

Role of Desire in Risk-Perception: A Case Study of Syrian Refugees' Migration towards Europe

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Abstract : The aim of the manuscript is to further the understanding of risky decision-making in the context of forced and irregular migration. The empirical evidence is collected through interviews with Syrian refugees who arrived in Europe via irregular pathways. Analytically, it has been approached through the juxtaposition between risk perception and the notion of desire. As different frameworks have been developed to address differences in risk perception, the common thread was the understanding that individual risk-taking has been addressed in terms of benefits outweighing risks. However, this framework cannot explain a big risk an individual takes because of an underprivileged position and due to a lack of positive alternatives, termed as risk-taking from vulnerability. The accounts of the field members of this study that crossed the sea in rubber boats to arrive in Europe make an empirical fit to such a postulate by reporting that the risk they have taken was not the choice but the only coping strategy. However, the vulnerability argument falls short of explaining why the interviewees, thinking retrospectively, find the risky journey they have taken to be worth it, while they would strongly advise others to restrain from taking such a huge risk. This inconsistency has been addressed by adding the notion of desire to migrate to the elements of risk perception. Desire, as a subjective experience, was what made the risk appear smaller in cost-benefit analysis at the time of decision-making of those who have realized migration. However, when they reflect on others in the context of potential migration via the same pathway, the interviewees addressed the others' lack of capacity to avoid the same obstacles that they themselves were able to circumvent while omitting to reflect on others' desire to migrate. Thus, in the risk-benefit analysis performed for others, the risk remains unblurred and tips over the benefits, given the inability to take into account the desire of others. If desire, as the transformative potential of migration, is taken out of the cost-benefit analysis of irregular migration, refugees might not have taken the risky journey. By casting the theoretical argument in the language of configuration, the study is filling in the gap of knowledge on the combination of migration drivers and the way they interact and produce migration outcomes.

Keywords : refugees, risk perception, desire, irregular migration

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