy of the EU and its member states.

Many more initiatives remain to receive an in-depth presentation, but we don’t want to finish this article without specifically mentioning some experiences coming from the

world of music, such as the project Refugees for Refugees: *La musique de l'exil*¹³, from the Belgian association Muziekpublique, and from the audio-visual world, such as the International Film Festival CineMigrante in Barcelona or the Mostra de Cinema Àrab i del Mediterrani (Arab and Mediterranean Film Festival) – this year focussing on the migration axis – seeking to create spaces of intercultural dialogue, break down stereotypes and promote human rights.

Film, music, gatherings, dialogues and solidarity actions show that the determination of citizens to know each other, to obtain deeper knowledge of the causes, to share experiences and to find solutions reaches much further than inactive politics with an evident lack of willingness to face a transforming world where people have the capacity to raise their voices on an individual and collective level, their own voice.

1. Communication from the European Commission on the New European Agenda on Migration of 13/05/2015.

2. On 11/11/2016, the register shows an estimated record of 4,271 deadly victims in the Mediterranean in the year 2016, 773 more than in 2015.

3. At the beginning of 2016, the association Caminando Fronteras screened the documentary Tarajal, transformar el dolor en justicia (Tarajal, transforming pain into justice) on the reactions of the families of 15 persons who died on the Tarajal beach (Ceuta, Spain) on 6 February 2014. The facts that occurred in Tarajal have also been the topic of another documentary, Tarajal: Desmuntant la impunitat a la frontera sud (Tarajal, dismantling the impunity at the southern border), a co-production of Metromuster and the DESC observatory.

4. On 3 October 2013, more than 350 persons drowned near the coast of Lampedusa, Italy. Eight days later, on 11 October, there was another shipwreck near the same island where, according to the platform Watch the Med, an estimated number of 200 persons died,.

5. The action of ProActiva Open Arms and their ship Astral has been the topic of an episode of the program *Salvados*, on the Spanish channel la Sexta. For the first time, the refugee subject was screened in prime time on national television.

6. Volonteuropa reacts to the European Migration Agenda (14/05/2015).
7. CONCORD press release “Migration for Development and Human Rights” (22/03/2016).
8. Webpage of Amnesty International’s campaign Yo acojo (I welcome), where you can see the video ¿Y si fueras tú? (And if it was you?)
9. SOS Racisme is one of the members of the international network Migreurop.
10. Migra Studium is a member of the Servei Jesuïta als Migrants (Jesuit Service for Migrants), which recently published the yearly report on CIEs (Internment Centres for Foreigners) in Spain Vulnerables vulnerabilizados. Informe anual SJM sobre los Centros de Internamiento de Extranjeros en España 2015 (Vulnerables vulnerabilised. Yearly SJM report on Internment Centres for Foreigners in Spain 2015).
11. Action Aid Hellas will soon translate the report: The challenges of family reunification programs and resettlement for refugees arriving in Greece (currently only available in Greek)
12. For example, the group of persons of which l’Espai de l’Immigrant (Space for the Immigrant) is composed provides, among others, free services of medical consultation, legal and administrative advice to persons in irregular administrative situations.
13. Muziekpublique has gathered around twenty refugee virtuosos, coming from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan or Tibet, who have settled in Belgium to record an album. They share one common aspect: they are all stars in their countries. Some of them have seen their situation being regularised, others still do not know whether they will be allowed to stay.

Photography: Protest in favor of “Safe passage” in Barcelona, 27th February 2016. ANONIO CRIADO

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IN DEPTH

Debunking myths, recovering common stories

Cécile Barbeito

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Forced displacement is not a new phenomenon. But, now more than ever, several factors invite us to reflect on how to manage the resettlement of displaced persons, at a practical level and with regard to social perception. Some of these factors are the magnitude of this human tragedy – with the highest number of refugees and displaced persons in history, more than 65 million worldwide¹; media coverage of the arrival – which leads to falsely believe that Europe resettles a large proportion of refugees – and, more importantly, the drift towards xenophobia observed in some European countries. How can the radicalization of European xenophobic sectors be prevented? How can empathy towards refugees be developed?

The most immediate response, in order to reduce this drift towards xenophobia and increase empathy towards refugees, is to connect with their personal and collective life stories: to understand the reasons that have led Ashanti, Yasir, Ayani or Dakarihagin to flee their homes, and recognize situations of persecution or structural violence. Humanizing these people, knowing their names, knowing details about their lives before fleeing, understanding that they are people who are struggling and wish to live independently in better situations can be a way to promote empathy. Many refugee resettlement organizations² offer the possibility of inviting refugees (to schools, civic centers, etc.) to learn about their stories firsthand. Teacher assessments tend to highlight the great interest generated in students, both in learning about the life stories of the people invited, and denouncing the conditions that exist in their countries and which have forced them to flee.

In addition to learning about these terrifying experiences, there are initiatives that seek to highlight similarities between these personal and collective life stories and the experience of having lived through the (Civil) War, in exile, or in refugee camps. In exhibitions like “Art and Commitment, Responses to the Civil War” at MNAC, or the Museum of Memory and Exile (MUME) in La Jonquera, local history calls into question present accounts of forced displacement around the world. It wasn’t that long ago when images of flight to France during the Spanish Civil War were evoked by more recent images of people displaced by the Balkan War. There are also obvious similarities between the (concentration) camps in southern France in the 1930s and 40s and current images of Idomeni, the Calais “Jungle” or Immigration Detention Centers ³. Besides learning about the harsh personal stories of people who have been forced to flee, recognizing that this experience is very close undoubtedly helps to create empathy with the problem.

“ To reduce the drift towards xenophobia and increase empathy towards refugees, it is necessary to understand the reasons why they have fled their homes ”

But beyond these obvious responses, it is important to keep in mind that dehumanization processes of the “other” are closely linked to the feeling of threat. Seeing the “other” in a way that ignores their feelings, that minimizes their suffering, or that subordinates them to “our” alleged general well-being, is often a consequence of a progressive dehumanization process that originates from the feeling that some basic needs (identity, well-being, physical integrity, etc.) are threatened. What can these needs be?

Some recent surveys deduce that the main fears regarding the arrival of refugees have to do mainly with physical integrity and well-being: according to a survey conducted in ten European countries, 59 percent of Europeans⁴ believe that a greater influx of refugees implies an increased risk of terrorist attacks. The second problem identified,

with which 50 percent of survey respondents would agree with according to the ten-country average, is that an increase in refugees results in their grabbing jobs and welfare benefits. These, then, are two arguments that must be refuted carefully. Networks such as Unity Against Fascism ⁵ have published documents that challenge some of these prejudices. However, a more generalized scope of this reasoning is needed, and the media and public service messages should deliver the news with fewer stereotypes and more critical thinking.

Some of the information that should be repeated ad nauseam to debunk myths and understand that European societies have a lot to learn regarding solidarity is, first of all, that resettling refugees is not an act of generosity; it is an obligation according to international law, which European countries are committed to. Therefore, there is no margin to decide whether or not to be a resettlement country: it must be done. A second myth that needs to be debunked is that Europe is accepting a large proportion of refugees: not a single one of the ten countries that resettle the most is European. European countries are not overwhelmed by the resettlement of refugees, in terms of the cost of this resettlement (the EU is the richest continent in the world), nor in terms of demographics, since granting asylum to all the people currently seeking asylum would amount to 0.36 percent of the total population of the EU. A third myth, concerning the alleged increase in terrorist attacks, can be refuted by saying that the majority of terrorist acts that have occurred on European soil have been perpetrated by European citizens, not by refugees, and that, at least in Spain, the main cause of hate crimes in 2015 was Islamophobia (“natives” who attack Muslims) and not the other way around. Finally, regarding the fear that refugees monopolize jobs and social benefits, these benefits are as scarce as they are for the local population. Only a small minority of people are granted refugee status and are thus entitled to relief (unfortunately, only 220 people were granted refugee status out of a total of 3240 asylum seekers in 2015). ⁶

**“ Resettling refugees is not an act of generosity;
it is an obligation according to international law,**

which European countries are committed to ”

Finally, because the process of dehumanization of the “other” also leads to believe that the endogroup (“we”) acts legitimately, while the exogroup (“others”) doesn’t, it is important to debunk these polarized misconceptions and make clear that the increase in forced displacements is not accidental or unconnected to European countries. Some organizations such as the Centre Delàs⁷ shed light on the connection between forced displacements and profits made by Western countries, either because they are the greatest arms exporters in the world or because they benefit from the security business (control of borders, building of fences, etc.). Therefore, another way to approach the reality of forced displacement is to recognize self-responsibility – “ours” – for the problem.

Promoting empathy towards refugees begins, first of all, with recognizing the main reasons why some people feel suspicious about resettling them, and responding to this feeling of threat with information campaigns that debunk myths. In addition, it involves collecting common experiences.

1. All the data on refugees mentioned in this article, unless otherwise specified, are taken from Global Trends 2015: Forced Displacement in 2015, UNHCR 2016.

2. In Catalonia, several resettlement organizations are coordinated through the Asil.Cat network. These include UNHCR, the ACSAR Foundation, the Catalan Commission for Refugee Aid, the Catalan Association for the Integration of Immigrant Homosexuals, Bisexuals and Transsexuals (ACATHI), etc.

3. Although the article focuses on refugees, it is important to be aware that there is a blurred line between refugees and immigrants in terms of contexts and people, and that, in any case, the authorities can deal with these cases indiscriminately.

4. Richard Wike, Bruce Strokes, Katie Simmons. “Europeans Fear Wave of Refugees Will Mean More Terrorism, Fewer Jobs,” July 11, 2016. Pew Research Center.

5. See, for example, the pamphlet “#RefugeesWelcome Protegeix-te contra els rumors racistes.”

6. CEAR data based on Eurostat.

7. Especially worth mentioning: Mark Akkerman (2016). *Border Wars: The Arms Dealers Profiting from Europe's Refugee Tragedy*. Barcelona: Centre Delàs.

Photography : Ravalució. Servei Civil Internacional de Catalunya.

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RECOMANEM

Materials and resources recommended by the ICIP

Action

What are the catalan NGOs doing for the refugees?

Lafede.cat – organisations for global justice is a network of more than a hundred Catalan groups, working to achieve social justice and eradicate inequality through development cooperation and the defense and promotion of human rights and peace. Many of the affiliated NGOs are directly involved in projects in Syria, in refugee camps in the neighbouring countries, in transit countries or offering shelter to refugees in Catalonia. There are also other organisations, taking care of raising awareness on this crisis and its causes, identifying responsibilities and offering solutions.

Lafede.cat has made a compilation of the various operations that are being carried out by these NGOs, indicating ways to give them support. This compilation, initially drawn up in 2015, has been updated throughout the month of October 2016.

Lafede.cat also proposes other ways to help the refugees. It stresses the importance of providing education in solidarity and offers guidelines to address the refugee crisis within an educational environment.

Report

Refugees in Spain and Europe (CEAR)

This is the 14th yearly report that the Spanish Commission for Refugee Aid (CEAR, Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado) has published to inform on the situation of refugees around the world, in the European Union and in Spain. The numbers it presents are not very encouraging. It reminds us that, according to UNHCR, in 2015, there were

more than 59.5 million people that had been forced to abandon their homes, as a consequence of violence and human rights violations. It also reminds us of the fact that, despite social mobilisation, the European governments have not fulfilled their commitment to resettle 180,000 refugees.

As far as the Spanish state is concerned, CEAR informs that, in 2015, Spain received around 15,000 requests for asylum (in 2014, this number was less than 6,000), a very low figure, representing 1% of the total number of requests registered in the 28 countries of the EU together. Spain does not particularly stand out for its generosity when it comes to granting the refugee status either. In the year 2015, only 220 persons received it; 800 others received subsidiary protection; and 68.5% of the cases were concluded with denial of any type of protection.

The data and arguments offered in this report are very useful tools for researchers and activists. Moreover, the report proposes a series of measures, designed to improve migration policies and offering more guarantees to people looking for shelter. It also provides an interesting reflection on the reaction of citizen solidarity, differentiating it from temporary charity.

Action

The humanitarian corridors

In order to avoid more deaths at sea and protect asylum seekers from smuggling and trafficking networks, the initiative “Corridoi umanitari” (Humanitarian corridors) has been launched by catholic and protestant groups, in coordination with the Italian government. This is an instrument, designed to provide safe and legal routes to refugee families from Syria on their travel to Italy.

The selection of possible beneficiaries is based on a series of interviews, conducted in refugee camps, located in Lebanon. It assesses the degree of vulnerability, according to criteria such as having directly suffered from persecution or the effects of war; being a woman and, more in particular, a pregnant woman or a single mother; being an unaccompanied child; having been previously identified as *prima facie* refugee or having serious medical needs which cannot be treated *in situ*.

The Italian government has committed to facilitating up to a thousand arrivals in two years through this mechanism. Despite the limited number of people, eligible to use it, it is an innovative project with great potential. With a minimum of political will, it could be replicated in other European countries. In Belgium, the initiative “Un visa, une vie” has been launched with the same philosophy, but on a much smaller scale. From its side, the Canadian government is also conducting a similar program, issuing humanitarian visas for people who are trying to escape the armed conflict.

For more information on this initiative on safe routes, we recommend this [France 24 documentary](#).

Documentary

Io sto con la sposa

The documentary *Io sto con la sposa* (On the Bride's Side) portrays the journey of a group of Syrian and Palestinian refugees, wanting to travel from Italy to Sweden. They do so in the company of a group of Italians and with the complicity of people offering them shelter in France, Germany and Denmark. In order not to be arrested by the police, nor be accused of human trafficking or smuggling, this group of men and women, all in their smart suits, pretends to escort the bride, completely dressed in white, during a 4-day trip over 3,000 kilometres.

This is a true story about solidarity, humanity, the use of humour and creativity, protest and civil disobedience against rules and border control that contribute to the death of thousands of persons on the maritime routes towards Europe.

The documentary, directed by Khaled Soliman Al Nassiry, Gabriele del Grande – also author of the blog [Fortress Europe](#) – and Antonio Augugliaro, was financed through *crowdfunding*. The project's success exceeded all expectations and the documentary was screened during the Venice Film Festival, where it was very well received both by the public and by the critics.

Website collection

The European Council on Refugees and Exiles is an alliance of more than ninety NGOs from different European countries, founded to protect and promote refugees' rights. Its webpage offers, among others, up-to-date information on political lobbying, documents published by the groups that are part of the alliance, and contact data of associations and lawyers where refugees can ask for help.

Watch the Med is an online platform that allows monitoring and mapping of the deaths and human rights violations, committed against immigrants on the maritime borders of the European Union. It counts with the involvement of a wide range of activists, researchers and organisations.

Migreurop is a European/African network of researchers and activists, working to condemn conditions of detention, put an end to the existence of internment facilities for foreigners and follow-up the European Union's policy of border externalisation. Its webpage offers updated maps with the locations of the different internment facilities, collected experiences, analysis of migratory policies, etc.

Refugee.tv is an online platform, launched by David Gross, an Austrian filmmaker, with the support and coordination of persons from six different nationalities, living in exile after having come to Europe, using their audio-visual, journalistic, technical and cinema skills and knowledge to explain their personal situations through documentaries and news items. In this way, this crisis is shown from a different perspective, namely based on the refugees' own point-of-view and opinion.

Calais Migrant Solidarity is a blog which gathers updated and practical information on Calais (France) and offers resources and guides for persons who find themselves trapped there. It also includes a death count of persons who lost their lives on this border over the last five years.

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TRIBUNA

The collective memory of recent past and challenges ahead

Jordi Font

Director of MUME

The armed civil conflict of 1936-1939, after the failed coup d'état of 18 July 1936, gradually became an open war where two armies were fighting to take territorial control over the entire peninsula. Meanwhile, for a period of a few months, the geographical division implied the consolidation of two rearguards. In both areas, acts of extreme violence were committed against the population. So much so that some historians would use the pun "war on civilians"¹ when describing the criminal ferocity, used on potential enemies. In the rebellious, or self-declared *national*, camp, assassinations obtained a systemic status, as it was understood to be one of the ways to achieve the political objectives; in the republican camp, which was legally and democratically established, the institutional collapse, consequence of the war, allowed a revolutionary movement to gain strength in some areas, as was the case in Catalonia, where the political ideas of some of its factions understood that social transformation was only possible through the physical elimination of, what they considered, the enemy of their class. This polarisation, embodied in mass killings and persecutions of all kinds, resulted in forced population displacements of considerable size during the conflict. In the end, people fled to avoid the harshness of a relentless repression.

One could say that, when looking at the population movements in detail, we can distinguish three significant moments during the war period. In first place, during the revolutionary months of the beginning of the war, around 50,000 persons² moved and fled to safer places. While the conflict lasted, some looked for shelter in fascist Italy³, but also in France, or they went to the Spanish city of Burgos, with the objective of

enlisting in the fight against the Republic. The second moment became evident, starting in the spring of 1937, when the war starts to turn in favour of the rebellious troupes, supporters of the coup. As more territories were conquered and the subsequent repression grew, the Catalan rearguard was transformed into a shelter for hundreds of thousands of refugees from other areas of the Spanish State ⁴. The Catalan administrations and civilians put in a gigantic effort. Around 600,000 refugees arrived to find an exhausted rearguard, without any supplies and submitted to cruel air strikes. Finally, in February 1939, in only a few days, there was a huge population displacement. Almost half a million people, coming from different parts of the Spanish State and the Catalan Principality, crossed the French-Spanish border to arrive to France, a country that was officially reluctant to supply humanitarian care to this stream of people in need. As was written, in an ironic tone, by the journalist and writer Arthur Koestler (*The scum of the earth*, 1941), the first thing France would have done in its combat against fascism was to follow its example, creating closed internment camps, where people lived in humiliating conditions.

“ How can a historical event, as extraordinary as the Republican exile, have been overlooked in most memorial narratives during the period between the transition to democracy and today?

”

The Republican defeat started a long period of exodus. A painful diaspora from which many will not return. In reality, with a duration of almost four decades, the Republican exile can be considered a paradigm of contemporary European history. Nevertheless, even if historiography ⁵ has taken this period increasingly more into consideration as subject of study, the question we need to ask, even if there is no easy answer, is: How can a historical event, as extraordinary as the Republican exile, have been overlooked in most memorial narratives during the period between the transition to democracy and today?

As a reply, we could point out that the long timespan of Franco's dictatorship, along with the effectiveness of its propagandistic rhetoric, would have contributed to the loss of political and symbolic impact of the exile. Also, most of the nearly 180,000 people – of whom probably one quarter originally came from Catalonia – who remained in exile for a long period, chose to start a new personal and professional life. The consolidation and international acceptance of the Francoist regime did not inspire optimism, nor did they promote the option of returning. Moreover, also the generation issue played an important role. Even if the role of the anti-Francoist militants who had stayed behind, forged in the struggles in factories and universities, would become increasingly more important, they found themselves at great distance from their political leaders in exile. They no longer spoke the same political language. During the final stage of the dictatorship and the subsequent transition, even if exile remained a reference and a key point for logistic support, the reins of political change were in the hands of the main emerging groups of internal opposition, as well as those of the reformers inside the Francoist movement, who ended up joining the pact. Exile, associated with the disruptive and traumatic memories of the war, became the subject of a weak and short-lived vindication during the derogation of Francoism. Then followed the years of voluntary amnesia, when the time was there to join the Single Market (predecessor of the European Union) and NATO. The eighties were not a good period to state a historical claim in favour of the values embodied by exile.

“ The implementation of collective memory policies has made it possible to value the period of exile; it has given new life to the memory of its actors and their descendants ”

At present, after the wave of memorials that started at the turn of the century, the recollection of exile has gained weight in the public discussion in our country. The changing political circumstances and conveniences could not erase the fact that exile had allowed to maintain the democratic legitimacy of the republican institutions. In the

case of Catalonia, this has been quite obvious through the recovery of the Generalitat (Catalan regional government) after it institutionally survived the exile period. As such, the implementation of collective memory policies has made it possible to value the period of exile. It has given new life to the memory of its actors and their descendants. However, the passing years are transforming the “living connection”⁶ of this memory (the generation that was exposed to it or to which it was passed on directly) into history or myth. The worst that could happen to the public vision of this memory would be to be dressed in a nostalgic tone of topics and sacralising, acritical idealisations; in other words, it would become just another myth. The memory that persists and that has been built from this massive exodus needs to be considered an object of critical historical study, and not a mystification, because precisely this is the best antidote to strengthen the democratic memory.

“ Being reunited with a critical recollection of our exile needs to help us to get closer to each other, with increased empathy for the millions of refugees and displaced persons of today ”

As a consequence, strict historical knowledge needs to be transferred to society. Far away from myths, a mature democratic society needs to know, as pointed out at the start of this essay, that violence against civilians was not exclusively the work of the participants of the coup, although it is essential to stress the differences and intentionality of both opponents in the conflict. Moreover, awareness of the fact that the Catalan society delivered a great effort, hosting refugees from the Basque Country, Madrid, Andalusia... can also be an incentive for some modern societies who, with many more resources, are unable, with some rare exceptions, to adopt an attitude of solidarity towards humanitarian problems which can be seen at the gates of Europe nowadays. And, finally, the fact that fellow citizens of two or three generations ago have suffered the misfortune of exile in their own skin leaves us in a position of equality with those who suffer it today. Many challenges with respect to this memory lay ahead – among

others, the recovery and dignifying of the missing bodies – , but placed in the field of exile conditions, one of the most relevant matters is that being reunited with a critical recollection of our exile needs to help us to get closer to each other, with increased empathy for the millions of refugees and displaced persons of today, deprived of a decent life. Sometimes, when looking at the present international scene, it seems we find ourselves in front of the new version of the “Non-Intervention Pact” of the European powers during the Civil War or reliving the 1938 Évian Conference⁷, where the same Western States were too insensitive to host Jewish refugees, trying to escape Nazi Germany. As stated by Walter Benjamin, who died in exile due to precisely this international indifference to the fate of refugees, the revival of the past should be used to transform the present.

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Photography : MUME / FONS Raymond San Geroteo. Fragment de la imatge del Portús, al costat de les mugues frontereres, feta des del costat català. Foto New York Times.

SOBRE L'ICIP

News, activities and publications about the ICIP

ICIP

International Catalan Institute for Peace

Peace Brigades International wins 2016 ICIP Peace in Progress Award

The Governing Board of the International Catalan Institute for Peace (ICIP) has decided to confer the 2016 ICIP Peace in Progress Award on the non-governmental organization Peace Brigades International (PBI) for its long history of protecting human rights defenders who work in areas of repression and conflict.

Peace Brigades International was created in 1981 by a group of activists inspired by Gandhi's nonviolent tactics. They were convinced that international accompaniment could deter attacks against the civilian population in conflict areas. Over the last 35 years, the organization has developed activities to support human rights defenders, including protection and accompaniment, safety training, advocacy workshops and workshops on rebuilding social fabric.

PBI works on the ground in conflict areas and its volunteers provide protection and accompaniment to people and organizations that suffer threats, intimidation, harassment, persecution, imprisonment and torture because of their beliefs and actions. They provide protection to activists and human rights lawyers, trade unions, environmental groups, indigenous communities, women's organizations fighting gender-based violence, and relatives of displaced and disappeared persons.

ICIP celebrates resolution in favor of banning nuclear weapons

On 27 October, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution in favor of opening negotiations to draw up a treaty banning nuclear weapons. The text was approved by a vote of 123 to 38 with 16 abstentions.

It is certainly a very significant step since the resolution recognizes the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons and the risk they pose to civilian populations. The international community has sufficient evidence on the long-lasting irreversible effects of nuclear weapons, and numerous civil society organizations, working together on the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, have fought for decades to achieve the abolition of such weapons. Nevertheless, the number of countries that have nuclear weapons has gone up from five to eight in recent years, and the world's most industrialized countries, including the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan and most members of the European Union voted against this resolution.

A long road lies ahead and it will not be free of obstacles; the United Nations will be holding the first negotiation conferences in 2017 with the objective of having a "legally binding instrument to ban nuclear weapons and to move towards their total elimination." ICIP welcomes the result of the last vote and we hope that the road that lies ahead is a road of no return.

ICIP President appears before Parliament

The current president of the International Catalan Institute for Peace (ICIP), Xavier Masllorens, and the ex-president of the institution, Rafael Grasa, appeared last September before the Commission on Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Institutional Relations and Transparency of the Parliament of Catalonia to present the future challenges facing the Institute and the 2015 Activity Report, respectively.

The current president, Xavier Masllorens, defined the present stage of ICIP as **"a time for reflection and consolidation"** and listed the five main challenges set by the new Governing Board, which was renewed in May in compliance with the law by which the institution was created: **"to focus on priorities and actions; to promote our international dimension in order to preserve our earned prestige; to strengthen our territorial dimension; to become a benchmark in specific areas; and to streamline internal procedures."** Masllorens also pointed out the need for ICIP **"to serve the**

country, parliamentary groups, and similar organizations and institutions working in the field of peace,” and added that “we must have a voice, create our own opinions, and educate.”

Latest publications

UN Security Council Resolution 2250: Youth, Peace and Security, ICIP Policy Paper by Romeral Ortiz

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INTERVIEW

Interview with Essam Daod, co-founder of Humanity Crew

Eugènia Riera

International Catalan Institute for Peace

Essam Daod, co-founder of Humanity Crew

In September 2015 Essam Daod left his job as a Doctor in Palestine and, along with his wife Maria, went to Lesbos (Greece) to join a Humanitarian mission to help the refugees. Two months later, they founded the NGO Humanity Crew, specialized in providing psychological support to the people who arrive every day to the Greek coast fleeing violence and war. On this interview, he explains how his everyday life is now next to the refugees, the enormous amount of difficulties they encounter, but also the great satisfaction he feels for being able to help those who need it most.

When you arrived in Greece on humanitarian mission a year ago, did you expect to encounter the dramatic situation which now affects the Mediterranean?

Not at all. When we arrived, September- October last year, no one knew about the real situation, we didn't know how big the crisis was and we were totally shocked. 7000-8000 refugees on 120 boats were arriving every day and we just could not believe no one was talking about that. There was no big organization there yet, just individual volunteers and small organizations, such as Proactiva Open Arms, and it was a total shock for me.

Now, one year later, how have both the situation and your work there changed?

It has totally changed. After that shipwreck in which nearly 400 refugees drowned, the media coverage was greater. The thing is that, last year, 8.000 refugees were arriving

every day but in two-three days they were out of Greece, and a week later they were already in Germany. Greece was a transit area. Now there are less refugees coming but the problem is that the border is closed, so they are all stuck in Greece. There are 80-90.000 refugees in Greece and there is no solution for them. Our work has changed from rescue and immediate emergency relief to support intervention. There is a different kind of suffering now, people are very desperate. Last year they had hope because they knew they could make it to Germany. Now, they continue feeling war and escaping from Syria and Turkey even though they know the borders are closed. This proves how much desperate they are. Also, since it is now more difficult for them to reach Greece, they try moving to other coasts, such as Libya or Egypt, to cross over to Italy or Spain, but the journey there is even more dangerous, lots of kilometers of sea to cross, the Mediterranean is a big sea!

Humanity Crew highlights the importance of psychological support and accompaniment for the refugees. Why did you focus on this kind of support?

We provide psychological support: our staff are psychiatrists, psychologists, teachers, art therapists, speech therapists, etc. We have education programmes and we are focused on mental, psychological and emotional care. I am a surgeon and at the beginning I used my surgeon skills as an emergency doctor. However, after some time, I noticed that everyone was focused on the same thing: all the money, resources and volunteers were dedicated to first emergency medical aid, all efforts were put on the body but no one was taking care of the mental side. These are babies and adults coming from war zone. We are not robots! Everyone was saying “do you want a blanket? Do you want a banana or water”? These people don’t want a blanket or a banana. Lots of volunteers don’t have the skills to give psychological first aid. They are themselves very afraid because the situation is also very traumatic for them. Seeing a big boat with babies and women crying arrive at 4 am is not something we are used to deal with. They don’t have the skills to calm them down. It is easier for the volunteers to provide them with medical aid, physical comfort, money or food. No one was providing psychological first aid.

“ It is easier to provide them with medical aid, physical comfort, money or food; but these people don't want a blanket or a banana ”

These are processes that may require time. How can you provide such treatments in a situation where refugees are just in transit to an uncertain destination? The lack of resources and means could put an end to the work you do?

We know that we can't give a treatment to someone who is in transit situation, who maybe leaving on the following day. It is also difficult for them to open up to you and tell you your fears. We have a work plan called the Four-step plan, that I myself wrote. First step is right when they come on the beach: they are scared, so we provide them with first emergency psychological aid. It is forbidden to do any treatments on these cases. We tell them that this is just a short transit situation and help them feel safe. Second step is when they are at the camps, where we do crisis intervention. These are longer treatments but focused on specific crisis; e.g. for those people who have lost a beloved, a child, who have problems with violence. We just focus on these cases, nothing else. Third step is supportive treatment: we do it by skype and telephone once they are already gone. We continue to support them using skype and the social media. We keep in contact so that they know we are there, but we do no treatment. Forth step takes place once in the place of destination. There we do treatment, as we know they will be there for some time. We either do it ourselves on skype or we contact with other organizations in those countries, which we know can provide them with the treatment they need. We help and support them.

Which kind of relationship do you have?

We are professionals and we treat these people as we treat our patients back home, as human beings. We are professional enough so that it does not entangle emotional difficulties for us, we have to stay neutral and not too much involved emotionally.

“ Unfortunately there is a huge fight between NGOs in Greece because there is a lot of money. There is no coordination at all! ”

How have all these experiences changed you?

I am not the same person at all! Me and my wife. I don't even know how to explain it... The most important thing is that, for the first time in my life, it led me to understand what it really means to feel happy and sad. I cried and laughed at the same time. I was very sad when I lost someone at the beach but I was also so happy because I just understood how strong sadness could be, how real. At home [Palestine], those emotions are not real. The idea of happiness we have at home, money or success, is not real. The money or even the success and the awards I had back in my country, as a part of this capitalistic world, would not make me feel so happy. I was just chasing a fake thing. Here the emotions are so real, I have connected with myself for the first time through the small things. Being in touch with these people, waiting for the desperate refugees to come so that we can help them. It's so true...

Humanity Crew is a small NGO compared to other huge humanitarian projects. Is there enough coordination among the different NGOs working with refugees in the Mediterranean?

There is no coordination at all! People don't like it to be said but it's all about money. Unfortunately nowadays there is a huge fight between NGOs in Greece, a huge one. This is because, now, there are just one or two boats arriving a week and there are 20 different organizations trying to help these people and rescue these boats, because there is media and there is a lot of money. Organizations get money for taking care of the medical, social and psychological support, so they want to have the monopoly in the field. They don't want to establish any kind of partnership with other organizations, not to lose the funds. No one will tell you about or recognize it, but they stay in a place where there is no need because the funds tell them to stay there. That's why we don't rely on

big funds; because we don't want to depend on them. We are very small but we are the fastest respondent NGO. We were the first organization to move to Salonica because we understand the situation as anyone else. We don't need to apply for funds.

What is your opinion about how the EU is dealing with the refugee crisis?

We should make a difference between the EU governments and the people. What the authorities do is unhuman. On one hand, the EU has signed the right of asylum for refugees of war. On the other hand, they pay 6 billion euros to a country outside EU, Turkey, to stop these people they signed their right to come from crossing. They could give 3 milion to Spain and 3 milion to Greece.. However, EU people are different. You can see all these people taking care of the babies and their families, cleaning them, giving them clothes, food, and a place to sleep.. This is the EU too.

“ What the EU authorities do is unhuman, but we should make a difference between the governments and the people ”

Do you think European civil society is doing enough to push governments into action?

It is not easy to push the governments. They are all well connected together and their politics make it hard for people to go out and defend their rights. When you finish work late, you earn 300 euros a week in Greece or don't have a job, you don't have the time to go and fight for someone else. That's capitalism. I have to pay for my house, my loans to the bank etc.

How do you see the future? Do you feel hopeful about any important change for this situation?

Before getting to know all this, one year ago, I was so hopeless. I didn't believe in humanity anymore. Now, after seeing all this suffering and death, I have hope. Because

I've met people who make me believe in the human being and make believe again that things can change (like Oscar Camps from Proactiva, Peter Bocca from HRW, Dani, Nico...). We just need to be aware of the things that make us human and try to make a difference. That's why the program in Barcelona (Ciutats Defensores dels Drets Humans) was like a dream for me, because I could talk about the refugee crisis with politicians but also with kids and teenagers! We need to work with them, with the young generation to make things change. It's not about money and politics, it's about these children. There is no fast change, it will take time.

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This picture was taken at the north shoreline of the Greek island Lesbos, a small town called Skala Skamias

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