'LEAVING AFGHANISTAN! ARE YOU SURE?' EUROPEAN EFFORTS TO DETER POTENTIAL MIGRANTS THROUGH INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS

Ceri Oeppen

Department of Geography,
University of Sussex

Abstract

Policymakers in Europe are currently under pressure to both lessen the number of incoming asylum-seekers and 'irregular migrants' and address the humanitarian crises occurring at Europe's border crossings. Increasingly, we see an externalization of Europe's border controls, as migration management policies try to stop migrants before they even arrive in Europe. One form of externalized control is information campaigns, discouraging would-be migrants and asylum-seekers from leaving their countries of origin. Such campaigns intend to inform potential migrants about the difficulties of settling in Europe and the dangers of being smuggled. As such, these campaigns aim to both discourage migration and present that discouragement as a means of protecting people from financial and bodily risk. I examine the use of information campaigns in Afghanistan, and ask why they are continued, when ethnographic work with Afghans suggests that the campaigns are unlikely to be believed. I argue that these information campaigns are symbolic, fulfilling the need of policymakers to be seen to be doing something, and also – and more ominously – serve a role of shifting responsibility for the risks of the journey onto Afghans themselves, rather than the restrictive border regimes of the EU.

'Dejando Afganistán! Estás seguro?' Esfuerzos europeos para desalentar migrantes potenciales a través de campañas de información

Resumen

Políticos en Europa están actualmente bajo presión tanto de disminuir el número de solicitantes de asilo y 'migrantes irregulares' como de enfrentar a las crisis humanitarias ocurriendo en las fronteras europeas. Cada vez más, vemos una externalización del control de las fronteras europeas, ya que las políticas de gestión de la migración intentan detener migrantes hasta antes de que lleguen a Europa. Una forma de control externalizado son campañas de información, los cuales desalientan a los posibles migrantes y solicitantes de asilo de salir de sus países de origen. Estas campañas tienen la intención de informar a los migrantes potenciales de las dificultades de establecerse en Europa y de los peligros de ser traficados. Como tal, estas

campañas tratan de desalentar la migración y a la vez presentar este desaliento como un medio de proteger a las personas contra el riesgo financiero y corporal. Examino el uso de campañas de información en Afganistán, y pregunto por qué se siguen, cuando el trabajo etnográfico con los afganos sugiere que es improbable que las campañas sean creídas. Argumento que estas campañas son simbólicas, cumpliendo la necesidad que tienen los políticos de parecer estar haciendo algo, y también – lo cual es más inquietante – desempeñar una función de trasladar la responsabilidad de los riesgos del viaje a los propios afganos, en lugar de los regímenes restrictivos de control fronterizo de la UE.

Palabras clave: campañas de información, gestión de la migración, solicitantes de asilo, Europa, Afganistán

Introduction

An important announcement on behalf of the Council of the City of Leicester, England (…) In your own interests and those of your family, you should accept the advice of the Uganda Resettlement Board and not come to Leicester (advert in the *Uganda Argus*, taken out by Leicester City Council, 1972).

On 30 January 2013, in light of the UK government's proposed information campaign discouraging Bulgarian and Romanian immigrants, a BBC radio programme – *Today* – invited Lord Bach (Labour peer and former Leicester City Councillor) and Mr Mughal (former Chair of Leicester City Council's race relations committee) to reflect on the 1972 information campaign in the *Uganda Argus*, quoted above. Both interviewees felt that the advert was not only racist but also had not been successful, with Lord Bach suggesting, 'It was actually almost an advertisement for people to come', and concluding that the racist advertising campaign 'was a very long time ago (…) and nothing like that could thankfully ever happen again'.

Yet, information campaigns aimed at discouraging would-be migrants continue to be used by the UK and other countries, and are a key component of what has come to be known as 'managed migration policy'

(Pécoud 2010). Below is an example from a German information campaign in 2015 aimed at Afghans.

Do not believe the rumours and false information deliberately spread by human traffickers about the allegedly easy trip and easy life in Germany. Do not risk your lives by trying to flee to Europe. Human traffickers are criminals who are only interested in money. They don't tell the truth and don't care about human lives (Official Facebook page of the Germany Embassy in Afghanistan).

Almost half a century apart – and from print media to social media – the message is the same: 'Do not come here!'. Yet in both cases this exclusionary message is couched in terms of humanitarian concern – neither of these examples explicitly says 'We do not want you here'; rather, they imply that, for the target reader's own good, their own safety, they should not come 'here'. Vaughan-Williams (2015: 3) argues that EU migration management '(re)produces the "irregular" migrant as potentially *both* a life to be protected *and* a security threat to protect against'. This juxtaposition can clearly be seen in the motivation and text of both the Leicester City advert and the German information campaign.

In this paper, I look at the ways in which contemporary European governments have tried to discourage migration through information campaigns. Using the example of information campaigns in Afghanistan, I discuss why they are produced, especially when previous research suggests they are unlikely to be trusted, and even the institutions that create such campaigns acknowledge that there is little evidence of their impact (Toms and Thorpe 2012). The paper proceeds as follows. First, I briefly review what some of the existing literature, both practice-orientated and academic, has to say about information campaigns targeted at migrants. Second, I take a recent example of a German information campaign targeted at Afghans to explore the implications of a contemporary information campaign targeted at potential migrants and refugees living in an insecure setting. Third, I draw on the literature and examples to build the argument

that these information campaigns are symbolic, fulfilling the need of policymakers to be seen to be doing something about 'the migration crisis'. More cynically, such campaigns serve the purpose of shifting responsibility for the risks of the journey onto Afghans themselves, rather than the restrictive border regimes of the EU.

Information campaigns discouraging potential migrants

Information campaigns aimed at potential migrants[1] in their countries of origin (and sometimes in transit countries) have been used by European states since the early 1990s (Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud 2007). They represent one of the ways in which contemporary migration management has externalized some aspects of border control to far beyond the geographical boundaries of destination countries. They also indicate the perceived need to start migration control 'upstream', to use the vocabulary of the British government (see Hughes 2015; Toms and Thorpe 2012) – to start controlling movement before it even occurs.

Information campaigns' specific content and modes of delivery vary but normally include a combination of informing potential migrants about the procedural aspects of immigration/asylum in the destination country (including removals and deportations) and the risks of traveling through non-regularized channels, particularly the risks of being smuggled or trafficked. In theory, and according to the UNHCR's guidance (2001, 2011), they should not be used to discourage people from seeking asylum where protection is needed, and should provide information about regularized migration routes where they exist. Information campaigns represent an interesting sub-section of migration management in the context of increasingly restrictive European migration regimes. It is hard to argue that providing information is detrimental to the potential migrant, especially if it purports to have the safety of the migrant as its priority; consequently it

is an area of migration management where migration policymakers can draw in NGOs and community organizations, as well as intra-governmental partners such as Development Ministries, in ways that would be impossible for more control-orientated activities (Pécoud 2010).

A number of practice-orientated reports provide guidelines on how to design and operate information campaigns (see, for example, Koser and Pinkerton 2002; UNHCR 2011). Browne (2015) provides a useful summary of what is thought to be best practice, including using multiple media techniques to convey the information in an engaging way, and targeting the whole community in recognition that family and social networks are often highly influential in shaping migration aspirations and decisions. However, it is important to note that even those who promote information campaigns as an important migration management tool are not clear on how to evaluate what makes a successful campaign (European Migration Network 2012; Toms and Thorpe 2012).

The basic narrative (after Boswell 2011) of information campaigns aimed at discouraging migration is that, if potential migrants can be made aware of the risks, particularly the risks of traveling outside regularized channels (for example, with a smuggler), they will not migrate. Consequently, migration is represented as almost exclusively negative, with little chance of success for the migrants involved (Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud 2007). Yet, clearly, people do continue to migrate, and take great bodily and financial risks to do so. Does this mean that the information campaigns have failed to reach the right target audiences? Perhaps. More likely, however, as suggested by a number of empirical studies, is that migrants are already aware of the risks outlined by information campaigns but decide, for various reasons, to migrate anyway (Alpes and Nyberg Sørensen 2015; Carling and Hernández-Carretero 2011; Heller 2014; Hernández-Carretero and Carling 2012; Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud 2007).

In some cases, it is easy to see why, despite knowledge of the risks, people would leave: for example, those fleeing war and persecution, for whom the alternative is an even higher risk of death

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1 Here I use 'migrants' in an 'umbrella' sense to refer to all people migrating, whatever the reason for their migration and whatever bureaucratic category they may fall into (asylum-seeker, labour migrant, irregular migrant etc.).

or injury, or those to whom the poet Warsan Shire refers in her poem, *Home*: 'You have to understand, that no one puts their children in a boat, unless the water is safer than the land' (Shire 2013: xi). However, this does not explain why people from 'relatively safe' countries also take on the risks of irregular migration. Empirical work with migrants and potential migrants does shed some light on this. For example, Carling and Hernández-Carretero's (2011: 49) research with Senegalese 'boat migrants' suggests that a) potential migrants may consider themselves already experts in the potential risks, especially if they have sea-faring experience; b) they may distrust the campaigns, especially if they suspect that these are driven by the goal of preventing migration; and c) they may decide that the improved opportunities available – if successful – justify the risk. Meanwhile, Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud (2007) discuss the existence of 'migration cultures', whereby migration becomes a normative act, to be undertaken whatever the risks, similar to Monsutti's (2007) findings regarding the social practice of migration as a 'rite of passage' for young Afghan men. Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud (2007) suggest that the 'objective knowledge' provided by information campaigns cannot counteract the 'migratory disposition': the idea that migration is a way to escape the 'stagnation' of everyday life.

Yet, despite these critiques of information campaigns and questions about their efficacy, they persist. In fact, since the publication of the European Migration Network's synthesis report on European countries' actions to try to reduce irregular migration in 2012, the number of European countries using information campaigns as an externalized migration management tool has increased. In the following section, I examine a recent information campaign aimed at Afghans considering migration to Germany.

Information campaigns aimed at Afghans

My initial interest in information campaigns was prompted by the largely negative and distrustful responses of my Afghan research participants to campaigns promoting 'assisted voluntary return' to Afghanistan from the UK during the mid-2000s, and from the UK and Norway in 2012. In this paper, however, I shift the focus from Afghans already outside the country to the information campaigns targeted at potential migrants and refugees in Afghanistan, such as the 'Rumours About Germany' campaign, aimed at persuading and educating those considering leaving for Europe.

Despite the current understandable focus on people displaced from Syria, Afghans remain one of the larger groups of asylum-seekers in Europe, following a shifting conflict that has been ongoing for more than 35 years. With renewed Taliban offensives and the political, economic and security situation in Afghanistan showing no sign of improving, this flow is unlikely to cease and, in fact, has seen a massive increase between 2014 and 2015, as illustrated in Figure 1. In 2015, Hungary, Sweden and Germany received the highest number of Afghan asylum appli-

Figure 1. Afghan citizens applying for asylum 2008–2015: EU total and selected countries
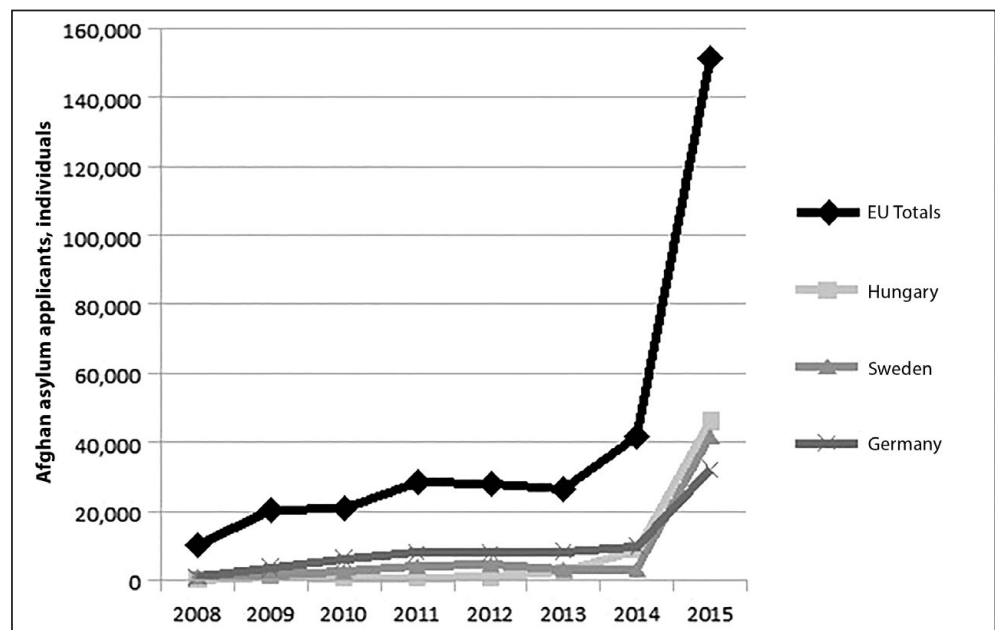
Source: EUROSTAT (2016)

cations in the EU but Afghans are spread across the whole of Europe (and, indeed, the world).

European governments have used information campaigns as part of their overall strategy of reducing the number of asylum-seekers (and other migrants) from countries like Afghanistan. Whilst acknowledging the diversity of reasons why people choose to leave Afghanistan (see Majidi *et al.* 2016), there is no doubt that conflict and insecurity, and the lack of adequate protection for those targeted by government and anti-government forces, are a major factor in people's decision to leave. For this reason, information campaigns that try to deter people from leaving to seek asylum are deeply suspect, as suggested by the UNHCR (2001: 13) in their response to consultations about the development of a common EU immigration policy:

> Because information campaigns may be interpreted as a form of deterrence to refugee flight, UNHCR would not normally be involved in their implementation. For the same reason, UNHCR would have to insist that such programmes should be strictly limited to those situations where the great majority of people who are leaving a country are demonstrably not in need of international protection.

In 2012, in a study produced for the European Migration Network, Schneider reports that Germany had not been involved in any campaigns aimed at preventing irregular migration, and cites the UNHCR's concerns as evidence of the controversial nature of information campaigns with such aims. However, from 2015, Germany has been actively involved in an information campaign in Afghanistan, called 'Rumours About Germany', which Human Rights Watch has branded 'irresponsible' given the ongoing, and worsening, conflict in Afghanistan (Ilsley 2015).

'Rumours About Germany'

The German government, through its embassy in Afghanistan, has embarked on an information campaign in Afghanistan. Billboards were erected in Kabul, Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif, with slogans in Dari and Pashto posing questions such as 'Leaving Afghanistan! Are you sure?' and 'Leaving Afghanistan? Think about it again'. Under the slogans are written '#RumoursAboutGermany' and a weblink – www.RumoursAboutGermany.info (last accessed 07 March 2016) – which redirects to *Germany in Afghanistan*, the official Facebook page of the Germany Embassy in Afghanistan. The billboards were accompanied by a social media campaign using Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, as well as stories in conventional print and television media.

Of the 22 posts on the *Germany in Afghanistan* Facebook page in February 2016, ten were explicitly relating to migration issues. In Table 1, I quote an excerpt from each post that gives an idea of its content, and categorize them according to whether their focus is on a) the procedural aspects of asylum in Germany; b) the deterrence and control measures used by the German government (for example, in relation to removing rejected asylum-seekers); c) the risks of the journey to Europe and the dangers of trusting smugglers; or d) the reconstruction potential and responsibility of Afghan returnees and non-migrants.

The Rumours About Germany campaign follows many of the guides (see Browne 2015) about information campaigns and has much in common with campaigns conducted by other countries such as the UK and Australia. Looking at Table 1, we see a mix of messages, including information about asylum procedures, the control and removal of rejected asylum-seekers, the risks of being 'in the hands of people smugglers' and messages meant to encourage Afghans to either not leave in the first place, or to return in order to 'help to rebuild their country'. As per suggestions based on previous information campaigns (see Browne 2015; Koser and Pinkerton 2002), the campaign uses multiple media methods and is designed to be seen by a reasonably wide audience – not just potential migrants but their families, too. As mentioned, the Rumours About Germany campaign has been criticized by Human Rights Watch and Afghan community organizations for trying to deter people from escaping an insecure situation (Ilsley

Table 1. Posts relating to migration on the 'Germany in Afghanistan' Facebook page, in reverse chronological order, February 2016

Type of post	Quote from accompanying text	Category
Photos	The German NGO HELP distributes flyers to inform Afghans about German asylum law and to ruin business for people smugglers who profit from spreading false rumours.	Asylum procedure Journey risks
YouTube link	The majority of illegal Afghan refugees will not be accepted in Germany and will [be] expelled forcefully [video of interview with German Ambassador].	Deterrence
Text post	New German asylum rules – Pashto	Asylum procedure
Text post	New German asylum rules – Dari	Asylum procedure
Link to news story	The German parliament voted to tighten German laws on asylum. The new rules are designed to speed up the processing of asylum claims, to better distribute the refugees within Germany and to make expulsions and deportations easier.	Asylum procedure Deterrence
Link to pdf	The attached leaflets have been designed by the NGO HELP e.V. in order to provide important information on asylum [in Germany].	Asylum procedure
Press release	Today, 125 Afghan citizens return to Afghanistan: after a difficult way to Germany in the hands of people smugglers they realized that their future is in Afghanistan and that they are needed in their home country.	Deterrence Journey risks Reconstruction
News post about visit of German Interior Minister	The main focus of the visit lay on the problems of irregular migration from Afghanistan to Europe (…) [the Minister] also emphasized the necessity to work together with the Afghan government in order to combat the causes of migration and to prevent an exodus of young, skilled Afghans. He urged the Afghan people not to trust in rumours and misinformation deliberately spread by people smugglers and to stay and help rebuild their country. Afghans whose request for asylum in Germany is not approved will face repatriation.	Reconstruction Journey risks Deterrence
Link to news story	The German Interior Minister Thomas De Maiziere during a visit to Kabul on Monday promised Afghanistan financial assistance to help reintegrate Afghan citizens.	Reconstruction
Link to German government website	The German Government has decided to make it easier for the authorities to expel foreign nationals found guilty of crimes. Moreover, it will be possible in future to deny recognised refugee status to asylum-seekers who commit and are convicted of, for example, offences against life or against sexual self-determination. Recognised refugees can also have their status removed in such cases.	Deterrence Asylum procedure

2015). In an interview with Deutsche Welle[2] (2015), German Ambassador to Afghanistan Markus Potzel defended the campaign:

> We want our campaign to reach those in Afghanistan who are considering fleeing to Europe, and especially Germany (…) We want to tell them: 'Do not believe any rumors or deliberately spread false information about the supposedly simple life in Germany. Think twice about whether you really want to sell all of your possessions to pay criminal smugglers and risk your life on the journey. Really think about if you truly want to leave your home, your family, and your friends behind for an uncertain and dangerous future far away from your homeland (…)'. It's not about deterrence, but rather about clarification – especially about the risks involved with fleeing and illegal migration, as well as the legal framework and the reality of life in Germany.

In this excerpt, Potzel manages to convey the financial and bodily risks associated with being smuggled and the challenges of settling in Germany, underlined by the sedentarist norm that people should 'naturally' remain in their 'homeland'. As with the Leicester City advert, the message conveyed is duplicitous: it could be read as a concern for the

2   *Deutsche Welle* is Germany's international broadcaster. It describes its mission as conveying 'Germany as a nation rooted in European culture and as a liberal, democratic state based on the rule of law' – http://www.dw.com/en/about-dw/pro-file/s-30688 (last accessed 07 March 2016).

safety of the potential migrant, but the underlying aim – to discourage migration to Germany – is clear, despite Potzel's claim that it is not about deterrence. Despite using the word 'fleeing', he does not mention the reasons why people might want to leave Afghanistan, nor their right to seek asylum in Germany or anywhere else. Alongside the message regarding the difficulties and risks of migrating, Potzel continues by reminding Afghans of their responsibility to the future of Afghanistan as follows:

> We firmly stand by our engagement in Afghanistan, and we are committed to the country's stabilization and reconstruction. It is crucial, however, that the Afghans do not turn their backs on their own country during these difficult times, but rather help build the future (*Deutsche Welle* 2015).

I have written elsewhere (Oeppen 2010) about the way in which European governments have encouraged Afghans living in the diaspora to return to Afghanistan to contribute to its reconstruction, but the use of this argument to discourage Afghans from leaving is relatively new. Discouraging people from seeking opportunities elsewhere by appealing to their sense of patriotism and their duty to 'rebuild' is exactly the kind of 'compassionate racism' which Sriskandarajah (2005) refers to in his work in relation to the so-called 'brain drain'.

At around the same time as the Rumours About Germany campaign was launched, the Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation started its own social media campaign. Images such as that in Figure 2 were shared on its Facebook page and Twitter feed. Some fed into the message of rebuilding Afghanistan. A photo of a father and son standing in lush farmland had the slogan, 'I love my country. I will not leave, I will build it for my loved ones'. But others were more brutal about the risks of the journey itself. One showed an image of an overcrowded boat, with the slogan 'Did you know Afghanistan has the highest number of dead illegal refugees in the world? Don't let your loved ones walk straight into death'. Meanwhile, in Figure 2, through the 'migration door' lie dead bodies surrounded by people in orange boiler suits. Whilst the image is actually taken from a news agency photo of rescue workers on a Libyan beach, for many Afghans the orange boiler suit is also evocative of the Global War on Terror and Guantanamo Bay, and their status as perceived security threats.

The timing of the Afghan Ministry's campaign – coinciding with the German campaign – is noteworthy. It is well known that the Afghan government is highly reliant on donor countries for its administration, services and security. It would be interesting to know whether or not the campaigns were intentionally coordinated.

Figure 2. A poster shared on social media by the Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, warning their 'compatriot' of the potential risks of migration, and pointing out starkly that there may be no return

Source: www.facebook.com/morr.gov.

Germany has troops stationed in Afghanistan and has been active in international reconstruction efforts. Recently, German government ministers have been explicitly linking their remaining presence in Afghanistan to migration issues. In February 2016, the German Interior Minister, Thomas de Maiziere, visited Afghanistan and, in talks with Afghan government officials, said 'We're staying here as long as it's necessary, but we also expect that the Afghan population stays here, we want the influx of refugees to be stopped' (cf. Sims 2016). He then went on to echo Ambassador Potzel and the Rumours About Germany campaign by reminding the Afghan audience how difficult and risky it was to migrate, and urging them not to listen to the 'propaganda' about Germany spread by people smugglers (Sims 2016).

The Rumours About Germany campaign and the Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation campaign both draw on a mix of guilt, fear and, in the German case, information about reception and removal to try to discourage Afghans from leaving Afghanistan. Neither campaign adequately acknowledges the reasons why Afghans may want to take the risk and leave Afghanistan anyway. The other glaringly obvious omission is any information about why Afghans would have to risk their lives 'in the hands of people smugglers', rather than enter Europe in a safe, dignified manner in order to exercise their right to seek asylum there.

The symbolic power of information campaigns

In the *Essentials of Migration Management*, an IOM (2004) training resource for migration policymakers, a discussion section raises the question of why governments should be proactive about providing information on migration opportunities and risks rather than being silent (perhaps in the hope of not encouraging people). Their answer to this question is striking.

> When 'objective' information is not available, 'bad,' fragmented or deliberately distorted information takes its place. When information is not provided by governments, the view promoted by trafficking organiza-

tions will be encouraged, namely that irregular migration pays. Better communication, while not a solution to this challenge, will portray government as more in control of their polities and borders and more caring towards potential new citizens (IOM 2004: 10).

Apart from reducing information sources to government *or* traffickers (not to mention collating smuggling and trafficking) and ignoring the widely acknowledged role of social networks, the answer is troublesome in other ways. It parallels my interpretation that one of the unspoken goals of information campaigns is symbolic: they allow governments to be seen to be doing something to control their borders whilst still maintaining a humanitarian image.

From my position as a member of the UK public I have observed an increase in awareness and shift in perceptions regarding migrants and refugees arriving in Europe. From the 2013 Lampedusa disaster, but particularly after the tragic death (and subsequent iconic photo) of three-year-old Alan Kurdi from Syria, there has generally been more public sympathy towards the plight of individual migrants, even whilst the British Social Attitudes Survey still suggests that the majority of the UK population would like to see immigration reduced. I would imagine that this paradox could be similarly observed in other European countries. Consequently, policymakers seeking to control migration are left with a dilemma. They have to be seen to control European borders but are aware that more aggressive actions, such as 'push-backs' at sea and physical confrontation between migrants and border guards, do not portray them in a positive light to significant sections of their voting public. 'Educating' potential migrants before they leave their country of origin through information campaigns provides a policy narrative that is both compelling and accessible to the public and media, even if, as the literature review above indicates, we do not know whether such campaigns are demonstrably successful in reducing either the risks to migrants or migrant numbers.

The increasing interest in information campaigns has occurred alongside a strong narrative from

European policymakers which portrays people smugglers as the real threat, both to the safety of migrants and to the integrity of border control systems, and as being to blame for the increasing numbers of asylum-seekers and 'irregular migrants'. 'Saving lives [through rescue at sea] is not going to be enough. We need to do much more to smash the criminal gangs that are fuelling this terrible trade in people…', said UK Prime Minister David Cameron (cf. Hughes 2015). The term smuggler is often used interchangeably with trafficker by policymakers, despite important differences between the two which further emphasize the construction of their role as the primary exploiter of migrants. There is existing literature problematizing the construct of 'the criminal smuggler' (see, for example, Alpes and Nyberg Sørensen 2015; Carling and Hernández-Carretero 2011; Koser 2001) and it is beyond the scope of this paper to review it in detail. To summarize, it is over-simplifying a complex reality to always portray smugglers as criminals who do not care about the lives of their charges. They could also be portrayed as facilitators or brokers – smugglers can provide a valuable service, helping refugees to escape from dangerous situations (Koser 2001). The narrative of smugglers as the main cause of risk to migrants and asylum-seekers fails to acknowledge why a migrant-smuggling business exists: the lack of regularized legal routes for people from countries like Afghanistan (or Syria, Somalia, Eritrea etc.) to travel into Europe. As Carling and Hernández-Carretero (2011: 45) point out, 'Professional smuggling services are a necessity for the vast majority of those who seek asylum in Europe, regardless of the merits of their claim'.

Apart from shifting responsibility for migrant endangerment from European border regimes to smugglers, what other symbolic purpose does the focus on 'criminal smugglers' serve, particularly in relation to information campaigns? It feeds the notion that migrants are not aware of the risks of being smuggled, despite countless empirical accounts, some of which are cited in this paper (and see also the paper by Belloni in this special issue), which suggest that this is inaccurate. As long as the European public is told that smugglers are both the cause of increasing numbers of arrivals and a threat to the migrants' safety

and wellbeing, then information campaigns – sympathetically warning would-be migrants of the risks of migration and consequently discouraging it – make for a compelling policy narrative, allowing European policymakers to position their actions as controlling migration, whilst being seen to meet their humanitarian responsibilities (after Vaughan-Williams 2015).

The implications of this policy narrative, based on 'wrong assumptions' (Alpes and Nyberg Sørensen 2015) lead me to my final argument – that, in addition to shifting responsibility and blame onto smugglers, the presence of information campaigns also shifts responsibility onto the migrants themselves. In a fascinating account of the use of images and other media in the control of migration, Heller (2014) cites an interview with Laurentiu Ciobanica, the head of mass information activities for IOM, who explains what they hope their information campaigns will achieve: 'We would like to have an impact on information levels, then move on to perception, then attitudes, and ultimately try to influence, *for the better*, the behaviour of migrants' (my emphasis, cf. Heller 2014: 312). Although claiming to be reluctant to make an explicit link between the two, in the same article Heller also points to the way in which the violence and control of colonialism were legitimized by parallel narratives of a caring and civilizing mission. He cites the work of anthropologist Brian Larkin on educational cinema as a 'civilizing tool' in 1920s' British-colonised Nigeria:

> …although Africans were perceived as naturally inferior, it was nonetheless considered that by training them, they could produce modern *rational* subjects (…) This echoes IOM's belief that the migrants leave their countries based on ill-informed and irrational decisions and that, with better information on risks provided to them, they will not leave (Heller 2014: 309).

In other words, information campaigns such as Rumours About Germany provide Afghans with 'objective information' (IOM 2004) and advice about the risks of fleeing Afghanistan for Europe. It follows that, if they then choose to ignore this paternalistic advice and travel to Europe, they, rather than the

European migration policymakers, can be blamed for the dangers they encounter on the way.

Conclusion

Vaughan-Williams (2015) entreats scholars interested in the persistently violent nature of European migration management to pay attention to the inherent ambiguity between the representation of migrants both as a threat and as human lives worthy of being saved. I argue that information campaigns represent one way in which migration policymakers can ostensibly be providing an 'objective' educational service (protecting migrants from financial and bodily danger) whilst also be seen to be taking action to try to reduce the numbers of migrants and refugees arriving in Europe.

This raises interesting questions about the intended audience for European governments' information campaigns. The declared primary audience is potential migrants but I suggest that the actual intended audience is much wider and includes European publics as well as the governments of migrants' countries of origin. Another potential audience, which I have not addressed, is, of course, existing migrants and diasporas. How do Afghans living in Europe feel when they see the images and other media discouraging their compatriots from leaving Afghanistan? During previous fieldwork, a young female Afghan in London told me how she felt when she saw targeted advertizing in Dari from the IOM suggesting that she 'go home' through an assisted voluntary-return programme: 'This is my home now, why don't they want me to stay?'. Despite Ambassador Potzel's claim that the Rumours About Germany campaign is about information, not deterrence, the sense that they are trying to discourage Afghans from coming to Germany is hard to miss, and the campaign will be seen by Afghans in Germany through social media and Afghan satellite television. The implications of seeing such messages for their socio-cultural integration would make for interesting further research.

Carling and Hernández-Carretero (2011: 49) write that 'Awareness campaigns are harmless interventions in the sense that migrants' safety or integrity is not

directly affected'. As such, information campaigns fulfil a humanitarian narrative about protecting would-be migrants from exposing themselves to the risks of being smuggled into Europe. In this paper I have argued that this narrative both ignores the reasons why people living in countries like Afghanistan might want and need to leave their country, and fails to acknowledge that European border control and migration management are the key reasons why people need to avail themselves of the services of people smugglers. Thus, whilst they may not appear directly harmful, I suggest that information campaigns have symbolic power, shifting responsibility for migrant injury and death onto, first, the shoulders of the smugglers and, ultimately, the shoulders of the migrants themselves.

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