

# A Word About Naïvety: Reflections on a debate in Toronto

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In the afternoon of the colloquium day at York University, where the paper "Cross-cultural Cooperation among Displaced Persons" (*Refuge*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (March 1989), pp. 4-6) was presented, there was a heated discussion between colloquium participants about democracy and power, in relation to refugees and forced migrants.

The view of CRS Director Howard Adelman and the presented paper's approach created the frame and the two poles of the debate. Professor Adelman was somewhat skeptical about the effectiveness of the "soft-politics of mutual understanding", framed by horizontal communication in interpersonal networks. He demonstrated, using the historical example of the New Left of the 1960s, that extensive horizontal communications only led to endless meetings with talk, more talk and double-talk, social paralysis and, finally, to disillusionment. The least patient ones, then, taking a decision on "radical efficiency", as a last resort, turned to active violence or pure terrorism. By contrast, he argued, "hard-nosed politics" (his term) may achieve far more success by using traditional, informal ways of political influence within existing hierarchical structures of society, would be the aim of the operation whether the protection of refugees or something else. Later, in his article on "Power and the Powerless" (*Refuge*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (March 1989), pp. 1-3), he returned to the issue and approached it from a slightly different angle: is the intention to build horizontal communication channels among refugees and forced migrants, in order to facilitate multicultural self-reliance and participation, the greater naïvety, or the complete reliance of refugees on the humanitarianism and good will of their hosts? His emphatic final conclusion in that article was addressed to Canadians: "Help restore power to these individuals [i.e., refugees] by utilizing your power."

The same question, though, addressed to refugees, is still unanswered. We might know by now what can and should be done by Canadian or other citizens, but we still do not know whether the self-reliance of non-citizens,

without resorting to desperate and violent actions, is simply naïvety on our part. This is the question to which we are seeking a feasible answer here.

Following the tradition of liberal thinking, the hesitant-humanitarian Hamletian-Raskolnikovian experience might suggest what Montesquieu expressed so clearly in his Persian Letters: if politics seeks to legislate love, it will end in violence. If this is true, then we should be suspicious about our "soft-liner" horizontal politics of mutual understanding, because it could eventually lead to violence. One could stop at this point, because this is one possible (and clearly feasible) answer to the posed question. The problem, however, still remains: in the absence of insider-initiated participation there is an apparent *gap in democracy*, even in otherwise democratic societies. We witness this gap by noticing that access and entitlements to democratic fora are selectively distributed among *de facto* inhabitants of a country.

Looking for an alternative answer, we might listen to the voice of contemporary history. It tells us that horizontal communication-based cooperation has a radically different meaning for the late 1980s and the 1990s from that for any other previous era. The apparent mushrooming of local and world-wide non-vertical communication is the result of the "information revolution", that is, the emergence of new information (and, to some extent, transportation) technologies. Its powerful opportunities have been exploited first, as usual, by the private (that is, business) sphere, particularly in finance, banking and the media. Secondly, and this is less usual, the non-governmental organization (NGO) sphere (that is, the non-business private sector) has arrived, having become aware of the opportunity for much greater efficiency of operation. Today there is a visible global web of these organizations, exercising horizontal communication-based cooperation around the world. Finally, as usual, the public (that is, government) sphere has realized this communication interdependence. Some governments regard it as a threat to sovereignty (the classic example is the controversy between governments of less-industrialized countries and multina-

tional corporations, or the restrictive national regulations on private satellite broadcasts; though, these kinds of communication might be regarded as vertical rather than horizontal). These governments in other fields and the other national and federal governments try to encourage, in varying degrees, horizontal cross-border communication in business or in "human contacts", as personal exchanges are called in documents of the Helsinki-conferences (CESCE).

From this short review of the current state of local and world-wide non-vertical communication, one might gain the impression that new technologies are creating a new frame also for world-wide political activities. It is probably meaningless to identify this frame (or infrastructure) with any traditional political wing. In such an unfortunate and misleading case, the advocating of free, horizontal business interactions could be called the New Right argument, whilst advocating the *same* free, horizontal interaction, but among non-business private actors, could be a typical New Left demand. So far from this, horizontal communication, relying on new technologies, is, in itself, a new and neutral frame, which can be filled with any kind of political, economic or cultural activities.

Robert Mazur says about refugee integration in a Refugee Participation Network (Oxford) paper: "a frequently ignored prerequisite of success ... is that ... integration be a process of communication in which solutions are worked out in an interactive basis". This is indeed a prerequisite of success, because horizontal communication among displaced persons enables the identification of common needs and interests and the action upon this identity is a self-reliant, participatory manner. It does not have to end in violence, as Montesquieu and others, otherwise probably quite rightly, would suggest. There are two reasons for saying this: first, the social impact of new technologies and, second, the multicultural cooperation feature of horizontal communication.

The effectiveness of new ways in communication makes it possible for inexpensive world-wide access to be mutually available, and can eliminate endless, fruitless meetings. Meanwhile, and more essentially, the multicultural feature of the displaced community (both in the local and global context) prevents certain violent routine-reactions of one or another ethnic group. This is so, because