The Refugee and Migrant Conflict Management in Europe

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Abstract

For providing useful suggestions for helping solve the European refugee crisis, this paper analyzes different players of the case and introduces and discusses two social theories. These two theories help build up an in-depth, and systematic analysis of the case. It also helps surface hidden factors driving European refugee groups to violence. This paper is not only meaningful in helping European scholars and policy-makers to rethink strategies of dealing with the refugee conflict, but it also lays a solid theoretical foundation in the management field by exemplifying how social theories can work in management in the real world.

Keywords

European Refugee, conflict management, structure violence, human needs.

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of 2015, the refugee and migrant crisis in Europe must be one of the most intractable conflicts which have been drawing attention from all over the world and most importantly, the whole crisis is still ongoing and actually is getting worse and probably will further worsen as the total number of refugees is expected to increase to around 5 million in 2021. The intractability of the refugee crisis consists of multifaceted factors, from inter-group conflict to international relations, from economic aspects to political aspects. However, the intention of this paper focuses only on the field of conflict management. Although some economic or political perspectives are touched in this paper accordingly, all theories, discussions, and practices stem mainly from the management field.

This paper aims at examining the European refugee conflict from an objective stance, not pro-government, neither pro-refugee/human rights. It strives to frame social theories as one of the socio-economic underpinnings that can provide efficient solutions for the continued exclusion and disenfranchisement of various refugee groups. Through discussing theory and its application to the case, suggestions are offered to improve hostile relations between the refugee groups and European countries.

The whole structure of the paper displays as follows. There are five parts in this paper, each of which helps us take a deeper understanding of the case through a lens of conflict management. The first part of this paper is an introduction. Then, there is a description of the conflict context in which main players and core issues of the conflict are addressed, as conflict management require a thorough understanding of the causes, the actors, and the dynamics of the refugee conflict and the relationships existing between context, causes, actors and dynamics [1]. The following parts are the theory portion in which two theories are respectively examined and employed to help us analyze the case. Finally, the last part is a conclusion that allows readers to review the whole picture of the case.

2. Description of Conflict Context

The migrant and refugee crisis has taken the headline on international news for a while, but the symbolic milestone was on the 21st December 2015 as the IOM (International Organization for Migration) claimed that "with the total for land and sea researching more than 1, 006, 000". The great number of refugees is not only comprised of asylum seekers from Syria, but also from Afghanistan, Kosovo, Iraq, Pakistan, Nigeria, and even Iran (BBC, 2015). Their routes to European countries are not the same, some arrived by land, and some arrived by sea. However, with the growing tension between refugee groups and European countries, the increasing number of refugees have to choose illegally entering Europe by flimsy boats, which is very dangerous. According to IOM, more than 3000 migrants are reported to have died trying to make the crossing in 2015[2].

Safely arriving in Spain, Greece, or Hungary does not mean those refugees have entirely escaped from war and death. Conversely, there are lots of tests waiting for them right at the border of European countries. Beginning from the Hungarian government, many European governments started to adapt strict, unfriendly, and arguable means to stop these refugees, for example, making more restrictive immigration laws in 2015. Hungarian immigration laws make it clear that "any helps to people who have entered the country illegally and without a visa are forbidden" [3]. These strict laws put these vulnerable and tired refugees in a dangerous and embarrassing situation. British ministers used words like "marauders" and "swarms" to speak of refugees a couple of times [4]. Then, Sweden looks set to drastically reduce the flow of refugees into the country by imposing strict identity checks on all travelers from Denmark, which caused a domino-effect and the Danish government quickly response to Sweden by announcing that they have beefed up border controls with neighboring countries where have a large number of refugees such as Germany. Finally, German, which used to hold a relatively welcoming attitude to refugees, has performed an abrupt U-turn on their open-door policy towards refugees [5]. What is more, to prevent refugees' access, the Hungarian government has invested more than 100 million euros to build a razor-wire fence at the border. Greece was even earlier, erecting their fence along its 128-mile border with Turkey in 2011 when the country was suffering from the economic crisis.

However, these preventative actions of European countries further provoke the grievance of refugees who risk their lives to arrive at the border of European countries. Desperate refugee groups have to try everything that they can do, including dangerously illegal activities, to get into European countries, especially countries in northern Europe. They smuggle; they have allied with media and try to pressure European countries, and they protest peacefully or violently. Violent confrontations at a relatively small scale between refugee groups and European countries frequently occur. For example, on 16th September 2015 Hungarian polices fired at the crowd of refugees with gas canisters and water cannons to keep refugees back when some refugee protests had broken a border gate [6]. For another extreme example, about 10 men trapped on the Greek-Macedonian border have sewn their lips shut to silently oppose blocked from continuing further into Europe [7]. Every week, some new refugees come to the country border and ask these Europeans to open their doors. If the EU then fails to implement effective policies, more violent confrontations may be triggered.

Indeed, the voices of both sides need to be heard. Sweden's deputy PM cried as she announced her country's "open door" policy on refugees ended in November 2015. The government also implied that they had done a lot to refugees by showing the data which indicated that they had already received many refugees, but the growing number is just beyond their capability. The keyword here is the capability because several other European countries also used the same term, capability, as a reason to close their doors to refugees. At least three factors could be able to fall into the category of the capability of a state regarding the refugee crisis, economic,

religious struggle, and political stance. Among the three, the economical pressures and religious struggles are more tangible than the political factor. Some European countries overtly or covertly associated the criminal activities with the Islamic beliefs of refugees. For example, when the Hungarian government officially responded to the violent confrontation at its border between the policemen and refugees in September 2015, Zolitan Kovacs, the spokesman of the Hungarian government, complained that "young Muslim mobs shield themselves with kids and hid themselves in the crowd of refugees" [8]. The recent attacks in Paris further overshadowed the refugee crisis, promoting tremendous concerns of European countries against these immigrants and refugees who mostly consist of Muslims. Economic stability also plays a crucial role in the case. The merit of new labor resources brought by migrants is always ignored by Europeans, while lots of local people view new migrants as a severe threat to their job market.

3. Human Needs Theory

The Human-Needs theory developed by John Burton is theoretically appropriate to be applied in analyzing the European refugee management, as it provides insightful explanations to the causing factors of the case. Adapting a part of Maslow's ideas, John Burton integrated the human needs theory into the field of Conflict Study. Maslow's original ideas focus more on the order of obtainments and believes that human needs are not only increasing unless the lower hierarchical needs are satisfied, while John Burton does not think that human needs have a hierarchical order and instead, argues that basic human needs including physical needs, safety needs, emotional needs, and needs of participation are all essential to individual well-being and failing to satisfy these basic needs could lead to conflict[9].

According to the human needs theory, the physical needs consist of two key factors, food, and shelter. If the physical needs could not be met first, then an unstable circumstance in which may affect the functionality of the individual can be created. Emotional needs mainly include belongingness and love, self-esteem, and self- identity. Based on the theory, the concept of self-esteem indicates that human beings hope and need to be recognized as competent and capable. Also, they want to know and prove that they have effects and influences on the environment that they live. Self-identity is defined as a sense of self about others and "identity becomes a problem when one's identity is not recognized as legitimate" [10]. The security needs can be viewed as a kind of mixture of physical and emotional needs, although the crux in the mixture is for structure, predictability, and stability. The need for participation is to be able to take part in civil society. Again, there is no order for different human needs. All these basic needs are essential to an individual's lives and once a type of needs fails to be satisfied, conflict can easily be triggered[11].

With the human needs theory, the unmet needs of refugees are important underlying causing factors of the conflict. First of all, refugees are short of food and shelter, which is one of the core motivations to make them start long journeys. Additionally, refugees can not have their needs of self-esteem met, as their images are widely portrayed and viewed as "troubles" by most European countries. Their future is highly unpredictable and relies heavily on what kind of policies each European country applies, so their safety needs are also far away from being met, let the needs of social participation alone[12]. Therefore, those unmet needs strongly drive refugees into the protest against the powerful European states who would not open their doors to more migrants. Strict immigration policies of European countries make the behaviors of refugees more irrational and extreme soon with the growing number of refugees gathering. However, unfortunately, most European countries do not realize these underlying issues and just put their energy on preventing the access of refugees, but not to solve problems and address unmet needs.

The approach of human needs theory offers us a unique standpoint that enables scholars to study the European refugee crisis more deeply. With human needs theory, underlying issues of the case can be surfaced and addressed, so scholars and policymakers could also take advantage and adjust their policies and strategies to comfort and placate refugees accordingly. Also, a thorough understanding of the hardships of refugees is one of the most important premises for a consensus-based solution or multilateral negotiations. However, the Human-Needs theory is not almighty. The weaknesses of the theory as it pertains to the refugee crisis outlined in this paper also need to be pointed out. On one hand, Burton paid little attention to the interests of parties, but in the case, we also need to address the interests of each party along with the needs of refugees as interests are the intangible motivations leading people to take that position [13]. On the other hand, refugee groups have lots of different individuals, and everyone's personal needs may differ. Thus, when we apply the theory to our case, we should not be confused by the wrong conception that two different individuals' needs that fall in the same category mean they are the same.

4. Structure Violence

Structure violence theory was originally developed by Johan Galtung in the late 1960s. It describes that systems and institutions keep a group of people away from reaching their basic human needs and this impairment of fundamental human needs can easily cause premature death and unnecessary disability [14]. Famer (2004) further specified that structural violence is one way of describing social arrangements that put individuals and populations in harm's way[15]. Different from direct and bloody violence, many other means can be employed by systems ingrained in various levels of different institutions to harm people, resulting in the "non-natural death" of targeted people for starvation, stress, discrimination, shame, denigration, and so on.

According to Galtung (1969), "violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations" (p.168). The inability to reach an individual or a group is rooted in a structural and institutionalized system of exclusion. By applying this theory into the case, one causing factor in explaining the occasional confrontations between the police force of European states and the refugee groups is that the refugee groups perceive that they are being targeted as an unwelcomed group and are excluded by the law systems of each European country. For a concrete example, through amending the immigration laws the Hungarian government economically isolates refugees and prevents refugees from getting any economic support and help of local people, which makes refugees impossible to stay in Hungary. This example shows how the system of European countries works against refugees. Thus, the institutionalization of exclusion impedes groups to achieve their full potential and consequently condemns these groups to live oppressed by those in control of the system. Overall, none of the basic human needs of refugee groups could be satisfied with a series of legal actions deployed by European states.

Structural violence helps examine the case of the European refugee crisis because it allows scholars to observe and understand how systems work in institutions and states to hurt refugee groups. Most governments would not choose to use direct and physical violence for the sake of protecting their national images, especially for European countries where the "face" of each country does matter, so structural violence, as a more covert means, is a better option. The theory also provides us with a sociological lens of explaining how migrants and refugees as an underrepresented group have systematically denied, as it often reveals the flaws within the structure that create systems of oppression to specific groups. Most importantly, the structural violence theory helps us build the framework which enables us to scrutinize and surface

strategies and policies of excluding refugee groups hidden in the system and the negative consequence.

5. Conclusion

The case of the European refugee crisis is undeniably complex, whereas many people only notice some tangible factors such as the financial hardships of refugee groups, but underlying factors are not analyzed. This paper, however, provides two theories to help establish an in-depth analysis of the case. It also helps surface hidden factors driving refugee groups to violence. This paper is not only meaningful in helping European scholars and policy-makers to rethink strategies of dealing with the refugee conflict, but it also lays a solid theoretical foundation in the management field by exemplifying how social theories can work in management in the real world.

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