

Refugee Bloodlines: America and Europe Can't Be Hypocrites Any Longer

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Global Research, March 09, 2016

Region: [Europe](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

As the Middle East-North Africa region continues to convulse with earth-shaking war, Western-backed jihadi terror, and sectarian divisions, the modern world's media continues to avert its eyes. As the US presidential race gains steam, American journalism, even the well-meaning "left", chronically under-report progress made in Syria, the cease-fire, the Syrian Arab Army's (SAA) progress, and NATO-Gulf Nations' utterly destructive policies, lies, and duplicity. Saudi's illegal war in Yemen barely registers as a blip on mainstream outlets. As all this goes on, disturbingly, refugees from the whirlwind of chaos and destruction are being denigrated as second-class citizens as they enter the European Union. In the US, the problems are just as bad, as Congress and the Washington establishment seem intent on pursuing blatantly anti-immigrant policies.

In 2015, approximately 1.3 million migrants applied for asylum in the European Union. Estimates show an expected similar or higher amount for this year, in the range of 1.5-2 million. Over 3,000 refugees died trying to cross the Mediterranean in 2015. Conditions are simply brutal for those who do make it to the EU. In Greece and Hungary, refugees wait patiently as surveillance is increased, checkpoints and fences multiply, militarized police battalions patrol, and razor wire is strung up on their way to their destinations.

In Sweden, thousands of unaccompanied minors and also adults are having problems finding employment and integrating. In Denmark, authorities are considering confiscating refugee assets worth over something like \$1,400 dollars- a pittance. In Germany, migrants are being told their families may not be eligible to make the journey to join them, causing many to return to Iraq and Syria. In Calais, France, violence and arson continue as refugees live in make-shift shacks, endure freezing temperatures, and the brutality of riot police.

In the US, last November the House voted in favor of the SAFE Act, 289-137, on a bill that would expand background checks and halting refugees entering from Syria and Iraq. In January, the Senate barely overturned the bill 55-43. The US has only let in approximately a meager 2,300 Syrian refugees, and most are women and children. (1) The process currently can take as long as two years, with vetting from FBI and DHS. Certainly, the US Congress has fallen off the deep end into paranoia and xenophobia to even consider such racist measures as the SAFE Act.

As has been pointed out many times, the one million refugees so far taken into the EU represents only 0.2% of the total EU population of 500 million. Surely, a responsible and humane program could be implemented throughout the Schengen area with minimal problems, if only member nations overcome their fears and delusional projections of the minority migrant "Others". The issues blocking such progress are not social integration,

assimilation, and demographic cultural problems, but are ultimately political. They relate to the way national politicians use identity politics to disparage and dehumanize refugees and immigrants.

Ultimately, news stories and sympathetic photo-journalism do little to express what refugees are going through. If a picture paints a thousand words, then engaging face-to-face with dialogue and compassion for refugees and immigrants and their struggles can paint a million. The words may not pour out, but be sure to look your companion square in the eyes. When I spoke with my own grandfather, the words were not plentiful, to put it lightly. His look, the depth of sorrow in his eyes, spoke for itself. He seemed to be saying: "Please, I do not want you to know about this. I can't talk about this. It is too painful." Ever since then, I have never blinked when expressing solidarity with refugees worldwide. It is seared into my consciousness, my blood, into my bones.

I have seen the look elsewhere. When I asked my friend from Lebanon about what he had seen in the civil war, he simply replied: "Everything...everything". His eyes shone, and I saw and felt the same tinges of anger and sadness. He was staring directly at me, his eyes steady. I did not push him after that. I had seen the look before.

At university, I experienced the look again: my friend from Germany was from the former GDR. He spoke of his elder family member, who was in the "secret police". His eyes had the same knowing, the same endurance of immense suffering, the same desire for liberation, the desire for the unadulterated freedom of the human spirit. Here was a real-life analogy to Harry Potter: just as Voldemort was "he-who-must-not-be-named", my friend would only use the phrase "secret police". He could not bring himself to say Stasi, even though they had not existed for over fifteen years when we discussed this.

The UN documents about 60 million worldwide refugees. (2) This figure is almost certainly an under-estimate, as it doesn't factor in massive numbers of political and economic migrants. A more thorough accounting might put the number at anywhere from 75-150 million: about 1-2% of the entire world's population.

If the US and European politicians continue to use xenophobia and racism to promote hate against refugees, our entire civilization will crumble into the dustbin of history. Of that there can be no doubt. The Enlightenment project of emancipation and universal rights can't be allowed to be rolled back because of anti-immigrant fear.

After the tragedy of the Vietnam War, the US response to calls for help was abysmal. However, the US did help resettle over one million people. The terrible events unfolding in North Africa and Southwest Asia deserve a similar response, starting now.

If there is any sense of goodwill and humanism left in world leaders, they must accept the UN Declaration of Human Rights (3) in its entirety and begin to build a framework for accepting millions of refugees into the "developed" world. The undeniable truth is that many of us in the US and Europe are descendants of immigrants and refugees ourselves. Despite the prejudices of the past, our ancestors were not turned away by tear gas, guns, batons, labyrinthine legal troubles, and barbed wire. Citizens in Europe and the USA must speak out and join hands in unity with refugees against the tides of intolerance, before it is too late.

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Notes:

1. <http://www.factcheck.org/2015/11/facts-about-the-syrian-refugees/>
2. <http://www.unhcr.org/558193896.html>
3. <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

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