

The Many Faces of Violence: The Exclusion of Immigrants

Tudor-Iulian Bradatan
Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Faculty of European Studies

Introduction

Some Eastern-European countries lie today in a situation of political, social and economic crisis; the systems are not adjusted to human aspiration and needs, and this not because of any lack of knowledge regarding this issues. Everyone, from farmers to policy-makers, are well aware of the situation they are in, but however, the reaction to some natural phenomena such as immigration consists mainly in increasing punishments and deterrent strategies. Even though it has been clear for long time that such strategies fail, very little attention has been given to the sources of this behaviours and to the appropriate means of avoiding their occurrence.

The 1st of May 2004, ten countries joined the European Union. One of the main discussions regarding this fact was the potential labour migration from former communist countries to old member states. The people who want to leave their countries and work abroad will now have a more feasible option: do it very legally. There are currently around 19.9 million foreign nationals living outside their countries of origin, as residents in Western Europe¹. But for the number of those who live outside their countries of origin in western Europe, and are not legal residents there are no exact figures, and researchers do not agree on an approximate number. This kind of immigrants (the illegal immigrants) are very often victims of what could be called violence.

Violence harms and hurts, often irreversibly, body, mind and spirit. Johan Galtung, best known for his work as a peace researcher is the author of one of the most complex theories on violence. He sees violence as “avoidable insults to basic human needs and more generally to life, lowering the real level of needs satisfaction below what is potentially possible”². He divides violence into three major concepts, representing them as a triangle of direct-cultural-structural violence. Direct violence is visible, destructive, with a will to harm; it is the form most feared. A violent structure harms some people in the sense of insulting basic human needs, it is a pattern of interaction where people are acting different roles without really reflecting on what they do. Cultural violence is even more problematic because it is inside us all, it is the violence of priests, intellectuals, professionals, the military, the economy, etc.

This paper intends to prove that the exclusion of migrant workers in various ways and at various levels is an act of violence towards them in Galtung terms.

The migrants – Profile

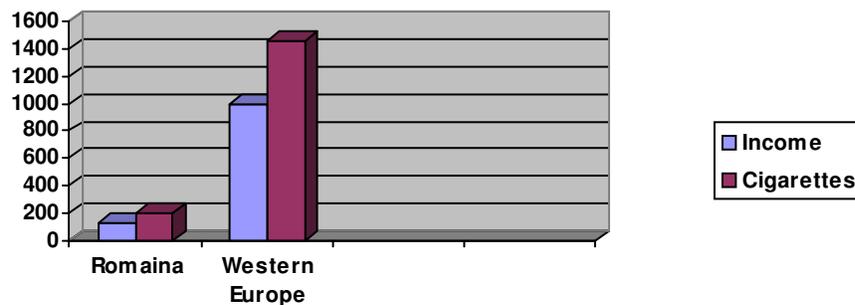
Until 1990, when it came to speak about migration, special attention was given to the settlement migration. The policies regarding this issue were aimed at enforcing border control (when entering Western European countries, as for former communist countries when leaving), and then, integrate those immigrants who have been allowed in. Nowadays, the situation is a bit different, we have a different kind of immigration; the concept of permanent migration is no longer as clear as it used to be³.

There are few people migrating now for purposes of family reunion, or ethnicity, the most significant feature of migration in recent years has been the labour migrants, generally low-skilled and low-paid, moving abroad to work for varying periods of time. Some of them move within organised schemes, and respond quickly to spontaneous labour market requirements. Most often what they do is to enter the host country legally, and then overstay or break their terms of entry. There are many options for them to enter a foreign country: as tourists and after what their visas expire, they overstay or go back home, they fake papers (a fake passport costs on the black market around 1000 euros) especially for those countries which require a visa, they go for work legally, and afterwards stay longer till their visas are long time expired, or simply enter the country clandestinely.

Economic motives are the strongest force promoting immigration. Often, however, the economic roots of immigration are not understood; politicians and media commentators paint a picture of immigrants coming from poor countries to rich countries in order to take advantage of public benefits or higher wage levels. The reality is a bit more complicated. Many immigrants are essentially economic refugees. In the era of globalization, governments around the world have faced a great deal of pressure to reduce public investment in infrastructure, services, credit, and job creation. Public subsidies for food and agriculture have also been slashed or eliminated, and small-scale farmers have been forced to compete with huge international agribusiness firms.

While these policies have a negative effect on all countries, their impact on developing countries has often been devastating. Without access to credit or markets, small farmers cannot survive on the land. Rural communities are depopulated as their inhabitants migrate to cities or across national borders. Small and medium-sized business and industry are affected in similar ways, and their workers also leave.

It is very easy to imagine why do people leave by making a simple mathematical calculation: in Romania a packet of cigarettes costs 0, 65 euros; in Wesestern European countries, the same packet of cigarettes costs 4, 00 euros. In Romania the average income is 130 euros per month, while in Western European Countries, any migrant worker earns at least 1400 euros per month. If one lives in Romania and has an average income, he/she can afford to buy 200 packs of cigarettes every month. If one lives and works in a Western European country and has an average income, estimated at 1000 euros per month, he or she can buy 1449 packs of cigarettes in Romania, this means a bit more than seven times the packs of cigarettes bought in Romania with an average income.



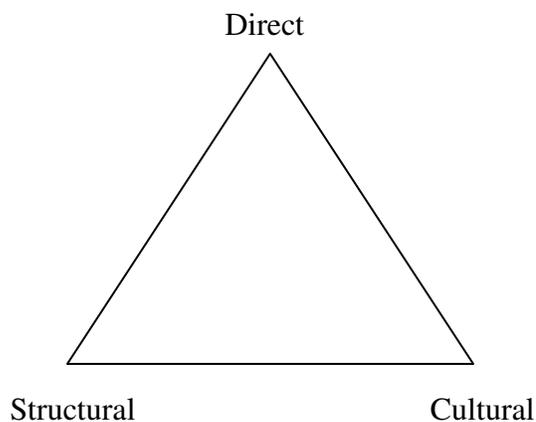
Romanians however, do not emigrate so they can buy more cigarettes; this calculation will show the same results also for many other products, in many other countries in Eastern Europe. There are still many questions that do not have such simple answers: what do these people have go through in order to earn their living, will they be victims of violence during this proces, what is the solution to all this?

There are many Eastern Europeans who left in the 1990's, and a quite a few of them came back with the money earned and set up businesses; others did not come back at all. But they were not all low-skilled or low-educated, they were able to choose from a bigger variety of jobs. Nowadays, the immigrants have mainly the 3D jobs (dirty-difficult-dangerous). They go most often through these three dimensions for their living, for a decent life, for an ill son or daughter, for themselves; but not everybody seems to know or care about this.

Violence in Theory

In dictionaries violence is defined as a behaviour intended to harm people physically (injuring, killing, hitting, shooting), or involving the use of physical force with the deliberate intention of causing damage, injury or death to people⁴. However it is more to violence than just this. The most complex definition on violence was introduced by Johan Galtung, the founder of the academic discipline of peace and conflict studies.

Violence harms and hurts body mind and spirit. Depending on how it operates, three types of violence can be identified: direct, structural and cultural. They are represented as a triangle.⁵



The direct violence is visible, destructive, with a will to harm, it is the form most feared. We can see its effects, and it is done with the clear intention of causing harm. It is often irreversible and has its consequences much beyond the visibility of human bodies or property. There are many actions that could be included in this category, from war to racism. Domestic violence, exploitation, beating someone, these are just a few examples of direct violence.

The structure is a pattern of interaction where people are enacting without really reflecting on what they do because “everybody does it” or “we always did it this way”. A violent structure harms some people or all of them in the sense of insulting basic needs. Two types of structural violence can be identified: a vertical structure (repression, exploitation, alienation) and a horizontal structure (keeping people who want to live together apart, people who want to live apart, together). In the horizontal structure the need insulted is identity, as for the vertical structure the needs insulted are freedom and well-being.

At some point the markets tend to cause violence, policies or political decisions, institutions also may cause violence; it is not visible, but could be even more destructive than

direct violence. A relevant example is to compare the number of people who died in World War II (9 million annual average) with the number of children who die every year of malnutrition (12 million).

The culture can be defined as a set of rules we learn early in life about good-bad, right-wrong, true-false, sacred-profane, beautiful-ugly. Culture expresses itself in quite a number of ways: speech, actions, structures, laws, arts. The problem is that there are aspects of culture that define violence as good or some types of killing as right or even sacred. This explains how direct or structural violence become acceptable. It legitimises violence through law, religion, practices, or makes it look acceptable. In quite a number of cultures the abuse against women is legitimised, wearing a gun is encouraged, killing people in the name of a holy war is allowed.

Violence in Practice

Direct Violence

It is very easy to identify the direct violence against migrant workers by just spending a day with them at work or in their free time. We can observe their work conditions, the equipment they have for protection, we can ask for their wages. The work they do is indeed 3D. On the other hand, the employers will register huge profits because they do not pay taxes or insurance. In a way we could call this exploitation, which is obviously violent. Furthermore, these kind of employers will not guarantee a decent place to stay or decent meals for their employees. Most often to earn their approximately 1000 euros per month they have to work from 8 to 12 hours per day in winter or summer no matter how high or low the temperature is.

If we are to observe the immigrants in society we can see that they are seen as second-hand human beings, for many extreme nationals or xenophobes, they are the symbol of lazy people benefiting from their welfare. This is linked more to the aspect of cultural violence explained below. In many countries there have even been violent attacks against the immigrants done by these people. Here is just a small example taken from a newspaper: "Mr. Gezer, his wife and four children were sent to the Toryglen estate in September 2001. They were frightened to leave their flat. They were shouted at in the streets. Groups of people hanging around the estate threatened them with dogs, spat at them and swore at them. Shopping was difficult. The wife was humiliated when using vouchers and waiting in the queue and checkout. Their son was bullied at

school. On one occasion the husband tried to throw himself out of the window. On October 27 their home was attacked by a group of men, and their son Ibrahim was threatened with a knife.’⁶

One of the most obvious examples of violence is the trafficking of people. South Eastern Europe is one of the main countries of origin for victims of trafficking, most of whom are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The number of trafficking cases and their dynamics in Eastern Europe over the last few years speak of a reality that has already settled in. Anybody could become a victim of trafficking, just any woman is a potential victim. The states as well as transnational organizations do everything in their power to stop this.

Structural Violence

If we look at the policies and political decisions regarding immigration, we find that they have a very bad consequence when putting them in practice, or are simply harm in a less visible way. We can see that though in many fields migrant workers are needed, work permits are not issued so employers can find low-paid workers. The corruption regarding this issue is again an example of structural violence by the simple fact that the authorities do not do everything possible to stop this, as it is done in the case of the trafficking with humans.

While states close their borders criminals have been cashing in on the desperation of migrants (political or economic) to change their lifestyles. People-smuggling has become a highly organized and lucrative market, sometimes resulting in tragedies like the asphyxiation of 58 Chinese would-be immigrants in a container lorry at the English port of Dover in June 2000. Those who have used the criminals' services in the hope of starting a new life have found themselves exploited in "black economy" sweat shops, spending many years paying back with interest the smugglers' fees. Women and children seeking a new life have been lured into sex slavery and prostitution in order to pay the fees.

If we look at the way the states of origin take care of their citizens, we find even more violence; they are not offered support, they are not informed about their rights. If they need help and try to get it at their national embassies, they will find bureaucracy and ignorance. Getting a visa or a work permit from an embassy may be more expensive and more complicated than getting fake papers. A very famous incident was when the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Britain resigned because of scandal. The Great Britain Embassy in Bucharest and Sofia was granting visas to people with bogus papers; a one-legged man was supposed to be working as a carpenter

or a man with some fingers missing as an electrician. These were people sent to London to beg for money, and not skilled workers. A lax legislation and corrupted personnel becomes an act of violence towards those people who ended up begging for money most probably in a network controlled by a mafia boss.

If we think about policies, there are quite a few cases where migrants, after spending ten or twenty years in a foreign country were all of a sudden deported. Most of the host states after several years will still not grant guest workers citizenship, or political representation. In Rome, Italy, for example the immigrants are allowed to elect a representative who does not have the right however to vote in the Local Council. In many other countries they can't even elect someone to represent their interest, even if that counselor does not have the right to vote.

Cultural Violence

Most often migrant workers low-skilled and low-paid are marginalised are associated with violent behaviour, with the ghetto. They are considered a threat to society; they are seen as villains, smugglers, rapers. The cultural violence nourishes the direct and cultural violence, makes both of them look acceptable.



This poster is supposed to advertise the fear and increase all kind of punishments and persecutions against immigrants. On a much larger scale, we can identify political groups that one way or another try to push forward anti-immigration laws. Right-wing parties like those of Jorg Haider in Austria, Pia Kjaersgaard in Denmark and Filip Dewinter in Belgium have prospered by playing on fears of a loss of national identity and campaigning against immigration.

Conclusions

The reasons for which people leave their Eastern European countries are mostly economic. We could name the people who leave for work outside their countries of origin economic refugees, just that unlike the other refugees mostly known as asylum seekers, they are on their own, they do not have very clear laws to defend them, they will not benefit from the welfare. The question is whether during this process of migration they are victims of violence. If we look at the broader concept of violence, we can see more than just the visible traces. There is a system that harms people by inefficient laws, by stereotypes. Though it is considered by everybody a "hot issue", and there is even at the European level a "Migration management strategy", the situation is no better. Many thought that by ensuring the legal background for people to apply for work permits, the situation would change, but it didn't. A very bureaucratic system or the high level of corruption in the institutions who issue these papers is not a solution. People will always find ways of leaving their countries and work abroad, it is up to the policy makers to decide if they want to help these people or find more deterrent or inefficient strategies.

¹ Council of Europe, European Committee on Migration, „Towards a Migration Management Strategy”, Strasbourg, November 2002

² Johan Galtung, „Peace by Peaceful Means”, International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, 1996

³ Council of Europe, European Committee on Migration, „Towards a Migration Management Strategy”, Strasbourg, November 2002

⁴ Macmillan English Dictionary, 2002; Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 1995

⁵ Conflict Transformation by Peaceful Means (The Transcend Method), UN, 2000

⁶ The Guardian, Thursday April 17, 2003