

Refugees emergency and bioethical issues

Valeria Schiavone

Experice Laboratory, Paris 8 University, France and CRTD (Centre de Recherche sur le Travail et le Développement) CNAM, Paris.

Abstract. Migratory movements and their policies represent one of the greatest challenges to our European societies. Bioethics can and must question respect for the lives of the thousands of people who have a migration project, as a common aspiration of all living beings to imagine and realise different and better living conditions.

Key words: migrations, refugees, human rights, capabilities, migration policies

Migratory movements and their policies represent one of the greatest challenges to our European societies. Continuous tragedies, that have the Mediterranean as their main and sad theatre, oblige us to think and act in an ethical and responsible way. “At least 1,337 people have gone missing on the Central Mediterranean migration route this year according to IOM’s Missing Migrants Project. Most of the 88,000 people who arrived by sea to Italy in 2022 have been rescued by the Italian Coast Guard and other Italian state-led rescue ships or arrived autonomously. Fifteen per cent have been rescued by NGO vessels” (1). Faced with the enormity and atrocity of the phenomenon, the fundamental question is how to be worthy of our humanity. In other words, how to take a purely ethical and critical position in a situation which is not easy to be analysed and interpreted, not only because of the complexity of its causes and effects, but especially for the interconnections of different stakes at psychosocial, geopolitical, economic, and educational level.

Bioethics has an important role to play, as a discipline based on the complexity thinking and which aspires to respect life in all its dimensions: from biological life to the humanisation of existence and to the development of an equitable relationship between the different living species on the planet. The current migratory events crucially concern each of these aspects that we have to analyse in all their mutual implications, starting from a fundamental perspective: people who leave in search of other and better living conditions, due to disasters

caused by climate change, wars or economic factors, do not represent the “misery of the world” which is the title of a collective work, published by Editions du Seuil (Paris 1993), under the editorship of Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002), a French sociologist to whom we owe a brilliant analysis of the influence of cultural and symbolic factors on the hierarchy of social classes.

In this important essay, four major psychosocial universes were considered: “point of view spaces”, referring to inhabitants of poor suburbs, scene of strong tensions between native inhabitants and immigrants; “social spaces” that have as prototypes the Parisian suburbs and the American ghetto; “decline of public and institutional spaces” and, finally, the different “declines” and their political and social repercussions in various contexts, in a physical or figurative sense, from factories to intergenerational clashes, to mobbing problems in schools or public administrations, etc. As this important work taught us, symbolic and cultural representations have a strong impact on our judgments about people belonging to other social categories, especially migrants and refugees. In a more realistic perspective, we must acknowledge that behind every migratory movement there is a project, a strong intentionality, a significant economic capacity, and a psychological solidity allowing people to take on this project through the roughest obstacles.

Bioethics is strongly called to deal with this phenomenon, not only human but also animal, existing from the beginning of life on earth referring directly to the

concept of 'one health' and global ecology. Highlighting the intentional, contingent and not merely necessary character of the migratory movements of all living beings inevitably leads us to consider the protection of rights from an exquisitely ethical and non-moralising point of view, beyond reductive and purely belief-driven schemes, truly appealing to the collective intelligence and not to the needs of the individual.

A disclosure / conflict of interest statement

None of the authors of this manuscript has a financial or personal relationship with other people or organizations that could inappropriately influence or bias the content of the paper. It is to precisely state that "No Competing interests are at stake and there is No Conflict of Interest" with other people or organizations that could inappropriately influence the content of the paper.

References

1. UNHCR, UNHCR and IOM appeal for urgent disembarkation of all stranded refugees and migrants in central Mediterranean. 7 November 2023. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/news-releases/unhcr-and-iom-appeal-urgent-disembarkation-all-stranded-refugees-and-migrants>

Corresponding author:

Valeria Schiavone
Experice Laboratory, Paris 8 University, France and CRTD
(Centre de Recherche sur le Travail et le Développement)
CNAM, Paris
Email: valeria.schiavone@gmail.com