

INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR GIORGOS KALLIS*

Marco Armiero

Question: Professor Kallis could you please introduce in few words CLICO project?

Answer: CLICO is an interdisciplinary collaborative research project financed by the European Commission, bringing together fourteen research teams, mostly from Europe but including also partners from the Middle East and Africa. Our goal is to shed light on the interrelationships between climate change, water hazards (droughts and floods) and human vulnerabilities.

Q.: In your project you talk a lot about human vulnerability. In which sense would you envision migration as a part of human vulnerability? According to you, is migration more adaptation or evidence of crisis?

A.: It can be either or even both, depending on the historical and geographical context. We do not aim to come with a universalizing thesis on whether immigration is "good or bad", but to understand better the dynamics under which immigration emerges as an adaptive strategy to hydro-climatic stresses as well as the complex socio-environmental forces that lead people to leave involuntary their homes.

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Q.: Your project includes eleven in deep case-studies from Southern Italy to Egypt, from Spain to Turkey. Could you use one of these case-studies to illustrate the way in which your project frames the relationships between migration and environmental changes?

A.: Take the example of the seasonal Kurdish workers travelling from the depths of Anatolia to cultivate watermelons on the Seyhan basin, on the Turkish coast, under appalling living and working conditions. The Seyhan is expected to face more frequent and severe droughts due to climate change. And all this in the context of the changing political economy of Turkey and its trade relations with its neighbours. How will this affect Kurdish seasonal migrants? Not easy to tell, and there is no simple causation running from climate change to intensifying vulnerabilities for the workers. Perhaps leaving Seyhan for the cities will make them less vulnerable; perhaps more. Only an in-depth, case-study analysis bringing together elements of ethnography, climate and water resource science and political-economy and historical analysis can reveal the complex dynamics at stake and give informed opinions about possible futures.

Q.: With CLICO you put together water scarcity, conflicts, and migrations and try to look at these issues through social sciences. According to you, what is the most challenging problem in doing so? In other words, which has been the most difficult problem you have been facing in the project?

A.: As in any case-study research, isolating the local and context-specific from the general pattern of wider relevance. It is not easy to compare and identify common patterns between the diverse set of cases we are studying, with their different geographical and socio-political conditions and trajectories. But we should. This is the pain and beauty of interdisciplinary social science research.

Q: Securitization seems to be the key word and, actually, the central policy in dealing with migration and, above all, in constructing a narrative of fear about it. Does CLICO deal with this issue? If yes, in which way?

A: Security is the new policy buzzword. There is a struggle between the notions of "national" and "human" security, the first coming from traditional foreign policy/military theories and the latter emerging as a fruit of the UN human rights discourse. Even though human security

is a laudable ideal, I am not yet personally convinced that it offers additional insights in analytical or normative terms, compared to older terms, such as "vulnerability". I find it also strange that at times at which the best system advanced societies devised to secure human well-being, our social security system and the Welfare State, are collapsing, to spend intellectual and political energy on vague notions of "human security", which we do not know what it is precisely, what it takes to do it, and who is to provide it. Strengthening and expanding (geographically, demographically and thematically) the social security system would go a long way into reducing human vulnerabilities to climate change.

Q: According to the results collecting through your work until now, would you risk to make a prevision about the future of the migratory processes and how they will affected or be affected by environmental changes?

A: No, I will not. Ok, I will. Migration processes are a constant feature of human societies, and they have always been driven by socio-environmental changes in the place of origin, producing new socio-environmental spaces in the place of arrival. Climate change will accelerate such processes compared to current rates, but I am not sure whether we will experience something radically bigger or more apocalyptic than the great migrations that accompanied industrialization and the growth of the Americas in 19th and early 20th century.

Q: Will CLICO include comparison with other geographical areas, like the US and Mexican borders where also migration, water and environmental change are relevant issues? Or do you think that the Mediterranean basin has a specificity?

A.: No, we will not work on a comparison ourselves, but we will be more than happy to collaborate informally and exchange information and experience with colleagues working in these areas.