

FROM FERMI TO MIGRATION PARADOXES

There have been many attempts to solve the Fermi paradox. But we should prioritize earthly matters rather than focusing on the cosmos, because we are now dealing with the terrestrial and very real migration paradox on our planet.

Text: CHRISTIAN H. KÄLIN *Illustration:* MARCELLUS HALL

Over the years, vast amounts of energy and money have been invested to find out if there is life beyond the human reality we know – so far without success. When we consider the billions of stars in the visible universe, this lack of result is fascinating. In 1950, the brilliant American Italian physicist Enrico Fermi pondered the irrationality of the lack of evidence and asked, “Where is every body?” This is the origin of what we now call the Fermi Paradox. If we know that the universe is expanding and that the Earth and the Milky Way are, figuratively speaking, mere specks of dust compared to the estimated total size of the universe, how can we justify the idea that the inhabitants of the Earth are the only intelligent beings in the cosmos? From a purely mathematical statistical point of view, the probability is high that there are other intelligent beings in the universe. But if we are not the only ones, and there are other intelligent beings on a similar level as the humans on the planet Earth, why have we not yet been visited by extraterrestrials?

WORLDWIDE MASS MIGRATION

This is an interesting question. However, given the numerous problems brewing on Earth, we should rather consider how these resources can be better invested in solving pressing issues. There are several of these, but since I am primarily concerned with migration issues, I mention here as one example the impending worldwide mass migration. Unlike an imminent alien invasion, which I consider unlikely despite Fermi’s interesting musings on the subject, the urgency of this problem is real. The World Bank predicts that more than 200 million people could be displaced by 2050 due to conflict and climate change, while the Institute for Economics and Peace indicates that up to 1.2 billion people could be displaced worldwide by then.

To tackle this major uprooting of people, society must ensure not only that strategies are being enacted that combat climate change and rising carbon emissions but also the understanding and capability of marginalized groups to adapt to this harsh new reality. This capability must extend as well to other inhabitants of the planet who may not expect to be displaced but could be, such as Europeans.

Current laws and protections for displaced people should be changed urgently to include those fleeing not only war but also climate change and economic hardship, among other factors. At the same time, we need more immigration in the high net worth domain to counter the issue of shrinking populations in wealthy and developed nations.

However, immigration policy is moving in a more restrictive direction almost worldwide, where recognized refugees are not granted all rights due under current rules, urgently needed skilled workers are only granted residence permits with difficulty, and investors and entrepreneurs who create wealth and jobs are unwanted as immigrants in certain political circles.

We are witnessing the emergence of a migration paradox. The mass migration of people due to increasing geopolitical volatility and global warming will significantly exacerbate the existing refugee crisis, which is largely caused by past and present conflicts and socioeconomic hardship in many states around the world. Rather than worrying about extraterrestrials, we need to consider what will happen when several hundred million people are on the run in the near future, and how we in the West can develop a well coordinated immigration policy that will offset our negative demographic trends and provide positive stimuli to our economies.

SHIFT IN POWER AND INFLUENCE

In addition to climate change, the causes

of which can be discussed at length, increased political and military conflicts will lead to more migration. The war in Ukraine has lasted for over a year. There is no end in sight and the people of Ukraine are currently bearing the brunt of a geopolitical conflict that extends far beyond the borders of the two nations involved. China, Russia, and the USA, as well as other national powers, are engaged in a global tug of war in which cyberwarfare, economic sanctions, propaganda, and military assets are used to gain or retain earthly power and influence. This dynamic, too, will shift the balance of power globally and exacerbate the unprecedented migration of people in the coming decade.

WHAT’S NEXT?

In Carl Sagan’s book, *Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space*, whose title was inspired by a photograph taken by NASA’s Voyager 1 spacecraft as it lifted off from Earth in 1990, he aptly wrote, “In our darkness, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves. Earth is the only world so far known to harbor life. There is, at least in the near future, no other place to which our species could migrate.” I tend to agree. That is where we should focus all our energy – on Earth and all its real problems and not on space with all its unknowns, and the extraterrestrials that, while highly likely to exist, we have not been able to find to date, and they have not been able to find us either. Rather, we will have to deal with a new and real migration paradox, which may prove even more difficult to solve than that of Fermi.

Dr. Christian H. Kaelin is Chairman of Henley & Partners and a shareholder at Arnova Capital.

