

The Era of Emergency Relocation – A Transcontextual Perspective

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Abstract

As increasing numbers of people are displaced from their homes by war, poverty, and ecological necessity, immigration and the so-called 'refugee crisis' have become a heated political topic. The rhetoric has become dualistic and is fueling a polarity of discussion that is locking individuals and communities into stances of either «for» or «against,» pro or anti, incoming refugees. The discourse is consequently dividing communities around the world into ideological groupings of nationalistic or globalized visions of the future. This essay seeks to go beyond the binary and expand the conversation by bringing a more complex picture of the issue into view. Introducing the notion of transcontextual description to the immigration and refugee discourse is an attempt to hold back the tendencies of us/them reductionism and reframe the conversation of what the possibilities are for responding. Using a transcontextual approach, this essay zooms in on institutional contexts as they relate to immigration, and then zooms out to look at the larger interception of these contexts in a new light. The institutions that form societal and global structures are forming interdependency that is similar to an ecology. These institutions include economics, culture, politics, history, family and more. The implications of this process are not described in concrete instructions on how to solve the refugee crisis, but rather to offer a pattern through which to generate conversation that will lead to an entirely new set of questions. Collaborative inter-institutional research at the community level is suggested to generate possibilities as they are found within the natural complexity of the situation.

Keywords: refugee, transcontextual, complexity, identity, culture, ecology, institutional epistemology, systems thinking, nationalism, globalization, double-bind, Bateson, non-linear, binary

Introduction¹

The *way* in which the public and political discourse is built around the narrative of refugee immigration is perhaps one of the most important issues of our time. The liberal argument for the «globalized community» that suggests we are all global citizens, as well as the opposing conservative argument for «entitlement to place,» which suggests the rights of multi-generational land inhabitants over refugees, are both unable to meet the aggregate of circumstances now facing humanity. Efforts to justify or prove «right» either of the arguments in this binary only detract from the more imperative questions of how humanity will fare in the coming decades of ecological, cultural and economic transformation. There are no simple solutions to this crisis and there is no way to rewind to a time when this situation could have been avoided. Now, in order to avert further socio-economic and cultural consequences, the question we need to ask is: «how can we develop and deliver information about this situation that is more respectful of its complexity?»

Right now, there are huge numbers of people relocating in emergency conditions ... conditions they cannot stop or fix or rework. These conditions stem from forms of economic, ecological and political destruction that arguably are rooted in two centuries of «globalization measures.» Refugees have walked across continents with nothing but the grief in their hearts of having lost their lands, families, profession, traditions and language. Then, arriving somewhere else, many experience the humiliation of anti-immigrant sentiments. Though unintended, the label of refugee insinuates traumas that are not conducive to supporting people to start a new life in an unfamiliar culture. Yes, it is important to honor the local heritage and identity of the incumbent citizens on the land where refuge is sought, but not at the expense of other human beings and their health, sanity, even their survival. Our conversation must go beyond this polarity if we are to find productive ways to navigate the coming decades.

A community is the mental and spiritual condition of knowing that the place is shared, and that the people who share the place define and limit the possibilities

1. This essay was delivered in compliment to a keynote speech and one-day seminar I gave in Oslo with the Norwegian Family Therapy Association's «Førjulsseminar» in Gamle Logen, Oslo, in December 2016. The form of this essay, which zooms in and out, focusing on the transcontextual interdependency of societal institutions was first developed to address «addiction» through a transcontextual lens in my research with the International Bateson Institute.

of each other's lives. It is the knowledge that people have of each other, their concern for each other, their trust in each other, the freedom with which they come and go among themselves (Berry, 2004).

We are facing, simultaneously, ecological, economic, cultural, religious, and political transformation that includes the crucial questions of identity and humanitarianism. To address this complex problem, we must use a lens that can take complexity into account. The immigration issue highlights the importance of finding new ways of approaching complex problems. Specifically, this means that we must look across the board for context, understanding and solutions – to the ecological, economic, cultural, educational, political, and medical – because there is no single sector that we can turn to for a solution. The actions we need to take are ones that are considered across the spectrum of systems. Where is the political and social mandate for this inter-system, and cross-institutional form of interaction?

Language Contributes to Perception and Vice Versa

The terms «refugee», «immigrant», «migration» and «crisis» are used in this paper, but I would encourage a dialogue about how to better describe the processes and people to which these terms refer. The term «emergency relocation» is perhaps an improvement, but the infrastructures in place still require particular language to conform with existing policy. A necessary response to changing situations is adapting communication to reflect more refined understanding.

Refugee: The term refugee, while necessary for governmental agencies to issue immigration rights and assign services, is a term that describes a particular form of victimhood. I would suggest that care be taken in the long-term use of this word and the way it may become an identifying terminology for large numbers of people trying to start new lives despite the weight of economic, physical, and cultural trauma. People need to be identified as people, first and foremost.

Immigrant/migrant: Framed in this terminology, the brunt of the ethical questions and pressure are faced by the immigration authorities. Given the complexity of the conditions both behind and in front of the incoming people, it is clear that immigration law is not broad enough to meet the medical, economic, psychological and intercultural dilemmas that are facing not only the incoming people, but the incumbent locals as well.

Crisis: Although press and governments refer to current movements and cultural upheaval as «The Refugee Crisis», the multiple historical, economic, and cultural causalities that have combined over centuries to bring this about are more of a slow crash than a crisis. The temporal communication that locates this immediate acute need as a «crisis» dangerously omits the long development of conflicts that have brought this on.

How Can We Best Increase Possibilities for Future Community Life?

The future of social coexistence requires a conversation that includes systems thinking and an understanding of cybernetic patterns. The success of future community living is largely determined now by the tone of the communication with which media and professionals approach the complexity of this conjoinment. The USA, Sweden, France, the UK, Hungary and other countries have witnessed the rise of right-wing political groups that disavow hard-earned civil liberties for people of color, and those with non-hetero-normative lifestyles. Divisions in political ideology around the issue of immigration are growing wider, and more violent, as groups which support receiving refugees and groups which are becoming increasingly nationalistic justify their positions with information that is compartmentalized. Trying to reduce the complexity of the issue is not only distracting the public from the depth of the issue, but is also destructive. However difficult, the description of the refugee crisis must not shy from the rigor of addressing the cross-sector, contextual complexity of this situation. The way in which the refugee crisis is perceived matters, and the constraints on that perception should be taken seriously, especially when the fabric of society is being torn by the vitriol of opposing opinion.

Research data and other information about the refugee crisis is currently weakened by the fact that it is derived through various bodies of governmental, academic, and social service professionals that do not have a common watering hole at which to exchange and compare their findings. This separation reflects our demarcated, mechanistic socio-cultural process of making decisions and taking action. These departments, by definition, require information in streams of specific description, some concentrating on economics, human rights, history, politics, medicine, or culture. While each individuated data stream is vital, there is dangerously little study of the way in which this situation is forming through interdependent institutions.

Structures that run right through our culture contribute to the fragmentation of information, such as healthcare separated from a larger understanding

of wellbeing, or banking and legal systems separated from a larger understanding of patterns of criminality in ecological destruction. Awareness of the limits that these structures place on our ability to respond to current crises is the first step toward better research and better solutions. A more comprehensive result will be possible with increased understanding of the knitted tangle of the inter-relationship, comparison of patterns, and multiple contextual studies.

Transcontextual Description

The term «Transcontextual»² refers to the ways in which multiple contexts come together to form complex systems. It allows for a concentration on the interdependency between contexts that give resilience to both living and non-living systems. Transcontextual description offers insights into where contextual overlap is reinforcing the status quo and where it is loose enough to initiate shifts. In terms of the refugee crisis, I want to use the process of opening perception of the situation in transcontextual terms, so that the polarities now obscuring broader understanding may be reconfigured within another perspective.

The emergency relocation of millions of people into Europe from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq presents a complex collection of causations and ramifications that, when separated from their contextual overlap, spins into polarized ideological rhetoric. But this is a problem that has multi-contextual facets.

When searching for a root cause, or singular rhetorical angle on what has brought on these crises, it is tempting to cast a net around a particular institution and drill down. Some will point to economic causations, others to historical or cultural ones, but the crisis is actually developing and emerging at and between the boundaries of multiple institutions. The root cause is a collection of responses to combined institutional conditions. While it is true that the problem can be identified as either economic, or political, or cultural, or historical, or legal ... none of those contexts can actually be disentangled from the others. Likewise, the future of Europe or the US cannot be separated from the rest of the global political upheaval, cultural revolutions or international markets. Our histories are bound together, as are our futures. Responsibility is everywhere, and is necessarily required within and between our institutional frameworks.

2. The term was coined by Gregory Bateson in 1969, see G. Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* 2000[1972], p. 272.

While it is challenging enough to require information that contextualizes the refugee crisis, even this exercise underestimates the complexity. One context is not enough: there are many. A listing of the contexts here will be incomplete, but may open the discussion to the multiple and interlocking formations of what is sometimes called a «wicked problem.» While each institution is contributing to the overarching narrative of the refugee crisis, the way in which these institutions mutually generate a container of cultural responses often goes unnoticed.

What follows is a limited, but transcontextual, description of the increasing crises that we face globally in terms of accommodating people who are in the process of emergency relocation. Due to a multi-causal perfect storm of global conditions, millions of people have no choice but to leave their homelands and seek life in other countries. While there are dedicated experts doing their best to assess and respond to the situation from their field of expertise, as of now there are no experts whose job it is to address societal crises with transcontextual responses.

Ecology of Institutions

Below is a cursory and incomplete illustration of the ecological patterns of interdependency that can be identified between social, political and cultural institutions. It may seem as though these institutions can be isolated, and even altered or fixed individually, but their reinforcing interrelationality makes change at that level nearly impossible. Likewise, the rhetoric that directs blame at any particular institution is a manifestation of our failure to recognize the way in which these institutions are interrelated and stuck together. Stuckness and change will be discussed later in this paper. Here I will attempt to lay out a few familiar narratives next to each other to gain perspective. There is no hierarchy implicit in the listing of these institutional binds, and their circuitry of interaction is non-linear. Of course, none of these listed institutions can be truly separated from one another, and my doing so is an invitation to the reader to notice the patterns that they form collectively and in which we all live and make decisions.

Economy

The most familiar line of discussion around the refugee crisis is that the arrival of people in need will disrupt and perhaps destroy existing economies. The social systems of the nations they migrate into cannot afford to pay for their housing, education, employment, and welfare without undermining the situa-

tion of citizens already in need. The argument for providing shelter to refugees before existing citizens is rife with injustice that typically puts the lower working classes in competition with incomers for basic needs. People perceive that refugees are expensive, that they arrive with nothing, and that they need care that taxpayers have not agreed to pay for. In this sense, the argument against the economic destabilization that sudden influxes of people will bring is strong. It is an old argument, used time and again around the world in times of transition. The economic discussion crosses into cultural territories in the form of nationalistic sentiment and fuels xenophobia.

Additionally, measures of austerity have revealed reinforced local poverty in harsh contrast to soaring international corporate markets – thereby fueling another level of distrust and anger toward the proponents of «globalization». The elite shield their funds from taxation in international accounts while national, public systems that support national social care, such as medical, educational, and other infrastructure, struggle to fund local initiatives. When governments are not flush enough to give anyone a «free ride,» there is increasing competition for funding that pits locals against refugees. Bitterness toward refugees increases when people perceive that addressing local citizens' impoverishment comes second to assisting strangers.

It is easier to blame the refugees for the lack of jobs and social services than to call the larger global corporations to order in terms of being transparent and honest about paying their share of taxes, fees and environmental fines. The constant threat of unemployment and economic volatility is leveraged against citizens while offshore accounts and hidden assets are the norm for the world's biggest moneymakers.

History

Colonialism is not a thing of the past. While they may not be explicit, colonial patterns and the epistemological habits flavored by that history are deeply engrained and seep into our perception of the refugee crisis in significant ways. Holdover colonial attitudes surface as a sense of entitlement to assets, democracy and a comfortable lifestyle. Most of the world's populations do not presume these luxuries to be within reach, while wealthier demographics within wealthier countries take the same luxuries for granted. Countries that have a history of colonizing carry the often-unseen attitude of the victor, and the intrinsic assumptions that confidence of access and ownership of this positioning have generated.

The history of how some nations became wealthy and others have become economically and ecologically vulnerable is largely an extension of the colonial narrative. Across generations in wealthy countries there is an expectation of living standards that require vast resources, both economic and natural. Colonial shadows and holdover attitudes have normalized a sense of entitlement to a particular vision of success, wealth, and way of life that is mathematically impossible to distribute equally across the population of the globe.

Colonial heritage, particularly in wealthy countries, implicitly imposes a responsibility for people in need, especially those who are themselves the descendants of people who lived under colonial rule. As such there is a necessity to address the errors and imperfections of the systems that have increased «progress». The idea that no problems exist in the richer societies feeds the illusions that the state is more efficient than it is, and that support is available. In turn, underlying conflicting expectations on both sides that spark rivalry gain momentum. Refugees needing succor are led to believe that wealthier countries should and can offer help, while the incumbent citizenry construe the refugees' needs as drains on existing social service and employment resources.

Mining rights, big banks, cheap labor, resource exploitation and tax evasion have allowed poverty and notions of «underdeveloped» nations to reach across decades and even centuries. The accumulation of wealth and influence that wealthy countries enjoy are the spoils of capitalistic leveraging of inexpensive resources. Exploitation and violent inequality appear to be built into notions of «progress and development». But colonialism had a shelf life and while its shadows are still looming, the tipping points are being reached all around the world. Again, this history spills into both culture and economics, as ideas of success and economic dominance are inevitably woven into the historical picture.

Some of the same dynamics of exploitation, exclusion, and social hierarchy, which colonial nations and peoples extended outwards towards their external empires, also extend inwards towards non-dominant social classes and regions «at home.» Though it can always be argued that being citizens of a nation or members of its dominant race or group brought and brings privilege, this shouldn't obscure the fact that similar principles of subordination and privation can apply both externally and within empires. Taking a broader view, the similarity in position of those oppressed at home and abroad could ideally yield solidarity and compassion from one to the other. But, sadly, the internally exploited or excluded can often be manipulated to set themselves against the externally exploited and excluded, for example in the defense of minor advan-

tages in a world they have learned to see as being characterized by scarcity and competition.

Looking back: People have the tendency to naturalize historic events that illustrate the predictability of conflict and impossibility of mixing races, religions, and economic classes peacefully. History is often used to justify inequality with stories of inevitable violent invasions and take-overs around the world with the victors taking the assets of the losers. However, naturalizing this pattern will not serve now. Though there is an historical case for an impulse to fiercely defend territory and wealth, there is also an historical case for coexistence.

World War II is being brought into the collection of metaphors surrounding the refugee crisis, by both the right wing and left wing political parties. While today's context is not the same as the 1930s, the direct correlation is impossible to ignore. From rapidly emerging Nazi groups to large camps holding millions of refugees in Turkey, the sentiment of hatred toward others matches the imagery and the language of WWII history. One difference in the current context which is important to note is that present generations can bring to mind remembered history of fear, loss and pain that was felt by the world as a result of the twentieth century era of fascism. The identity of the German nation and especially the children and grandchildren of Nazis have carried the shame that was cast on Germany by engaging in anti-humanitarian policies and consequent unthinkable genocide. How this historical mirror will reflect into the coming years is, as yet, unclear. There is collective shock in the hearts of many that this verbal and physical hatred is actually returning to mainstream culture after such inhumane disregard for the lives of others was seemingly shut down after WWII ended, and again in the US with the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

Looking back further: It cannot be disputed that humanity has always moved around the globe in times of need. The history of *Homo sapiens*, and in fact all of biological evolution, is a testament to movement, cross-fertilization, and fusions of ideas, forms, environments and cultures.

How has the idea formed over time that we can value some people's lives more highly than others? Or that the sacred lands of some people are more valuable than the sacred lands of others? Where does this thinking lead if not to violence?

Culture

While economics and policy will be important in addressing this process, it is cultural discourse that is framing, limiting, and normalizing ideas about «immigra-

tion» and how to respond to this situation. Human beings are creatures of place, and our identity, belonging and well-being are woven into landscapes that house our history. In response to the dream of a world where people are integrated, homogenized, and peaceful, there is no question that the globalized economy has generated a flatness to the earth's cultural dimensions. Languages and traditions are lost every day as the extinction of human societies parallels the lists of animal species that are disappearing. The same massive spaces and fluorescent lighting of corporations have hijacked the architectural expressions of localities, and designed modernized efficiency has stolen the soul of so many moments in a day.

In contrast, the notion of cultural purity is equally untenable. Language, arts, food, traditions, religions, scientific breakthroughs and skills are all derivations and fusions of multiple cultures. As individuals within larger communities our notions of identity inform our ideas of who we are in relation to the systems we live within. But this era is a time of upheaval; ecosystems and social systems around the globe are in rapid transition. The fear that cultural identity can be taken away, like money or other assets, is contributing to a rising right-wing political fervor to guard and protect violently what is felt to be cultural heritage, and ensure the pre-eminence of certain cultural heritages in «homeland» places. Current instability triggers more stringent attempts to ensure security within ideas of belonging and normalcy.

While change is a constant in living systems, the rate of change in this era is extraordinary. Reaction to the need for rapid adjustment to unfamiliar culture (for refugees and existing citizens) often takes the form of heightened attempts to preserve culture as identity. Nationalism, racism, and protectiveness around perceived boundaries of culture limit the flexibility required for mutual learning. Nothing but loss results from this response, loss of safety for both the refugees and the locals as violence is justified by both sides, loss of trust, loss of political discourse as binaries supersede information about the complexity of the situation, loss of economic security due to the increase of broken ties in communities, and more. We have not begun to see the true cost of animosity between locals and refugees yet. In the decades to come the roots of the toxic seeds sown now will be part of our daily lives. Have we sown community spirit? Collaboration? There is a lot to lose in these early days of this new era of relocation as cultural isolation contaminates the possible upsides of diversity with violence, vengeance and rumor.

It may be useful to ask «who are we in this changing world?» As families, as professionals, as cultures, how is our perception of ourselves changing – and

what if it doesn't? Identity is a personal matter, but it also matters in terms of family, culture, society, ecosystems, and the future. Double binds of identity, and other traps of obsolete fragmentation in our thinking, can be seen with greater clarity through the lens of complexity and systems.

Making social and cultural identities sustainable in a world where change is unpredictable, frequently exogenous and often resulting in unintended consequences can be compared to rebuilding a ship at sea. It requires flexibility and improvisation, or novel forms of boundary-making (Eriksen & Schober, 2016).

The culture of exploitation that has fed the economic and political domination of wealthier nations is worth questioning not only in terms of human rights in labor and industry, but also the destruction of the global ecology. Demand for increased assets and ownership underpins much of the violence and abuse in poorer nations. Cheaper labor and cheaper resources make for larger profit margins, but the profit does not go to the people at the bottom who need it most. The culture of consumerism is woven into the suffering of the people who are relocating and into the very threats to their survival.

Politics

Democracy is under-equipped in its current form to accommodate the complexity of the issues emerging globally. By definition, elected representatives are tasked with the responsibility of serving their communities, states or nations. They are not tasked with a larger responsibility to the ecology or to humanity as a whole. Consequently, they are bound to the well-being of their specific locale. Ironically this promotes nationalism in a moment when the most acute decisions and actions must take into account global concerns.

The past decade has brought a sudden explosion of right-wing political parties around the world that have voiced a fear of losing national culture, racial purity and social services. Racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, fundamentalism and extremism and multiple other forms of humiliation and disrespect for other people have been emboldened by the surge in popularity of right-wing groups. Left and center political parties have found themselves unexpectedly in dialogue with previously extremist positions on proposed or actual policies, such as the government making lists of Muslim immigrants (US), the removal of personal jewelry from incoming refugees (Denmark), or the sending of children with no parents back to Afghanistan

(Sweden). The EU decision to house three million refugees (some say that number could be doubled) in Turkey was a political decision that many argue was illegal under the UN Human Rights Convention. Political discourse has been hijacked by the populist struggles between right and left, and diverted from the larger issues of climate change, water, and human and ecological rights.

Of course, it is the job of the politicians to represent their constituents, so the leadership that is emerging is in keeping with the voters' preferences.

But who and what are informing the voters?

Media and Journalism

Communication of information about complex topics like climate, global economy and the refugee crisis are rarely expressed in their complexity over mainstream media and journalism. Mostly stories that have more than two sides are regarded as complicated and unsellable. The press is a commodity whose demand is informed and fed by numbers of readers. Popular stories dominate the news, and usually popularity means that the issues addressed are either fluff or simplistic, binary narratives.

Many news and media corporations are not able to provide impartial information that could discredit existing socio-economic structures, because they are not free to do so. TV channels, newspapers, radio and other media at the top level of global journalism form part of larger corporate conglomerates that have their own «dog in the race,» so to speak. This is not true everywhere, but enough news and media sources face conflicts of interest situations that can alter the course of big stories. Many journalists who have tried to publish critical stories that undermine powerful and corrupt leaders or businesses have found themselves publicly discredited and even in physical danger in recent months.

The press has found itself in a feedback loop that blinds it to the growing numbers of citizens (around the world) who have become so dissatisfied with mainstream discourse that they have seemingly moved their cultural focus into a parallel communications realm that utterly befuddled the press in the UK and US around Brexit and Trump.

Law

Immigration laws, humanitarian aid rules and refugee regulations are all in a state of transformation now as a result of the sudden increase in numbers of refugees arriving in Europe after fleeing Syria and other countries in the Middle

East. Sweden, for example, has thousands of unaccompanied child refugees who were sent ahead of their families in the hope of establishing asylum status for which families could apply. Now the rules have changed to stop the flow of refugees and their families are no longer allowed to apply for entrance to Sweden based on their children. Swedish family services are overwhelmed and children are fostered into care centers, traumatized and alone. They are caught in a Nowhere-land of not being able to go home, because home is gone, and increasingly finding no way to stay alone in Sweden.

Likewise, many EU countries are contending with proposed new laws around religious dress codes, education systems, and privacy of information for citizens.

Legal systems are also struggling with increasing pressures to harmonize with international norms that differ from local traditions.

Ecological Changes

Ecologists have warned that tipping points of climate change have been passed and that droughts, rising sea levels, flooding and extreme weather will disrupt food production, transportation and habitability in large areas of the world. In this sense the surge in refugees we are seeing now is only the beginning.

The ways in which these ecological changes will affect culture and economy are yet to be seen. But, it is more than likely that survival needs threatened by a combination of ecological disaster, economic depression and political unrest will drive millions of people from their homelands in the coming decades. Who those peoples will be, and where they will go is unknown.

Generally, the most vulnerable demographics are hardest hit, but even that is hard to predict. This emergency relocation project we are facing now marks the beginning of an era, not a passing event.

Family

The institution of the family is where all of this comes together. Between generations, at the dinner table, in the garden or the market, this is where ideological threads are woven into the ecology of institutional systems. Families are where attitudes toward other people and nature are expressed and passed on. The care and empathy – or lack thereof – demonstrated within the family toward others provides the model for the next generations.

For many of the refugees arriving who have lost all or some of their family members, traumatic separation leaves feelings of loss and heartbreak, and

potentially the desire for vengeance. After their journeys across continents to find a safe place to start over they are met with hostility from some and hospitality from others. What will the children who are arriving now feel about their new community if their experience is one of feeling unwanted and despised? Will that divisiveness develop into us vs. them revenge and gang behavior? What will the children 10 years from now experience when they walk alone at night in the city? Will the polarity of today beget a day-to-day life of violence for them?

The idea of home is usually associated with place, with residence, or with culture. But home can also be found in those that we love and that love us. Particularly in times of suffering, place is less reassuring than those people in whom we place our trust.

The Double Bind – A Cross Contextual Stuckness and Unstuckness

The term Double Bind refers to a pattern of perceived impossibility produced by cross-contextual limitations. The term was introduced by my father, Gregory Bateson and a team of researchers to describe the conditions for schizophrenia.³ However, the pattern was never intended to be concretized as a cause for any particular pathology. Rather, Gregory Bateson insisted it was a description of an evolutionary pattern that produces both the trap from which all options appear blocked and the possibility of escape which comes with finding another level of perception. Double Bind theory is similar to what is sometimes called a «Catch 22» in that there is a high-stakes problem in which multiple contexts overlap and eliminate any strategic solution. The experience is one of being stuck from multiple directions, and usually contains the additional aspect of there being no way to express this multiple stuckness. Before addressing the ways in which the Double Bind theory is relevant to this analysis of the refugee crisis, the stuckness needs an illustration. An example of the double bind can be seen in the experience of the child of an alcoholic parent. The child whose life is danger in their household, knows his survival depends upon his parent, and that to go to the authorities will break up his family leaving him with nothing. The child cannot leave, but to stay is dangerous, and to tell is disaster.

The description above of the transcontextual overlap of institutional perspectives on the refugee crisis illustrates the theater of conflicting conflicts in

3. The term was coined by Gregory Bateson and his colleagues at MRI in 1956, see G. Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* 2000[1972], p.201.

which the crisis is brewing. Seeking solutions to the refugee crisis from any singular contextual angle will certainly breed consequential conflict from other angles. To receive the refugees with open arms is unfair to residents with the local experience of hardship under austerity, will change local culture and could crash the economy (some say); to send them back to their homelands is not possible when their homes and schools have been destroyed and there is no life there; to be responsible for their death in a camp somewhere at the doorstep to Europe calls into question the whole of European Civilization. What kind of culture sends millions of innocent people in need and asking for assistance, to their deaths? How do these events reflect upon cultural identity? And in what will future generations say about the choices made by their ancestors?

The solutions for one institution create further conflict in another. Preventing the parents and families of migrant children from receiving refugee status limits the numbers of refugees entering the EU, which may appear to be a political solution. However, economically and culturally this policy has the adverse effect of increasing the psychological service needs of the alone-children to treat their trauma, and of forcing the children into situations where they have to face day-to-day survival without the emotional and structural support of their families. Likewise, the political decision to park the refugees in Turkey provided an answer to the dilemma of where to put them, but created human rights issues, increased the likelihood of anger, humiliation and violence, and did nothing to stave off the ecological drought and political devastation that the refugees are fleeing from.

As mentioned above, the double bind is not only a pattern creating stuckness across contexts, but is also a pattern that permits release from that stuckness. The release requires that the stuck ones find the capacity to perceive their contextual circumstances in a new way. The stuck ones of course are not only the refugees and the citizens of the nations who are affected, but also the national and transnational institutions charged with understanding and dealing with the larger issues. In a sense, Europe, and the world as a whole, are caught in the stuckness of this situation. The ability to identify the double bind patterns is a step toward at least recognizing that the way the problem is being described is part of the problem. A new description will open otherwise unseen possibilities.

Complexity in Emergency Situations is Hard

Lives are at stake, cultural identity is at stake, economic and social services are at stake – making the urgency of this issue a dominant political and economic

story in the media. The lives of those who are relocating and the lives of those who are receiving them are both now and forever changed by these circumstances. The question now is about the nature of that change. Even though they have been developing over centuries, the emergencies around this crisis are severe. In the face of life and death decision-making, holding complexity in focus can appear to be a distraction from taking action. However, the narrative of this international situation is forming rapidly into polarized ideological interpretations, conflicts, and the emergence of divisiveness between citizens. Organizing a description of the current situation into a form in which the information is visible in a more contextual way is vital if we are to move toward the possibility of asking more productive questions about how to respond more effectively.

What Now?

The era of people's movement is under way. It is estimated that there will be hundreds of millions of people relocating in the coming decades. How do we generate a discussion about this that helps us get better at both supporting the incoming, and the incumbent, populations? The ecology of institutions that I have briefly described is patterning together and reinforcing outdated and inflexible interlocking relationships. With that in mind, I am increasingly inclined to encourage communities to organize outside of existing institutional frameworks. Changing institutions from the inside is unlikely given their stuckness, but we can change our relationship to our institutions by reconfiguring our own communications and interactions.

This process of reorganizing the relationships between existing institutions will require that communication and collaboration be opened between them in new ways. Ultimately this discussion will become installed as a change in the structures of our institutions. But, that will take time, dialogue and a collaborative mandate for information that addresses multiple contexts. On a community level this process is quite easy to begin. Organizing a group of people from varying corners of the socio-economic system around a topic is the first phase of gathering transcontextual information. In achieving even this initial step toward making the boundaries between institutions more porous, the complexity and interdependencies will become visible, thus lessening the tendency to reinforce binaries. There are many urgent topics such as the ecological crisis, health, and education which communities are struggling to find systemic approaches to support, and which could make a good starting point. At present

the discourse is authorized only in terms of siloed information. As long as those compartments of our institutions are kept separate, their cross-sector consequences are not approachable in systemic ways. Polarization and binaries are useless in complex systems ... except that they are highly effective in escalating unrest.

The issue of rapid human relocation globally is particularly charged by the looping of this siloed information. The press, the public and governments are feeding into the polarity of either welcoming or walling-out immigrants. Together they are frothing up passionate memes of nationalism versus global collaboration. These communication patterns miss the necessary complexity but offer what looks like the possibility of belonging to familiar right- or left-wing ideological positions in the discussion. If a wider range of transcontextual information becomes available, this illusion of partisan sides is worn down, making way for the more relevant questions of how to support systemic health and prosperity through this era of transformation.

I fundamentally believe that human beings can be horrible, but they can also be creative, and can instigate remarkable improvisational possibilities. History attests to both. This moment in history is the time and the opportunity to challenge habits of thinking that drift to reductionism. When information about complex issues, such as emergency relocation, is derived without contextual consideration «solutions» or actions to get pinned to simple binaries that wreak havoc. Now is the time to bring to the fore a more informed and contextualized perception of what lies ahead for humanity. Preparing the conditions in which another kind of conversation can take place will bring with it the possibilities of new forms of action.

I shall act always so as to increase the number of choices (von Foerster, 1971/2003, p. 228).

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