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The History and Politics of Human Mobility

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Abstract

This contribution reflects upon different aspects of human mobility throughout history as well as the way how they relate to politics. It briefly describes important moments in the European history of migration, including the periods of Antiquity, Middle Ages and the contemporary history. This paper argues that human mobility has been present throughout history and is a natural phenomenon. Since ancient times, large-scale migrations, motivated in most cases by demographic developments and climatic changes, have substantially determined the shape of the contemporary world. The freedom of movement has been one of the important facets of societies throughout history. However, in the 20th century, with the rise of different kinds of freedoms, the freedom of movement has shrunk. The technology which accompanies mobility and restricts it is also something new. This article concludes by discussing the issue of human mobility and its relation to politics and takes into account the recent developments in the European Union.

Key words: human mobility, history of migration, refugees, asylum

Introduction

Most global problems (globalization, population growth or ecological crisis) scare us not only because of their potential risks and threats, but also because we do not know their history. If we examine their history better, it will help us perceive the problems more realistically and resolve them rationally. Without a doubt, this also applies to migration, which is raising so many concerns in today's Europe. As one of the most prominent scholars on human mobility Tim Cresswell (2010: 29) put it, "We cannot understand new mobilities then, without understanding old mobilities. Thinking of mobilities in terms of constellations of movements, representations and practices helps us avoid historical amnesia when thinking about and with mobility." Migration is almost as old as human history and has not always been a negative or significantly abnormal phenomenon. International migration is a rare event both in an individual's life and on a global scale. Despite the record numbers of people currently forced to move due to conflicts, the majority of these people stay within the boundaries of their own state and become internally displaced. Globally, there are twice as many internally displaced persons as there are refugees. The statistics currently indicate that 3.3% of people move across international borders and this number has stayed roughly the same over recent decades (United Nations, 2015).

This paper aims to illustrate the continuation of the past into the present and will begin by outlining the changing circumstances of mobility through history. It argues that history and politics have always been inextricably linked to mobility and that movement

is related to power and resources. We would like to assert that migration is part and parcel of what it means to be human. *Homo migrans* has always been present throughout history, from antiquity to the modern era and the situation we are currently witnessing in Europe is not unique. However, we are facing enormous pressures which are testing the limits of human mobility on a global scale; a phenomenon that has only been introduced relatively recently. Before the First World War, people could move freely, without passports. After the war, nation states decided to control people's legitimate means of movement (Torpey, 2000).

The history of *homo migrans*

Through migration, new continents were populated and the present-day political, ethnic and cultural map of the world was created. The German migration historian Klaus J. Bade (2003: IX) states, *"'Homo migrans' has existed just as long as 'Homo sapiens', as moving from place to place is a condition of human existence – similar to births, diseases and deaths. Migrations as social processes are – if we disregard flights (escapes) and forced migrations – a response to more or less complex economic, environmental, social and cultural conditions of human existence. Therefore, the history of migrations is a part of general history and can only be understood in the context of general history."* For members of the oldest prehistoric societies of hunters and gatherers, migration was essentially a natural way of life. It was not before the gradual transition to agriculture – and the related settled way of life in the period of the Neolithic Revolution – and the subsequent birth of the oldest civilizations, already organized into the form of states, that humans discovered the concept of home with a link or tie to a single place and community.

The permanent settlement and the notion of home was starting to represent a significantly positive value and expulsion from home (e.g. as a result of very serious wrongdoing or illness – such as leprosy in ancient times and in the Middle Ages) was considered as one of the most severe punishments, a fatal stigma. Throughout our cultural history, since ancient times and up until today, an uprooted individual without a home has been viewed either as a hopeless creature struck by fate or, in contrast, as a suspicious and morally untrustworthy being. A vagrant, an uprooted homeless person, an uprooted wanderer became a cultural and literary archetype. Conversely, a homeless existence, a life on the road, was a sign of protest against a settled society, an escape to freedom. In contrast, for rebels against society, all those who were viewed by the settled society with mistrust (in the Middle Ages they were vagrants and wandering students, in later ages they were, for example, wandering comedians, grocers, migrating Gypsies and more recently tramps, American beatniks and hippies) became the embodiment of freedom, the symbol of a totally unrestrained lifestyle. From ancient times to the present, sedentary societies have viewed with mistrust and suspicion the nomads and unsettled, migratory tribes and nations that lived in their immediate neighborhood, and which often posed serious military and political threats to these societies (e.g. the Greeks and the Romans included them among the so-called "Barbarians"). Using selected examples of migration from ancient

times to the early Middle Ages, we would like to show the complexity of the problem, as well as the fact that it is not always a problem, as it can sometimes be a benefit.

Since ancient times, large-scale migrations, motivated in most cases by demographic developments and climatic changes, have substantially determined the shape of the contemporary world. The following examples taken from the history of the Middle East and Europe illustrate the link between demographic developments, environment, and the progress or collapse of various civilizations. For example, an extensive migration and invasion of the Sea Peoples around 1200 B.C. resulted in the devastation of the entire eastern Mediterranean, the burning down of Phoenician cities, the break up of the Hittite Empire and serious danger for Egypt. One of these Sea Peoples, *the Philistines* (as described in the Bible), gave the name to a country called Palestine. In the same way, only slightly later, an invasion of the Dorians destroyed the advanced civilization of Mycenaean Greece. Some of the migrations of ancient times have become truly legendary (e.g. the exodus of the Jews from Egypt to the "promised land").

Other migrations were forced and were actually deportations ordered, particularly by the kings of the ancient Near-East empires (the Babylonians, the Assyrians), for the purposes of easier control over subjugated populations (e.g. the well-known Assyrian and Babylonian capture of the Jews). A similar policy towards the Jews and other nations was, to a certain extent, pursued by the Romans. Following the suppression of Jewish revolts between 66 and 70 A.D., particularly the Bar Kokhba revolt between 132 and 135 A.D., the Jews were forbidden to enter the territory of Jerusalem and a large proportion of them were forced to leave the territory of Judea, which contributed to a significant strengthening of the Jewish diaspora. Thus, not only did a life in diaspora become the destiny of the Jewish people, but it also – thanks to the talent and advanced intellectual culture of the Jewish nation – enriched all societies where the Jews were present. Environmental causes were behind the migrations of the Maya people around the 9th century B.C. and a long time before that, of the population of the once green Sahara (Hughes, 2001). Their gradual exodus from an advancing desert that was expanding as a consequence of a global climatic change and also partly because of their intrusive agricultural techniques (especially pasturage) eventually reached as far as the Nile valley and gave rise to the ancient Egyptian civilization.

"Multiculturalism" in Antiquity

Migration also contributed to the significant growth and enrichment of classical ancient culture. From this historical territory, evolving Greek culture spread through large migration waves known as the "Great Greek Colonization". As a consequence of the rapid economic growth of Greek municipalities as early as the beginning of the Archaic period of Greek history and the related population growth, the free population of these municipalities had to look for new settlements. Climatically favorable, but suffering from a lack of a r a b l e   l a n d   a n d   o t h e r   r e s o u r c e s ,

Greek territory was not able to sustain the growing population. During the great colonization period, the Greeks populated the Black Sea region, the Western Mediterranean (the so-called "Magna Graecia" or Great Greece) and part of north Africa. Many of these Greek colonies laid the foundations for the later important European cities (Marseille, Naples, Varna, Odessa, Constanța.

Migration actually played as many as three roles: first, it was a natural demographic outlet which could prevent potential social unrest; second, it enabled Greeks to obtain valuable resources of agricultural land, wood and minerals; and third, it supported civilization exchange. Thanks to this migration, the Greeks adopted the Phoenician alphabet and gained extensive natural scientific knowledge from the Orient and, in return, they enriched the cultures of a number of other peoples (the Etruscans, the Romans, the Italic tribes). The intensity of the migration and the related cultural exchange can be seen by the remarkable fact that the oldest known evidence of the Greek alphabet, which originated from the Phoenician alphabet on the Levantine coast, comes from as far away as the island of Ischia off the Italian coast and is from the 9th century B.C. In particular during the Hellenistic and Roman Greece periods, migration led to a fundamental transformation and an interconnection of the world. Nevertheless, the situation began to change quickly and dynamically in the Hellenistic period and then with the relatively rapid Hellenization of Rome. The Mediterranean world had become interconnected as never before, a real Mediterranean ecumene was taking form, mainly through military invasions (the last wave of Greek colonization was in connection with Alexander's campaign) and, in particular, through mutual trade. This situation is vividly described by the well-known archaeologist and historian Gordon Childe (1960: 145): *"Goods and their producers were dispersed across the whole Hellenistic world. In every port, in every metropolis, colonies of foreigners were arising and especially the Jews were omnipresent. Thus, we can read about an Indian merchant settled in Egypt who, even at that time, held a ministerial office. The guild of Syrian merchants operated a proper hotel on Delos, which offered lodgings, a storage area, a conference room and a chapel. A contract is still preserved between a resident of Massalia* (today's Marseille) *and a Spartan, who were partners during a business voyage to Ethiopia. Also, a free labour force was mobile as never before. An Italian coppersmith processing bronze moved his trade from Lucania to Rhodes, while a silk processor from Antioch died in Naples."*

Besides economic and labour mobility, people also travelled for the purpose of study (especially the Romans to Greece) and for recreation and exploration, i.e. a predecessor of modern tourism. An important consequence of this mobility was the formation of a cosmopolitan, racially, ethnically and culturally, mixed society. Even though some researchers regard this racial mix which took place in the Hellenistic world and at the peak of the Roman civilization – especially in connection with cultural changes and a certain "orientalization" – as one of the causes of their decline, history shows that it was actually the opposite.

The power of these state entities grew hand in hand with their ability to continuously integrate new ethnicities, cultures and social strata into their communities. This increased the chances of success for competent people and, in turn, contributed to social development, which, as is well-known, is directly proportionate to a society's social dynamics. Conversely, strictly hierarchical societies, where human talent – unless born into the right racial or social circles – is not given the opportunity to progress, are doomed to stagnation and decline.

Gradually, members of other ethnic groups became Roman citizens and in the 1st century A.D. the first Roman senators from the provinces were appointed, and in the 2nd century even some emperors. In the 3rd century, the first non-ethnic Roman became an emperor; the tough yet very competent military commander Maximinus Thrax (as his name suggests, he was of Thracian origin), and he was followed by an emperor of Arabic origin (Philippus Arabs). This multicultural orientation of ancient society was not the exclusive preserve of elites, as marriages between indigenous women and Alexander the Great's soldiers, the Greek colonists of the Hellenistic period and Roman legionnaires, were commonplace. Nevertheless, it was the unsuccessful cohabitation with some ethnicities, especially the Germanic peoples, and the failure to cope with their migration wave, that contributed to the fall of Rome. It was one of the largest migrations in the world's history and is known as the "Migration Period". It took place between the 2nd and 6th centuries A.D. across a vast part of Eurasia, stretching from the western frontiers of China to Western Europe. In the 5th century A.D., concerted pressure from the Huns, Sarmatians, Germanic peoples and Slavs eventually led to the downfall of the Western Roman Empire and the origins of early Medieval European states.

We can say that these migration processes established the political map of Europe and the Mediterranean region which, subject to some changes, has remained in existence to the present day. The Roman Empire failed to pass this last test of multicultural cohabitation – both because of an internal weakness which prevented more generous political projects and as a consequence of a major social, economic and demographic imbalance between the Roman and Germanic worlds. This situation is being warningly compared to what is happening in Europe today. However, we must realize that the invasion of the Germanic peoples was only one of a large number of factors that contributed to the downfall of the Roman Empire, and that it definitely was not a fatally unavoidable factor. Rome's social decadence played a very significant role, as did her unwillingness to integrate the newcomers in a dignified way. After all, until the Germanic pressure came, Rome had been rather successfully developing as a multicultural empire able to integrate the most diverse ethnic and cultural groups. The danger of the type of intercultural clash which destroyed ancient Rome is surely a serious problem which has rapidly arisen today with the growing immigration of a mainly Muslim population from the turbulent regions of North Africa and the Middle East. Naturally, this danger can be prevented through the careful integration of newcomers, making them fully-fledged citizens of the secular state.

These issues are addressed in an excellent study written by Douglas E. Streusand and entitled *European Islam or Islamic Europe?*: *"Various predictions concerning the future of Europe can be reduced to two extremes: we will either see the development of an Islamic Europe where Muslim institutions and traditions have replaced the current secular and Christian institutions and traditions, or we will see the origin of a European Islam under which European Muslims share the European identity created by European Catholics, Protestants and Jews. More than two centuries ago, Edward Gibbon wrote that if Charles Martel had not prevailed in the Battle of Tours in 732, Oxford University would today teach the interpretation of the Quran and the holiness, and veracity of Muhammad's doctrines would be preached to circumcised nations.' Thus, the notion of an Islamic Europe is a reversal of the results attributed to Charles' victory. In contrast, a European Islam would only mean the addition of lessons on Islam to the list of subjects at the Oxford University, without the removal of anything original"* (Streusand, 2004).

Colonization in the Middle Ages

In the Middle Ages, migration mainly took place in the form of *colonization,* and it led to the population of the inhabited areas of Europe. A significant factor in this process was the organized German colonization, which led to the expansion of the German ethnic group into Central Europe and the Baltics. Farmers, craftsmen and miners from the territory of Germany were invited by medieval Czech and Hungarian kings to settle in the unpopulated regions of their kingdoms. This migration not only contributed to the spread of technological achievements from the more advanced Western civilization, but it also served as a form of buffer against the growth of population and the demographic changes occurring in Medieval Europe at that time. In connection with the climatic factor, there were also migrations by the Vikings over a vast area from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean region, to Greenland and – as has been reliably proven – the coast of North America. Another interesting example of medieval and early modern-era migration is the so-called Wallachian (Vlach) colonization which took place over the entire Carpathian area from Romania to the east of Moravia.

The significant rise in migration, especially the mass migration of refugees, brought about social, religious and geopolitical changes in Europe in the early modern era. The pressure from the Turks on the Byzantine Empire, which culminated in the conquest of its metropolis and last bastion, Constantinople (1453), triggered the large-scale emigration of Byzantine scholars to the West, especially to Italy. These intellectuals brought with them extensive libraries, as well as knowledge of the Greek language and ancient Greek philosophy and culture. In the medieval and predominantly Latin Europe of that time these were either completely unknown or at best learned through intermediaries on a "second-hand" basis. Thus, the scholars made a notable contribution to the richness of thought that existed during the Renaissance and to the formation of European culture of the modern era. I

n contrast, the expulsion of Jews, Muslims and also gradually the Moriscos (baptized Muslims) from Spain shortly after the successfully completed Reconquista, led to both the material and spiritual decline of the country, which could not be arrested, even with the enormous fortune which came from the newly acquired colonies. Consequently, Catholic Spain transformed itself into a country lacking freedom of thought, culturally closed and symbolized by a despotic ruler and the inquisition. These two examples show how an essential role can be played by migration and emigration in the growth of civilization in respective areas.

As a result of the Reformation and the subsequent religious wars in the 17th and 18th centuries, swarms of migrants and refugees started wandering across Europe to a degree that was previously unheard of on the continent. For example, there was a mass migration of Irish people fleeing religious and ethnic terror during the reign of Oliver Cromwell. Mass migration at the time of religious disputes also brought quite significant social consequences. For instance, the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 by the French king Louis XIV resulted in the mass emigration of 50,000 families of enterprising and creative French Huguenots, mainly to England. Eventually, this loss weakened France, while in England these expatriates and their descendants significantly contributed to the country's economic growth at the start of the industrial revolution. This resulted in the rapid industrialization of England and conversely, France significantly lagged behind. Paradoxically, despite a considerable civilization potential of its own, France approached the industrial revolution substantially later than other countries of Western Europe (Bade, 2003). To a lesser degree, similarly positive consequences for the target country were registered in the case of the emigration of Protestants from Germany. For example, the German sect of Anabaptists (called *habáni* in the Czech lands), who were persecuted in Germany and Switzerland and settled in southern Moravia, made considerable contributions to the growth of crafts (wine-making, production of faience) and pharmaceuticals.

The Impact of Migration in the 20th Century

Radical social changes and ethnic conflicts at the end of the 18th century, and in particular in the 19th century, sparked large migration waves which basically gave rise to the phenomenon of modern refugees. However, a major turning point for migration was the 20th century, which is – and it is not a coincidence – referred to as the century of refugees. Two world wars, numerous nationalist conflicts, disgusting dictatorships, the totalitarian ideologies of Nazism and Communism and attempts for their practical implementation, massive differences in material well-being and the level of social development and unprecedented devastation of the environment, all left their marks on the world in the 20th century and led to forced migrations on an unprecedented scale and of an exceptionally tragic nature, as well as to unprecedented restrictions on the freedom of movement. The different character of migration and its limitations in the previous period are aptly described by Zbigniew Brzezinski (2004: 157): "*Until national states were formed and actually until the time when truly effective border control systems were introduced, people's movement*

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was not restricted by the state, but rather by prejudices against non-residents, geographical obstacles and general lack of knowledge of conditions existing outside one's own homeland. In Europe, from the early Middle Ages until the 19th century, a relatively significant freedom of movement was enjoyed by merchants and settlers (e.g. Germans in Eastern Europe and even in Russia), who were even encouraged to do so by enlightened rulers. The discovery of America then opened the doors for almost mass resettlement."

With the exception of the perverse totalitarian systems of Nazism and Communism, the entire modern civilization is characterized by the growth of a wide variety of human freedoms. Paradoxically, one of the most natural of these freedoms – the freedom of movement – is significantly restricted as never before and a phenomenon as obvious as the migration of individuals or groups of people has become an unmanageable threat. However, this is an unnatural and, from a historical viewpoint, basically unprecedented situation. American political scientist Zbigniew Brzezinski (2004: 164) fittingly says: *"The national passport, a typical twentieth century phenomenon, thus actually symbolized mankind's loss of the right to view the Earth as its common home. A consequence of nationalism, from a humane point of view, was a step backward."* A similar message is carried by the final words of the excellent book *Europe in Motion* by the above mentioned German migration expert Klaus J. Bade (2003: 332): *"Nevertheless, the link between the non-acceptance of individual asylum seekers from crisis areas outside Europe and the fears of the downfall of Europe amidst the gradual influx of masses of migrants is so vague that it can be really used for demagogic purposes only. Until protection against refugees from third-world countries is simultaneously counterbalanced by the elimination of the causes of their flights from the areas of departure, this approach remains a historical scandal by which future generations will measure the understanding of humanity in Europe at the end of the 20th century and in the early 21st century."* However, these restrictions on the freedom of movement will only prevent us from enjoying the advantages that freedom of movement offers to every society without distinction.

The Politics of Human Mobility

Taking the current refugee situation in the European Union as the starting point, let us now turn to the intricate links between mobility and politics. Migration is just a fraction of the totality of mobilities on different scales and similarly, the movement of refugees represents just one of many different channels of mobility. People move for different reasons and can be classified into different categories based on their movement, such as tourists, immigrants, migrant labourers, refugees, undocumented migrants and academics. However, we are witnessing a blurring of categories as people often move due to a mix of reasons and this makes problematic the division between forced and voluntary migration and its usefulness as an analytical tool. Instead, the concept of power and inequality will be used as the focus for discussion on the politics of human mobility. Borrowing the definition from Tim Cresswell (2010: 21), politics means "social relations that involve the production and distribution of power.

[Politics of mobility are] the ways in which mobilities are both the products of such social relations and are produced by them."

It can be asserted that all movement is political and related to power and hence, it is important to scrutinize who has the power to classify the migrants and create policies concerning mobility. As Ben Rogaly (2015: 529) puts it, "power and inequality are central in understanding why some people do not have as many mobility/fixity options as others." Fixity cannot be omitted when discussing migration. Fixed places, often labelled as moorings, have become increasingly important in human geography. The opposite concept, mobility, has been depicted with many contradictory meanings such as adventure, freedom and threat (Cresswell, 2010: 19). It seems that the latter is the most salient in the current discourse surrounding the refugee situation in Europe.

Tim Cresswell (2010: 22) further argues that "there seems little doubt that mobility is one of the major resources of 21st-century life and that it is the differential distribution of this resource that produces some of the starkest differences today." Mobility can be seen as a resource, when people who move represent a valuable asset to their communities, as well as a divisive force. The following quote highlights this discrepancy. According to Zygmunt Bauman (1998: 9), "mobility has become the most powerful and most coveted stratifying factor." There are some stark differences when it comes to discussing mobility in different contexts. These contradictions will be further depicted in the following sketches, which do not claim to show the current situation in its entirety but want to point out discrepancies inherent in the power relations.

The case of Malta is particularly poignant. With the right kind of resources, people can become mobile and access Maltese citizenship almost instantly, that is within one year, within the framework of the Citizenship by Investment programme (BBC, 2014). It is enough to spend 1.2 million EUR on a property in Malta and then fly into the country at least twice in order to claim an EU passport. It is not even necessary to be resident in Malta but only to show genuine connection to the country. Once in possession of an EU passport, there is no need to ever return to Malta again. People in detention centres in Malta are in stark contrast to this policy. Drawing on Agamben's (2005) concept of biopower or power over bare life, which builds on Foucault's previous writings, we will argue that power works in a certain way on people's lives as well as on their bodies. Fingerprinting migrants arriving to Europe is an example of such practice. It is in stark contrast with the privileged business traveller at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport who can be subjected to an iris scan and storage of their data in the Privium database in order to speed up their boarding process. The speed of movement is an important criterion in the analysis of how movement becomes political (Cresswell, 2010: 23). The more privileged the person is, the faster they can move. Mobility is further controlled and channelled into "the production of correct mobilities through the designation of routes" (Cresswell, 2010: 24).

As has been argued elsewhere, "global interconnections between highly valued spaces, via extremely capable infrastructure networks, are being combined with strengthening investments in security, access control, gates, walls, CCTV and the paradoxical reinforcement of local boundaries to movement and interaction within the city" (Graham and Marvin, 2001: 206). An example of this is the EURODAC database under the Dublin III regulation which stores migrants' fingerprints in order to prevent people's mobility within the Schengen area. This policy aims to stop, as many call it, "asylum shopping" within EU countries.

There have been cases of self-mutilation amongst migrants, such as burning their fingers so that their scans would be unreadable. This occurs because people have different chances of being granted asylum in different EU countries and a lot depends on people's nationalities. When looking at the statistics of refugee recognition in Europe, 95% of Syrians are granted asylum (or "subsidiary protection") in Europe, and only 2% of Kosovars. For people from Sub-Saharan Africa, the chance of being granted asylum is between 30 and 70% and obviously differs from country to country within the EU (Eurostat, 2015). On top of that, lists of safe third countries are created by many states which are somewhat contradictory to the international refugee regime and its individualistic nature.

Fragmentation of the International Refugee Regime

UNHCR, the United Nations refugee agency, has recently published a poster with a clear message which distinguishes between refugees and migrants. It could imply that migrants are a different kind of people, less deserving (Carling, 2015). Nonetheless, there are many migrants who are vulnerable and need a certain level of help and assistance.

Many people move for a combination of reasons which can also change during their journey. Think about someone who escaped poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa, went to Libya and was later tortured or had to flee due to fear of death. Is this the prototype of the so called economic migrant? Despite the borders being erased between forced and voluntary migration, the umbrella term migrant encompasses all the people who move, including refugees.

UNHCR is not a neutral actor. Its task is to look after a specific type of person, the refugee. If there were no refugees, UNHCR would cease to exist. It is an organization which claims monopoly over the refugees and their definition (excluding the Palestinian refugees, who have a separate UN agency, UNRWA). However, refugees' voices are rarely heard. The current refugee situation cannot be discussed without reference to the Second World War and its aftermath, which led to the creation of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. According to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, a refugee is a person who has had to flee for one or more of the following five reasons: race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. All these reasons are individualized and the states have to determine if the person is to be granted refugee protection.

The 1951 Geneva Convention has not been ratified by all the states and this makes it somewhat problematic to enforce it globally. Nevertheless, the principle of *non-refoulement* (or the prohibition of return or expulsion of the refugees), which is included in this convention, has become part of customary international law, so even the states which are not party to this convention are obliged to follow this principle.

Currently, we are witnessing a fragmentation of the international refugee regime. You can see that many people who flee generalized violence cannot be classified under this Convention. However, there are other regional legal instruments which can be applied in this context: the Cartagena Declaration for Central American States, the African Union's Convention and most recently, the EU Temporary Protection and the EU Qualification directives. These conventions and directives have a broad scope to include people fleeing generalized violence as well as serious harm. The international human rights instruments are equally important when discussing mobility. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights incorporates the right to freedom of movement and the right to leave any country, including a person's own. The UN Convention against Torture confirms that we are legally bound not to hand people over to their persecutors and torturers. These human rights legal instruments complement the pillars of the international refugee regime and are cornerstone in the current situation.

In spite of these legal instruments, which should in theory facilitate asylum for people in need of it, it is virtually impossible to claim asylum in the European Union states without reaching its shores. The concept of friction created by Tim Cresswell (2010) fits well with the current policies which deliberately create frictions and cause some absurd scenarios. An alternative to the dangerous sea crossing for the Syrian refugees has been a route across Russian territory – part of which had to be taken on bikes. In October 2015 more than 1,000 Syrians undertook this journey (BBC, 2015). As there is a legal requirement that this border is not allowed to be crossed on foot, they had to purchase bikes. Piles of bikes were left on the Norwegian side of the border and later crushed.

Conclusion

Mobility is complex, relational and dependent on power and resources. It is equally about the ability to move and about the restrictions on movement which can channel mobility in different directions or produce immobility. This paper has attempted to illustrate different examples of human mobility through history up to the present. In the past, migration brought positive and negative effects. However, it was not perceived as something unnatural. Today we are confronted with images of refugee migration which form only a part of all mobilities on different scales. Furthermore, large scale migrations are nothing new. It is the technology that accompanies them that is new. The current situation in Europe is emblematic of the states' inability to resolve the political situation in their neighbourhood. However, limiting access to asylum procedures by the European states is something that goes against the legal and moral commitments to which we have subscribed

through international legal instruments. It is clear that conflicts which fuel refugee migration are related to power and inequality and will need a political solution. However, to discuss the causes and possible scenarios of the situation requires further analysis, which is beyond the scope of this paper. Let us conclude with the following quote by Peter Adey (2010: 131), "to move is to be political."

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