

ASYLUM SEEKER OR SEEKER OF A BETTER LIFE? WHAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE WITHIN CATEGORIZATION?

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Abstract. *Migrants are often classified based on the reasons of emigration and way of travel. In this paper our aim is to focus on the stories and discourses of humanitarian migration from different perspectives offering first; the new category of classification of the migrants, second; the new way to face asylum seekers and third; to make a questionable necessity of classification over all: what kind of added value the classification gives and to whom in the end of the day? We are focusing on this phenomenon in the context of border security.*

We will identify how the consequences of natural forces (e.g. earthquake) impacts emigration. In this paper, we argue that the individual life situations, cultural discourses and societal factors all are important for understanding the phenomenon of migration. Thus, suggest of a new category of migration, is "seeking better life". However, at the same time we recognize that often the categories overlap and depend on the perspective.

Keywords: *asylum seekers, migration, humanitarian migration, categorization, border security, narrative research*

Introduction

This manuscript is a part of a wider research conducted in a GLASE (Multilayered Borders of Global Security) project funded by the Strategic Research Council (SRC) at the Academy of Finland. Our research is on progress with the aim to provide new knowledge on migration and migrants for enhancing border security. We focus mainly on humanitarian migration and parts of migration that are connected to border security, following that student, retirement, skilled workers, tourism or corresponding migration are not in our main focus.

Migrants are often divided to different categories based on the reasons of emigration and way of travel. Humanitarian migration is one broad categorization itself covering wide range of reasons for travel, individual stories and life situations. Researchers of migration tend to criticize categorization. With this manuscript we take part to the conversation of categories and dichotomies of migration from different

perspectives. On the one hand, we want to highlight the objectives and added value of categorization on the other hand we problematize the value of categorization by offering new way to face “asylum seekers” and their migration.

We analyse the stories of migrants who have arrived to Finland during last previous years to seek asylum. Our aim is to focus on the individual stories behind the “mass” of asylum seekers and discourses of migration; following two interests of research. First: how asylum seekers talk about their reasons for seeking asylum and their journey? Second: do these stories correspond to the common discourses and categories of migration? To widen the perspective, we also use our notes from seminars and interviews of experts who work with the migration issues. In addition, we take a look behind of categorization of migrants in the light of border security.

We begin with an overview to the categorization of migration addressing both the objectives and benefits of categorization and critics towards it. Then the data and method of this study is described followed by empirical findings on reasons of asylum seekers to emigrate. Research findings from previous studies are referred to along this paper. The paper ends with a discussion between our empirical findings and categories of migration. In conclusion, chapter we highlight why individual stories are important and present a new category of migration, seeking of a better life.

Categories of migration

Migration and migrants are categorized for several purposes. One important aim is to support decision-makers on national and international level by providing evidence-based data for policy makers or for decision-makers of different organizations. For example, European Commission divides migration to legal migration (work, family reunification, study and research), irregular migration and asylum. This distinction serves policy development and implementation that differ depending on the category. The first category is related mostly to economic development, migrant smuggling is the key concern related to the second and for asylum seekers common system within EU is the basis. (European Commission, 2018a).

Not only policy but legislation as well is often based on different categories. In criminal investigation and prosecution processes, the key objective is to find out whether crime has been committed and which crime is in question by focusing on the essential elements of a crime. For example trafficking in human beings and facilitation of illegal entry are separate crimes even though these categories overlap to some extent (Korpi, 2012). Categorization is relevant also for allocation of resources. The analysis of

risks levels of different risk categories such as human, socio-economical and natural made for example by Knowledge Centre on Migration and Demography (KCMD), may support the decision making with regards to what kind of aid is possibly needed in different countries.

Categorization is one, but not the only, way to structure and process information on migration. KCMD provides migration profiles focusing on demography, volume and reasons of the migration and risk assessment (KCMD, 2018). United Nations analyses migration levels and trend based on statistical data (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2018). European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) provides migration trend maps to plan and carry out rescue and border control operations effectively (Frontex, 2018).

The common reasons for leaving one's country of origin are persecution, violence and the desperation toward future in the home country (Juntunen, 2016), youth unemployment, poverty, population growth, environmental issues like climate change and lack of water, and civil unrest (Jauhiainen, 2017; Laitinen, Jukarainen & Boberg, 2016; Himanen & Könönen, 2016), just a mention few. These are regarded as reasons for humanitarian migration, to distinguish it from reasons behind other type of migration, such as labour, skilled workers or student migration. Humanitarian migration refers to migration resulting from bad security situation at the country of origin/habitual residence, for example because of environmental catastrophe, armed conflict or lack of human rights. Residence permit may be issued on the basis of humanitarian protection (e.g. Laitinen et al. 2016).

Rarely there is only one reason for migration and the reasons may also change during the time of travel (RMMS East Africa and Yemen, 2017). There are also country specific reasons for emigration/exile, e.g. some of Eritreans emigrate to avoid forced conscription which duration is indefinite (RMMS East Africa and Yemen, 2017). According to the estimation of United Nations, by the end of 2016 there were approximately 65 million people exiling due to persecution, violence, conflict or assault of human rights (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR, 2016).

As we can see, there is a tendency to categorize migration and migrants to different kind of groups and categories in research, everyday talk and media. The typical dichotomies of migration are illegal-legal, voluntary-forced, international-internal and temporary-permanent (King, 2002). There is also tendency to see trafficking and smuggling as dichotomy, trafficking as forced and smuggling as voluntary migration (e.g. Davidson, 2013). However, these dichotomies and categories do not correspond to the reality that is more blurred than one might expect. For example, the phenomenon of debt and debt-financed migration questions

these dyads (Davidson, 2013). As Davidson (2013) argues, financing migration through debt may be actively chosen by the individual, without this choice being voluntary or autonomous. It might be that debt is the only option to secure one's life and future freedom by emigrating and financing emigration through debt (Davidson, 2013).

Correspondingly, several studies have shown that smuggling is not a victimless crime; smuggled migrants are vulnerable for trafficking both during the travel and when arriving the destination (US Department of State, 2017). The distinction between smugglers and traffickers is more complicated than the concepts imply. Smugglers may restrict freedom of the migrants they are smuggling against their will, extort more money or abuse physically the persons they are smuggling (RMMS Horn of Africa and Yemen, 2017). Smuggling may also turn into trafficking along the journey (RMMS East Africa and Yemen, 2017). Very often victims or customers of smugglers are not aware that they are perpetrated into border crime/crimes on their journey to "better life". Those are categorized as "better life seekers"; they are not willing to be recognized as smugglers or victims of human trafficking- they don't want anybody disturbs their path toward "better life". (Migration officers' interview, 2017) It is possible, that they actually are not aware of crime.

The category of illegal migration especially attracts opposite interpretations. According to King (2002), for other illegal migration represent "mass" migration that should be controlled and managed. For others, illegal migration represents "natural force" reflecting that migration cannot be controlled (King, 2002). The categories of "illegal immigration" and "failed asylum" seekers are dominating the categories of migration and migrants in the British press 2010-2012, constructing the common picture of migration (Blinder and Allen, 2016). Blinder and Allen (2016, p. 34) argue, that using metaphors of "flood", "wave" or equivalent, when talking about migration are acts themselves because they may trigger policy solutions that are considered to be suitable for stopping the "flood". The categories of migration, such as refugee and migrant, may serve administrative purposes when deciding who has right to international protection and who not, but for individuals themselves these distinctions hardly corresponds to the reality they are experiencing (e.g. Long 2013). We are interested to find out the stories, meanings and experienced realities behind the "mass" of asylum seekers who arrived to Finland 2015-2016. By looking more closely to the individual stories, our aim is to enlarge the knowledge of asylum seeking and humanitarian migration as phenomenon.

Research methodology

We approached the phenomenon of migration by analysing different narratives. Narratives that we used in our study were asylum seekers' stories and interviews of officers working with migration issues. In addition to that, notes from seminars related to our research subject enriched the narratives. Thus, most of the narratives were written or spoken without influence of this study or the researchers. Interviews were conducted as unstructured thematic interviews. We analysed the narratives with qualitative content analysis method. Furthermore, from the individual stories of asylum seekers core stories were developed by combining the key contents and storylines together. We approached the data also with discourse analytical framework: along with the content analysis the framework of social constructionism was used to study how the migrants tell their stories.

Empirical findings behind individual stories

As King (2002) argued, natural force is one association related to migrants and migration. Natural force rhetoric is popular in the media as well. We wanted to find out the stories behind the "mass" discourse and common dichotomies of migration.

Previous research has found that unexpected shocks, such as flood damages or job loss, are connected to emigration, especially in families with few social networks (Cattaneo, 2016). In the case of sudden natural catastrophe, the most vulnerable ones are the poor families and individuals, as Cattaneo (2016) suggests. For example, a natural disaster may destroy one's home or the way to earn one's living by destroying the farmed land or the buildings of one's company or workplace. Depending on the life situation, natural disasters have different impacts and meaning. Others are forced to take loan to rebuild their house or company while others are already indebted and the natural force destroys the possibilities to have income and pay the debt, following that the reason for emigration is finding better job opportunities and living conditions elsewhere.

Even though natural force is sometimes contributing to the emigration, there are other reasons impacting as well. There may be following reasons behind the decision to emigrate: fear of violence, political conflicts and threat, lack of human rights, food and other goods, unemployment, poverty and social problems resulting from the culture. Social inequality is for others the primary reason for emigration and for other one contributor. Contrast to welfare states, in which the authorities often represent source of help, this is not necessarily the case in the experienced reality of asylum seekers: state is not necessarily able to

support victims of natural force or protect their citizens from violent groups, creditors or family members.

Furthermore, the categories of economic migrant and migrants fleeing political/ethical violence are not as distinct as it might seem. Unemployment may be connected to and resulting from the political or ethnical conflicts in that area or country. The political unrests and conflicts may limit the possibilities of earning one's living; running a business presumes joining political parties against one's will. It is also possible that for supporters of specific party it is impossible to find a job or they are threatened because of their work. If there is no social security in the country, work is the only way to survive and lack of it forces to find opportunities elsewhere.

On the other hand, studying or working abroad is seen as possibility for rebuilding one's life, both by those who flee persecution/violence and who seek better life. Some of the migrants are not even aware that they could seek asylum. Legal migration routes to EU are limited (European Commission, 2018b) and student, business and short-term (tourist) visas are commonly used for travelling abroad, even though the objective is not tourist trip but asylum seeking or work. The help of relatives, friends, acquaintances, and smugglers are needed for visa applications; without invitations or other proof visa is not granted. Some of the better life seekers are cheated by the smugglers; the promised job turns out to be something else such as forced labour, or the visa they are granted is not for work following that their residence abroad become illegal. Some finance their migration through debt, a phenomenon recognized by Davidson (2013).

Images of possibilities play a role in choosing one country or destination over other possibilities. Migrants may think that there is better situation outside the country, for example with regards to labour markets. Travel agencies, smugglers, acquaintances or friends recommend countries or choose it as a destination. Previous research suggests that the information for international emigration is distributed in social networks being important resource for those considering emigration (Cattaneo, 2016). It may be that these recommendations and information within social networks have important role for the decisions made by those considering migration.

Discussion

To which categories we could place asylum seekers? First, some could be seen as victims of natural force. For example, an earthquake can make life situation more complicated and worse, following that the key reason for emigration is aim to secure the basic needs (food, water, medicine, house) and also feelings of insecurity. It depends on individual life situation and

the seriousness of the lack of basic resources, whether migrants emigrating for securing their basic needs could be seen as forced migrants who have to migrate for security reasons, or voluntary migrants who seek better life. Fear may also contribute to the emigration: fear of the lenders, relatives or recruiters/members of political parties meaning that the threat of physical violence is real.

Many migrants seek asylum but the motive for travelling abroad is more blurred ranging from general aim of seeking help to finding a job. This contributes to the notion made by Long (2013) that the categories of 'refugee' and 'migrant' are not two clearly defined categories. Ten years ago, King (2002) already concluded that migration and migrants have become more diverse following that our old concepts and interpretations are not appropriate anymore. We have ended up with the same conclusion: trying to categorize migrants and migration to opposite categories of legal-illegal, voluntary-forced, smuggled-trafficked is difficult and far from the experienced reality of migrants. For example, even though we might see humanitarian migration mostly as security and social problem, it is very much connected to financial and economics, as Davidson (2013) emphasize.

Asylum seekers' journey is often based on visa applied by facilitators or equivalent, false information is used for visa application, resulting that the migration is illegal in that sense. However, if it is illegal by deliberately is another question: not all are aware if their entry is legal or illegal. In this case, the categorization matters; intentionality and aim to obtain financial or material benefit belong to the definition of smuggling. Crucial question in criminal procedures is also whether migrant is seen object or subject of smuggling (United Nations Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants, article 6). Experiences of some migrants raise a question whether some of them were actually victims of trafficking for forced labour or labour exploitation before seeking asylum in Finland. The phenomenon of smuggling turning into trafficking along the journey is already recognised in Africa (RMMS East Africa and Yemen, 2017) and it seems that the same risk exists for those travelling to Europe as well. In this case, categorization is also relevant: victims of trafficking have special legal status for example with regards to help (Council Directive 2004/81/EC; United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons) and criminal liability. EU Member States shall take the necessary measures to ensure that competent national authorities are entitled not to prosecute or impose penalties on victims of trafficking in human beings for their involvement in criminal activities which they have been compelled to commit as a direct consequence of trafficking (Directive 2011/36/EU, article 8).

The discourses of migration often include the statement of “crisis” or major change in the security environment. However, from the stories told by asylum seekers we can notice that the phenomenon and factors related to and threatening security are quite the same than before. Natural phenomenon, poverty, political conflicts, incapability of states to provide basic rights and future for their citizens, corruption and social inequality are factors that infringe human rights and security, and are also connected to the humanitarian migration.

The social, global media makes these dichotomy-discourses of migration even more blurred. Mobile technology enlarges the number of people having access to the media and when on the move. As Zijlstra and Van Liempt (2017) have found out, smartphones impact migrants’ journeys, the routes and destinations they choose. Who is responsible of the “idea” to emigrate? Is responsible the one who displays the content in the media by creating a pull factor for migration? Or does the responsibility lie on the migrant who believes the news and makes the decision to leave? Do we regard migration as voluntary, forced or something between when the decision to emigrate is based on false image on destination country or possibilities to work?

Conclusions

Based on the narratives behind the “mass”, there is an individual story and the unique life situation for the reason of leaving home. The natural forces or “mass” rhetoric and the dichotomies of migration leave the individual stories invisible. These kinds of discourses and rhetoric create images of continuous journey that moves on like a wave. However, other studies indicate that this is not the case (e.g. Schapendonk, 2017): migration is not so linear and well planned as it might seem. We should not forget that sociocultural factors such as institutions and cultural norms, and legislation as well, create “space of possibilities” that in turn have effect on the choices that individuals make (e.g. Salmela-Aro, 2009). Even in political, ethical or religious conflicts the ways they affect people’s lives are different and depending on individual life situations and individual itself.

The common reason for categorization is political purposes. However, we argue that the individual approach is required to make the societal, psychological and political structures and circumstances that contributed to the emigration visible, by contributing to more effective decision-making and measures. By focusing on individual stories, we better understand how the feelings of insecurity arise and what kind of meanings same events have for different individuals.

We also see that categorization as a way to analyse and structure data has its own value for research, administration, operative purposes and

decision-making. Therefore as a conclusion of this paper, we introduce a new category of migration: seeking of a better life. Seeking better life does not necessary mean that migrants belonging to that category would be looking for luxury or after welfare benefits. For many better life means possibility to secure the basic needs (food, water, medicine, house), it depends on individual life situation and the seriousness of the lack of basic resources what “better” life means. Not only political unrests and armed conflicts raise feelings of insecurity; also, the lack of house, medicine or social inequality may be a reason for seeking help.

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