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“Così è germinato questo fiore”

[PARADISO, XXXIII, 9]

DONNE E LAVORO

LE DINAMICHE PSICOLOGICHE
DELLA RELAZIONE EDUCATIVA

CONOSCENZA E DUBBIO SCETTICO

L'UGUAGLIANZA DI GENERE
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THE SCIENTIST, THE ARTIST

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Why ‘should we’? A well-grounded argument for refugee acceptance and integration

Silvia Zanazzi

The current unprecedented influx of migrants and asylum seekers fleeing from war-torn countries into the EU has created an intense debate on the obligation and opportunity to accept and integrate them in our societies. Between humanitarian concerns and political convenience, and beyond the rhetoric of the media, it is possible to argue in favour of acceptance and integration based on a sound process of data analysis and assessment. This article aims to present and discuss evidence from research that suggests we should support acceptance and integration of refugees in the EU, as a whole, and in Italy specifically. After describing the main recent events concerning the EU migration crisis, a number of key issues are investigated: the real dimensions of the influx, the security threat, the obligations deriving from international law, the cost-benefit ratio and, finally, the educational importance of cultural diversity.

L'attuale e inedito arrivo nell'UE di migranti e richiedenti asilo in fuga da paesi devastati dalla guerra ha creato un intenso dibattito sull'obbligo e l'opportunità di accettarli e integrarli nelle nostre società. Tra preoccupazioni umanitarie e convenienza politica, e al di là della retorica dei media, è possibile argomentare a favore dell'accettazione e dell'integrazione sulla base di un solido processo di analisi e valutazione dei dati. Questo articolo si propone di presentare e discutere le evidenze provenienti da ricerche che suggeriscono che dovremmo sostenere l'accettazione e l'integrazione dei rifugiati nell'Unione europea, nel suo complesso, e in Italia in particolare. Dopo aver descritto i principali eventi recenti riguardanti la crisi migratoria dell'UE, vengono esaminate una serie di questioni chiave: le dimensioni reali dei flussi, la minaccia alla sicurezza, gli obblighi derivanti dal diritto internazionale, il rapporto costi-benefici e, infine, l'importanza educativa della diversità culturale.

Introduction

As a social science researcher and faculty member of an American university consortium, since 2014 I've had the privilege and responsibility of teaching US college students a course on immigration and the current refugee crisis in Europe. In my class, I present facts, data, arguments, personal and political opinions on a highly controversial issue in today's world, one on which everybody seem to have something to say or to ask. Discussions are always animated and viewpoints can be extremely different: many of my students are descendants of Italian emigrants, others are education, sociology or political science majors who plan on becoming teachers, professors, or policy makers, while others are simply curious to understand who «these people arriving on a boat» are and what EU countries are doing, or not doing, to manage this unforeseen situation.

What is sure is that at a certain point during the semester a student will raise her hand to ask that ‘simple complex’ question: «Why should Europe accept and integrate refugees?». In US higher education, an attitude of ‘neutrality’ is expected on the professor's side: according to this cultural norm, I'd be supposed to present data in a way that is as ‘dry’ and objective as possible. I must admit that, in this specific case, I found the cultural norm of neutrality very hard to respect. As a matter of fact, I am strongly in favor of acceptance and integration, not only because I highly value the moral obligation to solidarity that we have as Italians and Europeans, but especially because I have read, studied, reflected and discussed enough to be able to say, at least, that the arguments in favor of acceptance and integration are definitely academically stronger, more numerous and forward-thinking and, finally, better supported and communicated, than those against it. One of my favorite philosophers, Paulo Freire, never stops repeating that «education cannot be a

neutral process». Although I totally agree with his statement, it's important to clarify that my conclusions on the topic of acceptance and integration naturally stemmed from a rational and academically sound process of data analysis and assessment, rather than simply from my heart. This article presents several well-grounded arguments for acceptance and integration of refugees, backed by solid references and data, with the purpose of hopefully contributing to the current debate in my country and, why not, in my classes.

1. Setting the scene: the European 'migration crisis'

At the root of the current 'migration crisis' are the wars in the Middle East and Africa: Europe is currently surrounded by countries in conflict and this situation has generated an unprecedented influx of people, many of whom are forced migrants and asylum seekers. The majority of the people come from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa. The peak of the crisis was in 2015, when more than one million migrants and refugees arrived in Europe by boat, rail or road, fleeing violence, persecution and extreme poverty. In the same period, almost 4,000 were reported dead or missing in the Mediterranean¹. During the first half of the following year, the crisis seemed to have abated, mainly thanks to a highly controversial EU agreement that allowed Greece to return all the newly arrived migrants to Turkey, in exchange for money and easier access to Europe for Turkish nationals². In spite of this new hurdle, people kept leaving their countries and dying along the way: in 2016, 387,000 arrived to Europe, while more than 5,000 were reported dead or missing. In September 2017, while this article is being written, the number of yearly arrivals to Europe has already surpassed 130,000 and more than 2,500 did not make it through their journey³. The refugee crisis has challenged border

controls, policies and institutions in the affected European countries and has triggered a highly conflicted debate within the EU about management, burden sharing and responsibilities. It has shown that the Dublin system⁴ is no longer functional and needs substantial reform. Most of all, it has highlighted the difficulty in coming up with common solutions. When, in May 2015, the President of the EU Commission Jean-Claude Juncker dared to propose a mandatory quota-based relocation mechanism for asylum seekers, he was faced with strong opposition by several member countries, among which were Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland, all threatened by the rise of populism⁵. As a matter of fact, anti-immigration parties exist throughout all of Europe and, in many cases, combine xenophobia with a rejection of the European concept. This is the environment in which politicians are now being forced to negotiate, and the reason why the proposal of a 'quota system' sounded politically 'toxic'.

Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán announced the construction of a fence along the border with Serbia to stop the entrance of thousands of migrants who had taken the so called 'Balkan route' to reach central and northern European countries. The Hungarian fence was rapidly completed by the end of that year, in spite of a harsh reaction from the EU: «We do not promote the use of fences and encourage member states to use alternative measures»⁶. And yet, that was not the only barrier erected against immigration on the Old Continent. Hungary itself announced and began building new fences along its borders with Romania and Croatia. Macedonia erected a wall against Greece and so did Bulgaria against Turkey⁷. The UK financed an 'anti-migrant' wall along

⁴ The Dublin Regulation determines the EU Member State responsible to examine applications for asylum. It is highly controversial now because by establishing that the first country of arrival in the EU must process the asylum request, it places an unfair burden on Mediterranean countries such as Italy and Greece, where the majority of migrants land.

⁵ ISPI, *Europe: No Migrant's Land?*, 2016 (<http://www.ispionline.it>)

⁶ M. Franco, *L'assedio. Come l'immigrazione sta cambiando il volto dell'Europa e la nostra vita quotidiana*, Mondadori, Milano, 2016

⁷ The Economist, *More neighbours make more fences*, 2017 (<https://www.economist.com>)

¹ International Organization for Migrations, Statistics, 2017 (<https://www.iom.int/>)

² M. Bordignon, S. Moriconi, *The case for a common European refugee policy*, «Policy Contribution», 8 (2017)

³ International Organization for Migrations, Statistics, 2017 (<https://www.iom.int/>)

the road leading to the French port of Calais, in an attempt to stop immigrants from sneaking into lorries, in a desperate bid to reach Britain. Additionally, several countries (Slovenia, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark) opted for a temporary reintroduction of border controls, a measure allowed by the Schengen Borders Code in case of a serious threat to public policy or internal security⁸. These decisions were condemned by other EU governments; however, they suggested that «while both the challenge and its governance were quintessentially transnational in character, nation states could enforce their national-level solutions»⁹.

At the end of 2017, Europe is still struggling with the migration crisis without being able to devise common strategies and long term policies. Europe appears divided, conflicted and «increasingly at odds with itself»¹⁰. The lack of coordination in facing migratory pressures is the result of many different factors, both at a transnational and national level. As of now, national responses are prevailing and «the refugee crisis turns out to be an opportunity for reaffirming national sovereignty»¹¹.

2. Focus on Italy

I am the new Mayor of the islands of Lampedusa and Linosa. I was elected in May, and from then until the 3rd November, 21 drowned bodies of people who were trying to reach Lampedusa have been delivered to me. This, for me, is something intolerable. Lampedusa now bears an enormous burden of pain [...]. I am not able to understand how such a tragedy can be considered normal. Last Saturday the bodies of 8 young women and two boys aged 11 and 13 were recovered from the sea. They were on a journey that was meant to be the beginning of a new life [...]. I am full of indignation about the acclimatization that seems to have contaminated everyone. I am

scandalised by Europe's silence, which can only be exacerbated by the fact it has just recently been awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace yet continues to stay silent over a tragedy that is now reaching figures more commonly associated with war. I am becoming more and more convinced that European policy on immigration sees this toll of human lives as a means to moderate the flow, if not as an actual deterrent. If the journey by boat is the only possibility of hope that these people have, I believe that Europe should be ashamed and disgraced by the deaths which occur at sea [...]

(from the open letter by Giusi Nicolini, Mayor of Lampedusa, to the EU - November 2012).

2013 – 2015: Efforts for the Mediterranean

On 3 October 2013, a boat carrying migrants from Libya to Italy sank off the Sicilian island of Lampedusa. The boat had sailed from the Libyan coast, but many of the migrants were originally from Eritrea, Somalia and Ghana. An emergency response involving the Italian Coast Guard resulted in the rescue of 155 survivors. More than 360 people died in the shipwreck. Following the tragedy, the Italian government decided to strengthen the national system for the patrolling of the Mediterranean sea by founding Mare Nostrum, a military and humanitarian operation aimed to rescue the migrants and arrest the smugglers. In Latin, Mare Nostrum was the name given to the Mediterranean sea; in Italian, the expression translates into ‘our sea’. A very appropriate name for a search and rescue operation that was mainly financed by the Italian government (€ 9.3 million/month), with marginal contribution from the EU. From October 2013 to November 2014 Mare Nostrum saved 160,000 people, but it became politically unsustainable due to high management costs. When the Italian government requested additional funds from the other EU member states in order to continue the operation, it did not receive the expected support. As a consequence, Mare Nostrum ended on 31 October 2014 and was superseded by Triton, managed by the EU Border and Coast Guard Agency Frontex. Compared to the previous operation, Triton initially had a much smaller search and rescue capability and was run with only 1/3 of the budget. Unlike Mare Nostrum, it focused more on border protection than on

⁸ M. Franco, *L'assedio. Come l'immigrazione sta cambiando il volto dell'Europa e la nostra vita quotidiana*, Mondadori, Milano, 2016

⁹ ISPI, *Europe: No Migrant's Land?*, 2016, p.47 (<http://www.ispionline.it>)

¹⁰ ISPI, *Europe: No Migrant's Land?*, 2016, p.9 (<http://www.ispionline.it>)

¹¹ ISPI, *Europe: No Migrant's Land?*, 2016, p.109 (<http://www.ispionline.it>)

search and rescue and could only operate closer to the Italian coast. The termination of Mare Nostrum was deemed to cause a sharp increase of the death rate in the Mediterranean sea. Just considering the month of April 2015, two shipwrecks together killed more than 1000 people. As a result, in May 2015 the EU decided to triple funding for Triton.

2016 – 2017 Crisis and route change in internal politics

The influx of migrants reaching Italy via the Mediterranean sea kept increasing in 2015 (153,000 arrivals) and 2016 (181,000) and, with it, the pressure on the reception system and on the institutions, the fears of 'invasion' in the civil society and the anti-immigration propaganda of the populist opposition parties, who could progressively weaken the pro-EU ruling Democratic party (PD) and its government. At the beginning of 2017, the situation in Italy was very different compared to 2013, when Mare Nostrum started. On the one hand, the common sentiment was that of having been 'abandoned' by the EU in the management of the emergency. On the other hand, the political climate was rapidly changing: the local elections in June 2017 saw some anti-immigrant mayors and local councilors taking office. The result left the governing center-left party jaded, forcing Italian leaders to seek short-term solutions, with an eye to the 2018 political elections. «Our goal is to govern the migration flows», said the Italian Interior Minister Minniti in an August 2017 news conference. «A big democracy, a big country, doesn't endure migration flows, but tries to govern them»¹².

The agreement with Libya

During a February 2017 EU summit in Malta, the President of the EU Council Tusk promised the closure of the Central Mediterranean migration route into Europe. As a consequence, the Italian government and the internationally recognized Libyan government headed by Faiez Serraj signed an agreement that contains three main elements: cooperation and funding for migration containment; support to the Libyan

Navy and Coast Guard in order to rescue as many migrant boats as possible in Libyan territorial waters; and funds to improve healthcare in the detention centers where migrants are detained once they are rescued by the Libyan Coast Guard. However, as Toaldo¹³ emphasizes, the agreement does not mention the respecting of international conventions. Moreover, Libya is not a party to the Geneva Convention and therefore does not distinguish between migrants and asylum-seekers: whoever enters the country without a permit is considered an illegal migrant and jailed. Even if the agreement does not formally authorize Italy to 'push-back' migrants, as happened under the 2008–2011 Berlusconi Government's 'politica dei respingimenti'¹⁴, it practically does the same by 'outsourcing' the push-back 'dirty' work to the Libyan authorities, similarly to what the EU did with Turkey and the Eastern Mediterranean route at the beginning of 2016. Migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean are being returned to Libya, in spite of the warnings by humanitarian organizations about the high risks of detention, torture and slavery.

3. Questions and answers

After setting the scene and describing the main events and issues, in this section I will present, in the form of questions and answers, my main arguments for acceptance and integration, supported by references and data.

About numbers: «Why are they all coming to the EU?»

¹³ M. Toaldo, *The EU deal with Libya on migration: a question of fairness and effectiveness*, Aspenia Online, February 14, 2017 (<https://www.aspeninstitute.it>)

¹⁴ In 2009 the Berlusconi government announced that intercepted migrants adrift in the Mediterranean would be returned to Libya. This policy was condemned by the European Court of Human Rights as it violated international laws by not respecting the principle of *non refoulement* stated in Art.33 of the Geneva Refugee Convention.

¹² CNN, *Europe's migrant crisis isn't going away, but it's changing*, August 29, 2017 (<http://edition.cnn.com/>)

An interesting set of data that can be analyzed to fully understand the current situation shows the number of refugees actually received and hosted by the EU as a whole and by Italy in particular. According to the UNHCR, the top hosting states in 2016 were Turkey (2.9 million refugees), Pakistan (1.4 million), Lebanon (1 million), Iran (979,400), Uganda (940,800) and Ethiopia (791,600), followed by Jordan, Germany, Congo and Kenya. We can immediately observe that only one EU country is in the top ten list for this indicator. Overall, the EU is now hosting 17% of the 22.5 million refugees worldwide, while Africa has 30% of them, the Middle East and North Africa have 26%¹⁵. In 2015, 1 million refugees arrived in Europe; although this number looks enormous, we must consider it relative to the size of the overall population: «[...] the population of the European Union is 550 million people, which means we are talking about one per every 550 Europeans, while in Lebanon, we have one refugee per three Lebanese. And Lebanon? Struggling, of course, but it's managing»¹⁶. A different way to assess the dimensions of the crisis is to consider the number of refugees per 1,000 inhabitants: this way, the first ten countries are Lebanon with 169 refugees, Jordan with more than 90, followed by Turkey, Chad, Sweden, Uganda, South Sudan, Djibouti, Malta and Mauritania. Again, we have only one EU country in the top ten list: the highest 'concentration' of the refugee population is definitely elsewhere. Then, we could compare the size of countries' economies to the number of refugees, indicating the economic resources that may be available in each state to meet the needs of the refugee population. If we count the number of refugees per one million US\$ GDP, we obtain the following top ten list: South Sudan (90 refugees), Chad (40), followed by Uganda,

Niger, Lebanon, Rwanda, Burundi, Jordan, Mauritania and Cameroon. It is clear that the pressure is greatest among the world's poorest countries, which hosted significant refugee populations compared to the size of their economies. Eight of the 10 countries hosting the most refugees relative to the size of their national economies are in Africa. While Lebanon and Jordan are middle-income countries, the high number of refugees they hosted compared to the size of their economy meant that their 'burden' was still notable¹⁷.

Let's now examine, in Table 1, the size of the refugee population in the different EU countries and in Italy in particular:

Table 1. Refugees and asylum seekers in the EU

Country	Refugees	Per 1,000 inh.	Asylum seekers
<u>Sweden</u>	230,190	23.4	83,134
<u>Norway</u>	59,498	11.4	7,525
<u>Austria</u>	93,316	10.7	76,427
<u>Switzerland</u>	82,662	9.9	30,771
<u>Germany</u>	669,950	8.1	587,475
<u>The Netherlands</u>	101,744	6.0	10,383
<u>Denmark</u>	33,507	5.9	6,359
<u>France</u>	304,546	4.6	62,676
<u>Belgium</u>	68,909	6	24,118
<u>Finland</u>	18,401	3.4	5,601
<u>Italy</u>	147,307	2.4	99,940
<u>Greece</u>	46,423	4.3	40,014

Source: UNHCR Statistics, 2017

Data and perceptions of phenomena can differ. Looking at Table 1, we can observe that the idea of 'invasion' is, at the time being, far from reality. The UNHCR administered a survey in Italy and Greece in June 2016, asking people how many refugees they thought were hosted in their country. The results of the survey showed that people on average perceived the refugee population as being much larger than it actually is. In Italy, 36% of the respondents believed that there were more than 20 million refugees in their country, while in Greece more than half of the population said there were at least 600,000 refugees in their country. It's easy to prove that their belief is wrong. And it's even more

¹⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Statistics, 2017 (<http://www.unhcr.org>)

¹⁶ A. Gutierrez, *Refugees have the right to be protected*, TED, 2015 (<https://www.ted.com>)

¹⁷ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Trends*, 2016 (<http://www.unhcr.org>)

incorrect if we relate the number of refugees to the overall population. In Italy we have 2.4 refugees for every 1,000 inhabitants, while other EU countries have much higher ratios, as we can see from Table 1. If we gathered all refugees hosted in Italy, they would not fill up the Circus Maximus, which can contain up to 340,000 people. In short, the refugees in Italy are fewer than a crowd of fans at a concert! Two of the larger soccer stadiums in our country, San Siro in Milan and the Olimpico in Rome, could easily host all the refugees living in our country and still have more than 10,000 empty chairs. I believe that the numbers presented thus far are enough to affirm that the EU and specifically Italy have not been invaded. A well-managed reception system could definitely transform an emergency into an opportunity¹⁸.

In conclusion, as emphasized by the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres¹⁹:

«It is because things are not properly managed that in the end we have situations that are totally impossible to live with, and of course if you have a village - in Lebanon, there are many villages - that have more Syrians than Lebanese; Lebanon has been living with that. I'm not asking for the same to happen in Europe, for all European villages to have more refugees than inhabitants. What I am asking is for Europe to do the job properly, and to be able to organize itself to receive people as other countries in the world were forced to do in the past»

About security: «Could terrorists disguise themselves as refugees?»

The idea that refugees could be closely connected to terrorism has been actively promoted by the media, as well as by anti-immigration parties and movements throughout Europe. Hungary's Prime Minister Orbán, for example, described the refugees as «the Trojan horse of terrorism»²⁰. Extremist organizations have taken advantage of this scenario to strengthen their power, based on fear. Europol,

¹⁸ A. Lanni, *L'“invasione” dei rifugiati in Italia. Ecco i numeri*, UNHCR, 2016 (<http://www.unhcr.org>)

¹⁹ A. Guterres, *Refugees have the right to be protected*, cit.

²⁰ J. Crisp, *Refugees: the Trojan horse of terrorism?*, Open Democracy, 2017 (<https://www.opendemocracy.net>)

the EU law enforcement agency, writes in one of its reports:

«There is no firm evidence that terrorist travellers systematically use the flow of refugees to enter Europe unnoticed, but it is indisputable that some have entered the EU posing as refugees [...]. Given that it is in the interests of IS to inflame the migration crisis to polarise the EU population and turn sections of it against those seeking asylum, there is a risk of some infiltration of refugee camps and other groups. The extent of this is unknown, however [...]. A real and imminent danger is the possibility of elements of the (Sunni Muslim) Syrian refugee diaspora becoming vulnerable to radicalisation once in Europe and being specifically targeted by Islamic extremist recruiters»²¹.

Based on this assumption, the agency recently requested to have access to the EURODAC database holding the fingerprints and names of asylum seekers, so as to be able to prevent terroristic attacks²².

According to a study conducted by the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, the number of refugees who have committed terrorist acts in the EU has been negligible thus far:

«Some conclusions can be evidenced from this study: [...] the number of terrorism incidents involving (recent) immigrants has risen, although overall it is still not statistically relevant [...]. If immigration flows continue, this trend could be reinforced. At the present, and using the best available evidence, the main terrorist threat to Western countries still does not actually come from recent immigrants or refugees, but from home-grown extremists driven by the ongoing jihad in Syria»²³.

Similar studies conducted in the US, Australia and Denmark have reached the same conclusions²⁴. On the other hand, it is very

²¹ Europol, *Changes in modus operandi of Islamic State (IS) revisited*, 2016 (<https://www.europol.europa.eu>)

²² European Parliament (EP), *Asylum: MEPs tighten internal security and improve safety for refugee children*, 2017 (<http://www.europarl.europa.eu>)

²³ European University Institute (EUI), *Islamic Terrorism in the West and Migrations: The “Far” or “Near” Enemy Within? What is in the Evidence*, 2017, pp. 20-21

²⁴ J. Crisp, *Refugees: the Trojan horse of terrorism?*, Open Democracy, 2017

important to consider that by linking migrations and terrorism, closing borders, erecting walls, paradoxically we play the game of the terrorists: «But if you say, like that, in the US or in any European country, ‘We are going to close our doors to Muslim refugees’, what you are saying is the best possible help for the propaganda of terrorist organizations. Because what you are saying will be heard by all the Muslims in your own country, and it will pave the way for the recruitment and the mechanisms that, through technology, Daesh and al-Nusra, al-Qaeda, and all those other groups are today penetrating in our societies. And it's just telling them, ‘You are right, we are against you’. So obviously, this is creating [...] a situation in which, really, it is much easier for the propaganda of these terrorist organizations to be effective in recruiting people for terror acts within the countries where these kinds of sentences are expressed. [...] ... because part of the strategies of Daesh is against refugees, because they see refugees as people that should be with the caliphate and are fleeing to the crusaders. And I think that is part of Daesh's strategy to make Europe react, closing its doors to Muslim refugees and having an hostility towards Muslims inside Europe, exactly to facilitate Daesh's work»²⁵.

If terrorism is mainly a homegrown phenomenon in relation to the global situation that we are facing, as several studies conducted in different countries have demonstrated, and if our fears and defensive reactions end up supporting the strategy of terroristic organizations, then what we need to do is to prove these groups wrong, by welcoming and effectively integrating refugees coming from the terrorists' own countries.

About laws: «Why are we obliged to assess asylum seekers' requests?»

The 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention is the key legal document that protects asylum seekers and refugees. Ratified by 145 State parties, among which is Italy, it defines the term ‘refugee’ and outlines the rights of the displaced, as well as the legal obligations of States to protect them. Article 1 states that a refugee is someone who

«owing to a well-founded fear of being

(<https://www.opendemocracy.net>)

²⁵ A. Gutierrez, *Refugees have the right to be protected*, TED, 2015 (<https://www.ted.com>)

persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country»²⁶.

The core principle of the protection given to somebody feeling persecution is *non-refoulement* (Art.33), which asserts that refugees should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom. This principle also explains why a policy of ‘push-back’ ends up violating the Geneva Convention: in a boat trying to land on Italy's shores there might be a mix of asylum seekers and migrants. Pushing back the boat means not being able to examine each individual situation. It risks returning people who are, in fact, fleeing persecution to countries where their life and freedom are seriously in danger.

It is now possible to answer the question about obligations. State parties to the 1951 Geneva Convention, such as the EU countries, have chosen to collaborate in order to protect refugees. The historical roots of the Geneva Convention make this simple answer even more meaningful. Bundy (2016) recalls that what we are currently living is not the first refugee crisis. In Europe we've had at least three periods in which refugees were created by conflicts and political changes. WWI and the 1917 Russian Revolution created the first refugee crisis in Europe and during the inter-war years the first norms and institution to manage the phenomenon were developed: a High Commissioner for Refugees and Nansen humanitarian passports²⁷. Then, during WWII, millions of people were displaced and after the conflict over 40 million refugees were «homeless, uprooted and in flight»²⁸. The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) managed nearly 800

²⁶ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Geneva Refugee Convention*, 1951, Art.1 (<http://www.unhcr.org>)

²⁷ Nansen passports were internationally recognized refugee travel documents. They quickly became known as "Nansen passports" for their promoter, the statesman Fridtjof Nansen, High Commissioner for Refugees for the League of Nations.

²⁸ C. Bundy, *Migrants, refugees, history and precedents*, «Forced Migration Review», 51 (2016), p.6

resettlement camps, housing 7 million people. In 1951 UNRRA was superseded by the new UNHCR and the Geneva Refugee Convention was drafted and signed. «At that time there was a collective political will in the face of emergency, and a sense of humanitarian responsibilities in the wake of the horrors of war and the Holocaust»²⁹. From the end of the war until the 1980s, Europe prospered under a long economic boom and became an attractive destination for migrants and refugees. In the 1990s it was suddenly precipitated into its third refugee crisis as a consequence of major historical events such as the breakup of the Soviet bloc, the war in former Yugoslavia and the wars by Western powers in Afghanistan and Iraq. All in all, there is much about earlier migration crises that can be recalled to explain why we should feel 'obliged' now. We, Italians and Europeans, have been refugees many times in recent history and as a consequence of the experiences that we lived, decided to commit to refugee protection.

Looking at Italy specifically, it is worth recalling that the 1947 Italian Constitution, approved long before the Geneva Convention, recognizes an even higher protection, extended to all those who don't have the same democratic freedoms as Italian citizens:

«The Italian legal system conforms to the generally recognised principles of international law.

The legal status of foreigners is regulated by law in conformity with international provisions and treaties.

A foreigner who, in his home country, is denied the actual exercise of the democratic freedoms guaranteed by the Italian constitution shall be entitled to the right of asylum under the conditions established by law [...]»³⁰.

About economy and welfare: «Is refugee acceptance and integration only a cost for the EU, or could it bring some benefits?»

The European Commission has recently run a study to estimate the macroeconomic impact of the refugee crisis³¹. The work focuses on

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ Constitution of the Italian Republic, Art. 10, 1947 (<https://www.senato.it>)

³¹ European Commission (EC), *An Economic Take on the Refugee Crisis*, 2016 (<https://ec.europa.eu>)

asylum seekers and refugees, presenting a first assessment of the impacts of the unexpected influx of these individuals on EU economies. It only presents an initial prediction, since much will depend on the characteristics of the flows, as well as the capacity of host countries to integrate the refugees effectively. According to the report, 70% of asylum seekers in the EU are of working age, compared to 63% of the EU's population. Therefore, their arrival has changed the age distribution in the most affected countries for the better. On average, the education level of asylum seekers is below that of natives, with a relatively large share of low-skilled workers, and the educational attainment of the population in the country of citizenship of the asylum seekers seem to be lower than in the EU Member States. The increase in public spending derives from rescue operations, border protection, registration of asylum seekers, provision of food, health care and shelter. Destination countries need to add expenditures for housing, training, education and welfare benefits. Estimates suggest that the direct additional costs for the Member States most concerned falls in the range of 0.1-0.6 % of GDP for years 2015-2016. The short term economic impact depends on many factors: whether migrants transit or stay, whether they are granted asylum or are rejected. It also depends on individual profiles, as well as the host country's economy and ability to integrate those that will be granted protection. As far as the short-term impact on growth from additional spending is concerned, the EC estimates suggest that the EU GDP could increase by an additional 0.2% by 2017. The impact, however, may be larger for some Member States: simulations on Germany, for example, show a potential increase in the country's GDP between 0.4-0.8% by 2017, depending on the skill level of migrants. However, the estimated small but positive impact on growth can happen only if appropriate integration policies are put in place³².

The medium and long term economic impact highly depend on integration: if well integrated, refugees can contribute to the labour market, help address demographic challenges, and improve fiscal sustainability. The impact will differ throughout Europe, but it is clear that the

³² European Commission (EC), *An Economic Take on the Refugee Crisis*, 2016 (<https://ec.europa.eu>)

earlier and better the integration, the more likely refugees will be able to positively contribute in the economies of their host countries. In particular, facilitating the ‘employability’ of refugees is essential. Compared to immigrants, refugees might take longer to integrate into the labour market since they didn’t decide to leave, but were forced to, therefore needing to overcome the trauma before being able to restart their lives. Similarly to immigrants, refugees are more likely to start their own business in the host country than natives, and by doing so contributing to the creation of work opportunities for others as well as for themselves.

According to the EC

a comprehensive policy response and a long-term view are essential to turn the perceived threat in the public debate into an opportunity. The degree to which refugees are integrated, in particular into the labour market but also into society at large, is a key variable to determine the macroeconomic effects in the medium to long term. While the cost-benefit analysis for an early intervention is clear-cut and the financial impact is likely to be modest, the cost of a failed integration, socially and politically, would potentially be markedly more important³³.

An IMF study comes to similar conclusions, drawing from the experience of previous economic migrants and refugees:

In the short-run, additional public expenditure will provide a small positive impact on GDP, concentrated in the main destination countries of Germany, Sweden and Austria. Over the longer-term, depending on the speed and success of the integration of refugees in the labour market, the increase in the labour force can have a more lasting impact on growth and the public finances. Here good policies will make an important difference. These include lowering barriers to labour markets for refugees, for example through wage subsidies to employers, and, in particular, reducing legal barriers to labour market participation during asylum process, removing obstacles to entrepreneurship/self-employment, providing job training and job

search assistance, as well as language skills. While native workers often have legitimate concerns about the impact of immigrants on wages and employment, past experience indicates that any adverse effects are limited and temporary³⁴.

The study emphasizes the importance of labour market integration in order to minimize the risk of social exclusion and maximize the refugees’ net contribution to the public finances in the longer term. The refugees’ successful labour market integration could also help alleviate the fiscal effects of population aging, although, according to the IMF, the effect is likely to be small and will not be a panacea for demographic problems.

In sum, while refugee reception definitely entails an increase in public spending, these and other studies suggest that it could be widely compensated by economic and fiscal benefits deriving from the integration of refugees in the host country’s economy. Forward looking attitudes and policies are necessary in order to understand that a cost today might be an investment for tomorrow.

Last, but not least: reflections on the educative value of acceptance and integration

Migrations are part of human history. Myths and legends feature them as an inescapable destiny that leads to new beginnings and opens new perspectives. As Aeneas fled from burning Troy carrying the elderly father Anchises on his shoulders and then wandered to find a new home³⁵, today thousands of people flee from extreme poverty, wars and persecutions, crossing land and sea in hopes of a new life. Nowadays these inherently human events often become triggers for fear, hatred, and intolerance. While it is common to think that a person is either a refugee or an economic migrant, and to show more compassion towards the first ‘category’ rather than the second, many experts suggest that such a clear-cut view is incorrect and that there is a need for a deeper understanding of the background and character

³⁴ *International Monetary Fund (IMF)*, The Refugee Surge in Europe : Economic Challenges (Summary), 2016 (<https://www.imf.org>)

³⁵ E. Isidori - M. Migliorati - C. Maulini, *Tra biopolitica e ospitalità: per una pedagogia delle migrazioni*, «Formazione Lavoro Persona», VII, 22 (2017).

³³ European Commission (EC), *An Economic Take on the Refugee Crisis*, 2016, p.4 (<https://ec.europa.eu>)

of the current migrations, since many people are moving for a variety of reasons in which the need for protection and the search for opportunity are intertwined³⁶. NGOs and international organization have repeatedly denounced violations of human rights suffered by migrants and refugees worldwide. They risk living and working in the shadows, being denied rights and freedoms, becoming vulnerable to marginalization, discrimination and exploitation of different natures (forced labour, sexual exploitation, forced marriage, prostitution, forced begging, sale of organs ...)³⁷. Furthermore, failed migration policies are allowing criminal organizations to exploit asylum seekers and economic migrants to make a profit or to recruit them for terrorism³⁸.

In spite of a strong emerging need to advocate for acceptance and integration, education and intercultural pedagogy appear to be struggling and, at times, unable to face the challenge³⁹. Rather, they should play a crucial role in fostering knowledge of cultures, building dialogue and mutual understanding⁴⁰, helping us to understand the underlying reasons for ethnocentrism and racism, to recognize and control prejudice that negatively influence self perception and social identity of 'the others'⁴¹. The ultimate goal should be that of building «an

intercultural mind»⁴² or, in Deweyan terms, «an international and interracial mind» able to 'interrupt' prejudice and to guide, instead, the formation of a «good judgment»⁴³. In the literature, intercultural competence is often described as a mix of traits and behaviours, among which the most cited are: respect, empathy, flexibility, patience, interest, curiosity, openness, motivation, tolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity, and suspension of judgment⁴⁴. It is important to say that intercultural competence can be learnt and taught and, therefore, intercultural education has a key role in all sectors of society⁴⁵. More specifically, it has the responsibility of creating the conditions for mutual understanding, reciprocal influence and 'hybridization'⁴⁶.

Cultural diversity is consistently present, in several forms, in our everyday lives⁴⁷ and it is impossible to deny the global interdependence of human beings⁴⁸ that brings about possible tensions, but also multiple opportunities⁴⁹. Accepting and integrating refugees will make our societies more culturally diverse, and diversity is undoubtedly a precious educational resource. Decades of research have highlighted the benefits of diversity in groups and organizations. Cultural diversity is deemed to foster effective learning in schools and universities and to increase creativity, innovation and productivity in business. An individual's ability to be effective in culturally

³⁶ S. McMahon -N. Sigona, *Boat migration across the Central Mediterranean: drivers, experiences and responses*, Economic and Social Research Council, 2016

OHCHR, *Migration and Human Rights*, 2017 (<http://www.ohchr.org>)

M. Catarci, *Considerazioni critiche sulla nozione di integrazione di migranti e rifugiati*, REHMU, XXII, 43 (2014)

³⁷ OHCHR, *Migration and Human Rights*, 2017 (<http://www.ohchr.org>)

UNICRI, *Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants*, 2017 (<http://www.unicri.it>)

³⁸ H. Ford, *Migrants and Mafia: Forced Migration and Organized Crime in Sicily*, Forced Migration Forum, July 4, (2017) (<https://forcedmigrationforum.com>)

³⁹ E. Isidori -M. Migliorati - C. Maulini, *Tra biopolitica e ospitalità: per una pedagogia delle migrazioni*, «Formazione Lavoro Persona», cit.

⁴⁰ G. Elia, *I processi migratori per una nuova sfida all'educazione*, «Formazione Lavoro Persona», VII, 22 (2017).

⁴¹ G. Szpunar, *Il pluralismo di Dewey: l'educazione al metodo sperimentale e la democrazia morale per lo sviluppo di una società multiculturale*, «Formazione Lavoro Persona», VII, 22 (2017).

⁴² L. Anolli, *La mente multiculturale*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2010.

⁴³ G. Szpunar, *Il pluralismo di Dewey: l'educazione al metodo sperimentale e la democrazia morale per lo sviluppo di una società multiculturale*, Formazione Lavoro Persona, VII, 22 (2017).

⁴⁴ M. Fiorucci, *La formazione interculturale degli insegnanti e degli educatori*, Formazione & Insegnamento, XIII, 1 (2015).

⁴⁵ A. Portera, A., *Manuale di pedagogia interculturale. Risposte educative nella società globale*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2013.

⁴⁶ D. Demetrio - G. Favaro, *Didattica interculturale. Nuovi sguardi, competenze, percorsi*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2004.

⁴⁷ A. Potestio, *Introduzione. Le migrazioni nella società della globalizzazione*, «Formazione Lavoro Persona», VII, 22 (2017).

⁴⁸ M. C. Nussbaum, *Non per profitto. Perché le democrazie hanno bisogno della cultura umanistica*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2010.

⁴⁹ G. Elia, *I processi migratori per una nuova sfida all'educazione*, Formazione Lavoro Persona, VII, 22 (2017).

diverse environments translates into better cross-cultural adjustment, enhanced personal well-being and improved job performance⁵⁰.

As emphasised by UNESCO, cultural diversity is often equated with the diversity of national cultures, yet 'national identity' is, to some extent, a construction. It is founded on political, static 'borders': within them, inclusion generates exclusion, legitimising the privilege of citizenship and of the rights that it provides⁵¹. Cultural identity is instead «a more fluid, self-transforming process, to be seen less in terms of a past inheritance than of a future project»⁵². Cultural identities derive from multiple sources and are, therefore, multifaceted and always evolving, reflecting the growing complexity of today's globalised world. This means that our approach to cultural diversity should take into account its dynamic nature and of the challenges to the concept of 'identity' brought about by a permanent cultural change. As a matter of fact, the European Union defines integration as a «dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by migrants and by the societies that receive them»⁵³. This policy statement emphasises that integration is a continual process and that it cannot be translated only into actions and programs targeted to immigrants, but has to involve the host communities as well. It is undeniable that images and representations of immigration produced within the host communities can have a strong impact on the results of integration processes. If, as Geertz wrote, «man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun»⁵⁴, at the moment we, the

European people, are entangled in intricate webs of politically constructed negative meanings given to migrations and integration that threaten our future and underline, more than ever, the absolute necessity of cultural and pedagogic mediation⁵⁵. The concept of integration should, therefore, be extended from the merely economic and productive sphere to all aspects of human life. Social, cultural and political realms are also crucial, but often neglected: in fact several authors have emphasised the reality of a «subordinate integration» where the immigrants are oppressed «between economic acceptance and political rejection», forced to take '3D jobs' (dirty, dangerous and demeaning) that natives don't want, in exchange for their 'tolerance'⁵⁶. A more comprehensive view of integration and more forward-looking policies are necessary, even more so if we think that cultural integration problems, very often rooted in social marginalisation, can turn into radicalization and security threats⁵⁷. All in all, a migration experience involves the totality of human existence and cannot, therefore, be reduced into an assimilationist paradigm concerned only about economic participation⁵⁸.

From an educational viewpoint, it is extremely important to communicate the inherent value and necessity of cultural diversity as a mean to promote mutual understanding and, ultimately, peace. As a matter of fact, culture is «not simply another sector of activity, a mass consumption product or an asset to be preserved. Culture is the very substratum of all human activities, which derive their meaning and value from it»⁵⁹. We should then conceive of cultural

⁵⁰ S. Zanazzi, *Cultural intelligence and creativity: the experience of trainees abroad*, «International Research in Higher Education», 2, 2 (2017).

⁵¹ E. Isidori - M. Migliorati - C. Maulini, *Tra biopolitica e ospitalità: per una pedagogia delle migrazioni*, «Formazione Lavoro Persona», VII, n.22 (2017).

⁵² United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue*, 2009 (<http://unesdoc.unesco.org>).

⁵³ S. Carrera - A. Faure Atger, *Integration as a two-way process in the EU? Assessing the Relationship between the European Integration Fund and the Common Basic Principles on Integration*, Centre for European Policy Studies, 2011 (www.ceps.eu).

⁵⁴ M. Milella, *Formare ad accogliere. Migrazioni come metafora della condizione umana*, Formazione Lavoro

Persona, VII, 22 (2017).

⁵⁵ M. Catarci, *Considerazioni critiche sulla nozione di integrazione di migranti e rifugiati*, REHMU, XXII, n.43, 2014

⁵⁶ M. Ambrosini, *Immigration in Italy: Between Economic Acceptance and Political Rejection*, «Journal of International Migration and Integration», 14, 1, (2013).

⁵⁷ M. Catarci, *Considerazioni critiche sulla nozione di integrazione di migranti e rifugiati*, REHMU, XXII, n.43, (2014).

⁵⁸ L. Zinant, *Tra diffidenza e accoglienza: le frontiere della scuola contemporanea*, «Formazione Lavoro Persona», VII, 22 (2017).

⁵⁹ United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue*, 2009, p.7 (<http://unesdoc.unesco.org>).

diversity as «contributing to the intellectual and moral solidarity of humankind by combating ignorance and prejudice and thereby helping to build the “defences of peace in the minds of men”»⁶⁰.

Conclusions

We have observed the theme of refugee acceptance and integration from several different viewpoints: the numerical issue, the perceived security threat, the obligations stemming from international laws, the economic effort, and ultimately, the value of cultural diversity. As multifaceted and complex as this challenge can be, the evidence suggests that the long term impact of the historical events we are currently living will be decided by the EU and by its member states, based on the policies that they will (or will not) put in place for effective integration. There are many good reasons, presented in this article, to say that an ‘emergency’ could be transformed into an opportunity for the future of our societies, into a chance for them to be more equal, prosperous, culturally rich and secure. There are also many good reasons to believe that «the ‘crisis’ in Europe is one of political leadership, not one of capacity» and that «migration cannot be stopped, without massively violating the human rights of the migrants. It may be defected and rerouted, for a time. But European efforts to stop migration will fail on a massive scale given the push and pull factors at work, such as survival needs on the part of the migrants and labour market needs on the part of European countries»⁶¹.

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⁶⁰ United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue*, 2009, p.17 (<http://unesdoc.unesco.org>).

⁶¹ F. Crépeau, *Foreword: Banking on mobility over a generation*, *Forced Migration Review*, n.51 (2016), p.4.