

The Territorial Imperative

The Serengeti migration of over a million wildebeests, zebras and gazelles crosses nations, vast stretches of inhospitable land, dangerous rivers, great divides. It is pushed and pulled by the coming of the rains and grasses, by the mating and birthing of the next generation, by the demands of family and herds and tribes.

Watching them, it is clear that the movement of animals follows inextricable natural laws. Survival, and its related hard drives for water, food, reproduction and family, are fundamentally no different for man as for the storybook animals on African parade.

When you add the fact that man is able to decide that such abstractions as religion, freedom and the dignity of work are as important as food and water, the idea that you can fence in or out humans who are on the move for such imperatives is preposterous.

This fall, seeing the centuries-old movement of an entire animal ecosystem caught me up short, especially in combination with a summer spent in countries that are each struggling with the same migration problems as is the United States. The stresses that push animals, including man, across territories are not going to be stopped by rhetoric. The lessons from nature place our immigration debate in a much more profound and scientific context.

Clearly we cannot stop the migration of “have nots” into “have” nations by laws or fences. It has been tried all over the world, and it never works.

Spain wants to stop North Africans crossing the Gibraltar Strait. France needs its Algerians and Moroccans for labor but is troubled by the cultural differences they bring. Norway does not have enough workers, but it is not comfortable granting long-term rights to its foreign help. Italy has unauthorized movement across the channel from Croatia, Bosnia, Slovenia and points east. Tanzania and South Africa are barely holding their own economically due to the pressures of refugees from Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe. England struggles with the right balance among its new diverse popu-


lation and its homogeneous heritage. The United States sees unlawful workers as a social issue, not a labor solution.

Each of these countries offers a mini-study of the reasons immigration will remain one of the dominant global themes.

It is not political posturing that will dictate human migration over the next half

century; instead, it is demographic facts, among them: the aging of the developed world and its decrease in available labor, the decline of birth rates in Europe and Russia, the high birth rates in the developing world, the bulge in the numbers of youth in Muslim countries and Mexico and much of Central America, the Islamization of Europe, the steep increase in serious illnesses in China and India related to pollution and overcrowding, the concentration of resources in have-

not countries parallel to their excessive use in have countries.

Only countries that acknowledge these demographic facts and build strategies around them will be able to redefine and resolve unwanted migration. The rest will simply continue to have to deal with the inevitable consequences of forces much greater than the artificial line-drawing of nation states who foolishly think that such borders will hold up against life-or-death survival pressures. 

The stresses that push animals, including man, across territories are not going to be stopped by rhetoric. We cannot stop the migration of “have nots” into “have” nations by laws or fences. It has been tried all over the world, and it never works.



Roxie Bacon

Roxie Bacon is a former President of the State Bar of Arizona. She is a Distinguished Fellow at Western Progress, an organization dedicated to the coordination and advancement of progressive policy solutions.