



PERSPECTIVES

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What's On a Muslim Refugee's Mind?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Almost all the “poor” illegal migrants on the Greek islands want to go to Germany, where they have heard from friends and relatives that they will be the best paid for being refugees. The cliché “the-poor-souls-are-fleeing-war-in-their-native-country” is becoming less and less convincing by the day. True, most Syrians fled to Turkey after the start of civil war in their country. But is flight from war their motivation as they proceed onwards to Greece, Serbia, Hungary, and Austria?

[At the end of July, the number of refugees and migrants in Greece waiting to be granted asylum or deported was 62,407. The five Aegean islands (Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Kos and Leros) are home to 15,222 asylum-seekers and migrants.]

The autumn of 2015 was unusual in almost every way on the north Aegean Greek island from which I am writing. There were tens of thousands of illegal migrants on the island, the native population of which was scarcely 100,000. New refugees arrived every day by the thousands.

One evening, the blue-grey sky grumbled shortly after sunset. The thick clouds blackened and rain poured down over the city with a roar. As I ran across the slippery pavement into a friend's bar, I heard a group of five poor souls speaking Persian with a Turkic accent and running amok, seeking shelter under the eaves of a building.

A quarter of an hour later I found them in front of my friend's bar, totally soaked. I went out and asked them if they spoke English; they shook their heads. I asked them in Turkish if they spoke Turkish. With glittering eyes, three of them cheerfully said, “Evet!” [“Yes” in Turkish]. I told them they could come

into the bar if they liked. They hesitated but politely declined. I asked if they needed food, water, or cigarettes.

The one with the most fluent Turkish stepped forward. He drew a pack of banknotes from his pocket and said, "If you really want to help, find us a hotel. The best, if possible. We have cash. Money is no problem. Find us a hotel and we'll pay you a commission." He explained that all the "damn" hotels on the island were full [of refugees] and they needed rooms.

I apologized and disappeared into the bar.

Nearly two years later, on a beautiful and cool summer evening, I met A. at a bar on the same island. A., a Syrian refugee, often spends his evenings bar-hopping with his western friends. Those friends are mostly romantic European social workers who, I observed several times, sport t-shirts, bags, and laptops festooned with the Palestinian flag. They are on the island to help the unfortunate Muslim refugees who are fleeing war in their native countries.

"I'll tell you strictly Muslim-to-Muslim," A. said in good English after having poured down a few shots of whiskey. "These (European social workers) are funny guys. And they're not just funny. They're also silly. I don't know why on earth they are in love with a Muslim cause that even some of us Muslims despise."

Last year, three Afghans stopped in front of my house on the same island and asked for drinking water. I gave them three bottles and asked if they needed anything else. Coffee? They accepted and sat down in the garden chairs.

Over coffee, they said they were glad to be hosted "not by an infidel on this infidel island" but by a Muslim. The young Afghan who was dressed like a dancer from a cheap hip-hop clip on MTV said, "One day we good Muslims will conquer their infidel lands." I asked why he was receiving "infidel" money for living. "It's just halal," he answered. "They ['infidels'] are too easy to fool."

M., another fluently English-speaking Syrian, gave me a long lecture on the wonderful governance of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. "Turkey is the best country in the world!" M. said. "Erdoğan is the leader of the ummah." I asked why he had risked his life to cross illegally from the "best country in the world" to the "poor, infidel lands." "I want to go to Europe to increase the Muslim population there," he said. "I want to make a Muslim family there. I want to have plenty of children." I reminded him that Greece, too, is a European country. No it's not, he answered.

Almost all the illegal migrants on that and other Greek islands want to get to Germany, where they have heard from friends and relatives that they will be the best paid for being "poor" refugees. The cliché "the-poor-souls-are-fleeing-war-

in-their-native-country” is becoming less and less convincing every day. True, most Syrians fled to Turkey after the start of civil war in their country. But why did they then risk their lives to squeeze into 12-man rubber boats with 40-50 other people, including children and the elderly? Because of war in Turkey?

No. Despite political instability and insecurity for all, there is technically no war in Turkey. It is a Muslim country whose mostly Muslim migrants want to leave it as soon as possible for non-Muslim Europe.

They reach the shores of the Greek islands, which are so beautiful that people from across the world fly there for their holidays. But the islands are not good enough. They want to go to Athens. Why? Because there is war on the Greek islands? No. It’s because Athens is the start of the exit route to the Balkans.

Apply the same logic to Serbia, Hungary, and Austria. Like Greece, none of those countries will be good enough for the refugees. Why not? Because there is war in Serbia or Hungary or Austria? Or because “my cousin tells me Germans pay the best?”

Turkey’s leaders often threaten Europe that they will “open the gates and flood Europe with millions of [Syrian] refugees.” They should ask themselves instead why those Muslim refugees are so eager to leave the “new Turkish empire” if given the chance. Why would they choose not to live a comfortable life in a powerful and peaceful Muslim country and instead flock to the “infidel” west?

Erdoğan blames the West for the tragedy. He has criticized the West for having taken only 250,000 Syrian refugees. In 2016, then Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said the United Nations Security Council's five permanent members (the US, Russia, Britain, France, and China), should pay the price, not Syria’s [Muslim] neighbors.

It is ironic that millions of Muslims are trying, through dangerous means, to reach the borders of a civilization they have historically blamed for all the world's evils, including those of their own countries. The “romantic” West does not question why millions of West-hating Muslims are heading in their direction. Or is it “Islamophobic” to point out that there is no war in Greece, Serbia, Hungary, or Austria?

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