

Imperialist Made Crisis of Migrants and Refugees

By [Alison Bodine](#) and [Tamara Hansen](#)

Global Research, July 23, 2019

Region: [Canada](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [Police State](#)
& [Civil Rights](#)

The [CBC article](#) headline reads, “Majority of Canadians against accepting more refugees, poll suggests.” It reports that, “the [poll] results come as no surprise to immigration experts and advocates, who point to a negative shift in tone on migration around the world, especially when it comes to refugees. They say that trend is stoked by media coverage in Canada of asylum seekers crossing the country’s border with the U.S.”

Alemayehu Beyene, an Ethiopian who arrived in Canada with his family 2.5 years ago after spending around 20 years in a refugee camp in Sudan told CBC,

“Maybe they don’t understand why we came here. [...] Nobody wants to be a refugee. Somebody push[es] you to go into refuge.”

So, where do refugees come from? And as a rich and advanced industrial country, why does the government of Canada have a duty and human obligation to welcome and support hundreds of thousands more refugees and migrants?

Crisis for Humanity: Refugees and Migrants Around the World

Today there are over 70.8 million people around the world who have been forcibly displaced from their homes, as reported by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR). People whose homes have become so unliveable due to war, occupation, extreme poverty, and the climate crisis that they have left everything that they have ever known in search of somewhere safe to live.

The Mediterranean Sea continues to be the deadliest crossing for migrants, who climb into small boats that have little chance of meeting the shores of Greece, Italy, or Spain. Between 2014 and 2018, more than 17,900 people were found drowned or went missing in the Mediterranean (International Organization for Migration-IOM).

From Central America, thousands of people also die as they travel through Mexico, with nearly 2,000 people dying at the U.S.-Mexico border in the last five years (IOM). Some of the people dying at the border have already spent months walking, in some cases, over 2,250 kilometres in search of safety in the United States.

With many bodies left unidentifiable and unrecoverable, these numbers are only an estimate of the immense human tragedy that is forced migration.

The New Era of War and Occupation

Since the U.S./Canada/NATO invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the world has been engulfed

by a new era characterized by ongoing imperialist wars and occupations. The U.S.-led warpath has crossed from North Africa to the Middle East, through Latin America, and into the Caribbean – and with each passing moment threatens another developing country in another corner of the globe. There is of course, an obvious and direct correlation between war and refugees. As one example, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) reported that, as of June 2019, 57% percent of refugees come from just three countries in North Africa and the Middle East, the epicentre of U.S.-led wars: Syria, Afghanistan, and South Sudan.

For the last 18 years, since the new era of war and occupation began, there has been no end to the war, violence, and economic devastation imposed on people from Afghanistan to Iraq; Syria to Yemen; and Haiti to Libya by imperialist governments like the U.S., Canada, and the countries of the European Union. These military interventions and sanctions have destroyed infrastructure, housing, hospitals, schools, and completely torn apart the social fabric of many countries. With no end to the war in sight, people have been forced to flee, first their homes, then their countries, and then ultimately the region entirely.

Imperialist governments are also responsible for the economic devastation imposed on colonial and semi-colonial countries around the world. The plunder and exploitation of these countries continues to line the pockets of the ultra-rich while destroying the living conditions and environments of the so-called “third-world”.

The majority of people fleeing their homes (80% according to the UNHCR) settle in a neighbouring country, hoping to return home one day, or lacking the resources to travel further. However, for those that do risk their lives for somewhere to be safe and secure, their hardship is often only just beginning, as they face continued violence, predatory human traffickers, and sexual violence, as well as inhuman border policies, racism, and bigotry when they finally reach a border with Europe, Canada, or the United States.

Photos that Remind Us of Our Shared Humanity

A devastating photograph of a lifeless human being has once again brought the tragedy of migration into the homes of millions of people in the United States and around the world. In the heartbreaking photo, Oscar Martinez and his 23-month-old daughter, Angie Valeria, are face-down on the shore of the Rio Grande, just as Alan Kurdi the 2-year-old Syrian boy who died in 2015 was face-down in the sands of a Turkish beach.

These images tell the same story of hardship and more importantly illustrate the lengths that people will go through when there are no other options. The blame for their deaths and thousands of others like them lies squarely on the shoulders of the United States and their imperialist allies, on the wars, occupations, and plunder that has forced them to flee and the inhuman migration policies that have left them with nowhere to go.

Central & Latin American Migrants Seek a New Life in the U.S.

As Bloomberg News [reported](#),

“More than 144,000 migrants were taken into custody along the U.S. border in May, a 32% jump from April, and the biggest monthly total in 13 years, according to Customs and Border Protection. Almost four-fifths of those apprehended were from the Northern Triangle [a reference used for the countries of Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala].”

In Latin America and the Caribbean, over 500 years of colonization and imperialist intervention and plunder has dug a deep wound. The lack of political and economic stability and devastating violence imposed on these countries is the result of the 56 U.S. military interventions (since 1890), the so-called “U.S. war on drugs,” and continuous U.S. meddling carried out in order to secure the theft and pillaging of Latin America’s resources to benefit the imperialist capitalist class and enable them to create an acceptable living standard for the middle class and working class in countries like the United States. How many people in the advanced industrial countries really realize how their comfort and relatively stable life are paid for by billions of people in colonial and semi-colonial countries, from Puerto Rico and Haiti; to El Salvador and Brazil; to Nigeria and the Congo; to India and the Philippines? Colonial powers such as Canada and the U.S. have successfully disconnected their people from the rest of the world. We must reconnect this disconnection.

The relationship between U.S. intervention in Latin America and the devastating situation in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala is most clearly expressed by the 2009 U.S.-backed coup in Honduras. 10 years ago, the United States backed a right-wing overthrow of the elected government of **Manuel Zelaya**. Since then political repression, state violence, and increasing poverty in Honduras have escalated, creating structural and institutional vacuums, along with deep instability throughout the country. After the U.S. supported coup Honduras ended Manuel Zelaya’s presidency, a country with a prospect of political and economic development became a failed state.

Gangs throughout the region, like the MS-13 which are so-often referred to by U.S. President Trump, were first formed in U.S. prisons, and then transplanted to Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala when people were released from prison and then deported. As the UNHCR [reports](#), the conditions of life for people in the Northern Triangle are not improving, “Current homicide rates are among the highest ever recorded in Central America. Several cities, including San Salvador, Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, are among the 10 most dangerous in the world. The most visible evidence of violence is the high rate of brutal homicides, but other human rights abuses are on the rise, including the recruitment of children into gangs, extortion and sexual violence.”

Due to the political instability and deep poverty in the region, many people are being forced to leave their hometowns in search of a better life, sometimes due to threats and violence and other times due to a lack of financial opportunities. The UNHCR predicts that “By the end of 2019, there are expected to be 539,500 displaced people from Central America”. Many of these displaced people are desperately trying to go north and find a way into the United States. The reaction of the U.S. government to the increasing number of migrants at the U.S./Mexico border – for whom it holds responsibility for their desperation – has been to criminalize and detain those trying to flee an unlivable situation in their country. Now, the Trump administration is once again facing backlash for the horrifying conditions for children at the U.S./Mexico border, where children are left alone in cages, uncared for, and without even a toothbrush. Since late 2018 six children have died while detained at the border.

Open air prisons, concentration camps, call them what you would like, the U.S. government is denying migrants their basic human dignity, let alone their rights and protections under international law.

Every day more children arrive, along with more migrants. U.S. government policies are causing deaths and hardship, and make no mistake, it only takes a brief examination of history to understand that a wall and criminalization are not deterrents for people with no

options. It only makes the crossings more expensive and more deadly.

Middle Eastern and North African Migrants Seek a New Life in Europe

“In total, there were 24 percent fewer people who journeyed over the Mediterranean in 2018 compared with 2017, and 84 percent fewer than in 2015. The proportion of people losing their lives during the crossing has gone up because they have been forced to choose more dangerous routes, and the Libyan coastguard, which is now patrolling the coast, lacks the rescue skills of European rescue services. According to the Norwegian Refugee Council, a total of seven percent of all those travelling over the Mediterranean lost their lives in 2018.” – “Hour of reckoning for European Refugee Policy” [report](#) by the Norwegian Refugee Council

The fear experienced, especially by women migrants, is clear in an interview with the Nation magazine in April 2019, and also shockingly similar to interviews and articles about the dangers faced by women and children migrating from the Northern Triangle. The Nation [interviewed](#) Leila (not her real name), a refugee from Afghanistan living in the Samos Refugee Camp in Greece, where 4,000 people live in a facility with 648 beds. Leila explained,

“When we arrived here in December, there was no place to sleep, so we had to buy a tent with our own money and set up in the woods outside the camp. [...] I was too shocked by the conditions to even think about how cold or squashed I was, but I thought at least there would be rules and security. But there are no rules. People have fights in the camp and you see them bleeding, but no one does anything. Men drink and party all night, so it’s too loud to sleep. It was so frightening at night, we had to go to the toilet together, holding hands.”

As long as the U.S. government and their allies, including countries in the European Union, continue to bomb, sanction and invade the Middle East and North Africa there will be continued migration to Europe. European governments must take responsibility for the devastation that they have caused and accept migrants and refugees with open arms.

Canada Can and Must Do Better!

Some might say, well Canada is different and welcoming of migrants and refugees. However, this distorts the fact that as per the UNHCR’s global trend report in 2018 Canada has only welcomed 28,100 refugees out of about 1.4 million refugees that needed resettlement (globally, sadly just over 90,000 were resettled that year). Others might also say Canada is different because it was not involved in the war in Iraq, or because Canada is still seen by some as a peace-keeping country. However, the hands of the government of Canada are also covered in the blood of people throughout the Middle East and North Africa – think of Afghanistan, Libya, Sudan, and Mali. Canada currently is even in Iraq, with 250 Canadian Armed Forces personnel scheduled to remain there until November 2020 (Government of Canada website).

Compared to the economy, population, and sheer land mass of Canada, the government has set the targets for accepting refugees shamefully low. In 2018 it was 7,500 and in 2019 it is set for 9,300. There are more than 25 million refugees in the world, and Canada won’t even accept 10,000 a year? The overarching message of Canada’s immigration policy remains

that there are open doors for the wealthy, and a long and treacherous process for the poor and exploited who wish to stay for more than a short time to work for low wages.

Not only that, the CBC [uncovered](#) in October 2018 that the Canada Border Services Agency has a plan to increase the number of removals of migrants that have been deemed “inadmissible” from Canada to a target of 10,000 each year. So now Canada will be deporting more people than they are settling as refugees?

Open the Borders - Legal Status, Democratic Rights, Civil Rights & Human Rights for All!

After many promises, the Liberal government ultimately has accepted just over 50,000 refugees from Syria, since Trudeau took office in the fall of 2015. This includes a combination of government and privately sponsored refugees. This is not enough!

Also, as [reported](#) by Maclean’s Magazine, “the 2019 federal budget, for example, proposes to take away their right to a full refugee hearing.” Shame on the Trudeau government for saying they are welcoming of refugees, while taking away refugee rights!

The government of Canada has the responsibility to immediately accept 200,000 refugees, and grant them legal status, as well as all democratic, civil and human rights.

However, rather than accepting migrants with open arms, as they have the responsibility to do, the governments of the U.S. and Canada, along with their allies are criminalizing not only the migrants but also the people that are working to save their lives. In June 2019, the government of Italy arrested the captain of a Sea Watch ship that had rescued 40 people from the Mediterranean because she had violated their ban on migrants landing on Italian shores. In the United States, Scott Warren is facing 20 years in prison for leaving water and food for migrants crossing Mexico-U.S. border through deadly desert terrain.

As poor, working, and oppressed people in the U.S. and Canada we must stand in solidarity with the migrants and refugees who are showing up on the doorstep of the White House or Parliament Hill, and letting imperialist governments know that they can no longer turn a blind eye to the suffering that they have imposed on millions of people in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America.

Open the borders immediately and unconditionally!

*

Note to readers: please click the share buttons above or below. Forward this article to your email lists. Crosspost on your blog site, internet forums. etc.

This article was originally published on as [Volume 13, Issue 7 of Fire This Time newspaper](#) “[Imperialist Made Crisis of Migrants and Refugees](#)”

Alison Bodine is a social justice activist, author and researcher in Vancouver, Canada. She is the Chair of Vancouver’s antiwar coalition, Mobilization Against War and Occupation (MAWO). Alison is also on the Editorial Board of the Fire This Time Newspaper. Follow Alison on Twitter: @alisoncolette

Tamara Hansen is on the editorial board and is a regular contributor to the Fire This Time

Newspaper, where she focuses on Cuba, Latin America and Indigenous struggle. Tamara is the coordinator of Vancouver Communities in Solidarity with Cuba (VCSC) and a member of the Executive of the Canadian Network on Cuba (CNC). Tamara is also a high school social studies teacher and a union member. Follow Tamara on Twitter: @THans01

Featured image is from Defend Democracy Press

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [Alison Bodine](#) and [Tamara Hansen](#), Global Research, 2019

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Alison Bodine](#)
and [Tamara Hansen](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca
www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca