Migration

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Preface

The United Nations defines a refugee as someone who has reason to fear persecution because of his race, religion, political opinion, social group or nationality. Refugees have the right to seek and receive asylum in any other country. In Belgium for instance, one is given the official refugee status after it is proven that one can no longer live in his or her own country because of the previously mentioned reasons. As long as this official status is not attributed, and the refugee has started the asylum procedure, one is considered an asylum seeker. There is a prohibition on returning an (acknowledged) refugee to a country where his or her life or safety is in danger. Curiously, people have the right to be in a safe country, however they have not the right to get here. Here arises the case that refugees are illegal in the act of crossing the border but their stay becomes temporarily legal as soon as they have crossed it. This results in border control to keep refugees out, but the providing of services to them once they manage to get in.

One of the most famous political philosophers of the twentieth century, John Rawls, assumed that justice was to be organized within the nation state. Global justice seemed a non-issue for him. Rawls saw migration merely as a small phenomenon to be fitted in a theory of justice within the nation state. However, nowadays migration cannot be seen as an incidental thing but due to problems in Syria, Iraq and Yemen as well as in North Africa as one of the most pressing problems, one that has impact on nearly every society. Political theorists are waiting for the new ‘Rawls’ of the twenty-first century whom will equip us to talk about questions of global justice, and in which migration will be a key issue.

One can ask, however, whether such a new figure might not be found, distributed, over a range of voices who could lead the way to such a new perspective on global justice. To hear them together might result in something more than their independent views. This issue is an attempt to gather a number of these interesting voices to talk about migration and hope to help you to hear a herald of such a global justice.
In this article I invite you to reflect on the rationale behind migrations (i.e. cross-border displacements) and the constructed character of being a migrant. For this, I’ll shortly analyse the character of some pre-modern and modern migrations, and propose a ground of understanding for the new migrations with which we are confronted today. I propose indeed to distinguish three major important eras: (1) the pre-industrial c.q. pre-modern era, (2) the era of industrialisation c.q. modernity, and (3) the era of post-industrialism and post-modernity, c.q. globalisation. To simplify the overview, I’ll focus on Europe related migration patterns. I apologize for this obviously too Western perspective. I know that the reality is much more complex and rich, but it is impossible to treat the topic in a universal approach with the needed qualifications in such a short article.

Pre-modern times: the Religious-Political Rationale

In pre-modern times religion, economy and politics are strongly interconnected. An example: Everyone heard about the exile of the Jewish people from the Northern and the Southern parts of Israel in the 8th and 6th centuries B.C. During the Assyrian occupation of the North (in 722 B.C.), people were deported from Samaria and replaced by people from outside Canaan. During the Babylonian occupation of the South of Israel, in 597, 587 and 581, three times again some elites from Jerusalem were deported to ‘the rivers of Babylos’. Even if such deportations had important, over the centuries also numerical consequences, at their very beginnings they concerned migrations of only some 5,000 thousand people.

In pre-modern times, there were lots of similar deportations or also voluntary exiles to escape the religious persecutions that have not been called migrations. Who doesn’t remember, some 2 millennia later, the voluntary migration of a lot of Flemish people to the Netherlands during the occupation of the Southern Netherlands by the duke of Alva, or at the end of the 15th Century the flights of Jewish and Muslim people from Spain to the Ottoman empire?

At the end of the 2 millennia long pre-modern times, we assist at a transition period of 2 centuries, where one stays with one leg in pre-modernity and with another leg already in beginning modern times. We assist at the last examples of religious-political migrations, namely from Europe to what will become the USA, and we see how labour market motives take over. In the 19th Century, the industrialisation of Europe will find its beginning acceleration. Only from that moment on, the rationale of autonomously functioning labour markets will become push as well as pull factors for people to leave a country for another country, one will start speaking of migrations and of migrants. Typical for this new era of economic migrations will be that it will reveal different patterns of migration at one and the same time: transoceanic migrations will be accompanied by inner-European migrations, there will be inner-country migrations from the rural areas to the cities, accompanied by migrations from the cities to other countries. Typical for the name ‘migration’ will be its low class character. Later, a new name will be created for middle-high and high class people, namely ‘expats’.

Modern times and Industrialization: the Guest Work Era

Between 1800 and 1930 about 40,000,000 Europeans emigrated to America, and to a lesser extent Africa and Asia. Between 1800 and 1860 these were largely British (66%), and German-speaking people (22%). From 1860 until 1930 these people were joined by emigrants from Italy, Spain and Eastern Europe. These migrations continued later too. But gradually we see a migration within Europe itself. Indeed, after 1822 a migration line ran from Ireland to England, and, particularly after 1875, emigrations started from countries such as Italy, Spain and Poland to other countries in the North-West of Europe, alongside the already existent transoceanic lines.

In the countries of NW Europe, until World War I (= WWI), this emigration took place at a time in which the countries involved very often colonised other countries outside of Europe, in other words, they sought to exploit the resources of non-European countries for economic reasons. Immediately after WW I, in 1918, a new migration started between the various countries of Europe, and this lasted until the depression of the thirties. For a country like Belgium it was in this period that guest workers started immigrating from Italy and countries in Eastern Europe to work in the coalmines.

Between 1939 and 1945, during WW II, 11,000,000 men were removed from the German labour market and replaced by men from foreign countries.WW II was clearly a watershed, though in the first decade after WW II a number of migration lines dating from the interbellum period, and even before then, continued, until the closing date of 1974.

After 1945, immigrants went to Great Britain from Ireland (a migration line that had already been in existence for more than 100 years), and from the countries of the (New) Commonwealth.In common with the Continent, Great Britain also attracted European Voluntary Workers, particularly from Italy. France attracted immigrants from Italy, Spain, Portugal, Morocco, Turkey and the former Yugoslavia. Of course, there were also Algerians, but until the Evian agreements of 1955 Algeria was French territory. In more recent times immigration there in France started from West Africa. The Benelux countries (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) also organized a new immigration of guest workers. In most countries, with the exception of Belgium, they called on workers from the former colonies, supplemented to a very large extent by workers from Southern (and Eastern) Europe. A particularity was offered by Switzerland, that worked with annual permits for professionals from Italy, Germany, France, Austria, Spain and Yugoslavia.

The main characteristic of this immigration period between 1945 and the 1960s, is that it was strongly localized around regions of heavy industry (coal and steel), and the guest workers (for they were spoken of in these terms) usually remained there for the rest of their lives. Moreover, they were mostly Europeans of a Christian background. This situation actually came to an end because the countries of origin themselves, such as Italy and Spain, experienced a strong economic revival at the end of the 1950s.
Germany took a bit a different position in the 1950s. Indeed, from WW II until 1961 Germany drew 3,000,000 people from East Germany. So, Germany didn’t need other guest workers. In 1955 it also signed a protocol with Italy to organize guest work, as Belgium had done in 1946. And later, also in Germany, migration started from Spain and Greece (1960), Turkey (1961), Portugal (1964), and the former Yugoslavia (1968).

The oil crisis, 1973-74, was the period in which the countries of the EEC (currently EU), each individually, decided to call for a stop to the migration. In theory it was the end of the guest worker era. It is not abnormal that this era still continued for one generation (some 15 years), due to family reunification and other demographic reasons. It will be followed by another ambivalent period of 20 years, until 2010, where one assists at mechanisms that permit refugees to migrate to safer countries and in a hidden or indirect way also permits to organize migrations that have been called migrations of economic refugees and irregular migrants. The transition period has led us into a new era, that of the ‘Fortress Europe’. It is important to see that, to understand better the discussion about ‘Schengen’ during the current refugee crisis.

On 1.1.1987 the Single European Act again stressed the idea of community citizenship and the exclusion of resident third-country nationals was again made explicit. Some years later, a very important stage in the more concrete institutionalization of the distinction between Europeans and ‘the Other’ is the Treaty of Maastricht (February, 1992). From then on every person with the nationality of a member state became a citizen of the Union, with electoral rights, at the local level (Directive 94/80/EC, see OJ L368, 31/12/94: 38) and to the European Parliament (Directive 93/109/EC, see OJ L329, 30/12/93: 34-8). But third country nationals do not enjoy these political rights. From that moment on, Italians living in Belgium are not seen as ‘immigrants’ anymore, but as ‘Europeans’. ‘Immigrants’ are non-EU-citizens.

The signing of the Schengen Agreement (14.6.1985) by some European countries aimed to dispense with the internal borders, but on the other hand strengthened the idea that there is no longer any room for new third country nationals in what was starting to look like a “Fortress Europe”. It is important to see that, to understand better, the discussion about ‘Schengen’ during the current refugee crisis.

In 1973-1974, what has become the formal end of the Guest Worker Era in Europe, a new kind of boundary (or social and juridical identity, or citizenship) has been created, i.e. between the third country nationals with right of unrestricted residence and those without right of residence. As of then there is actually no room left for newcomers in the category of permanent ‘European’ third-country nationals, a category that should in theory die out, unless via family reunification, a special work permit, or right to asylum.

In the area of social identities, currently we find the following division in the European Union:

- There are the different national identities, per country, for those who have acquired national citizenship; each country itself decides how this citizenship is acquired;
- There is a complementary European social identity with specific political rights at the local and European levels (but not the national level);
- There is an ‘other, in some sense half-hearted, European social identity’, complementary to the national identity of the country of origin for long-term third country nationals;
- There are people with a national residence permit restricted in place and time;
- There are undocumented migrants, with no residence permit.

In other words, migration as a reality and as a challenge remains, but it can receive different names. Also being and remaining a migrant has clearly become the result of a construction. Modern times have led to a culture of construction of very diverse identities in one and the same locality, also for what concerns migration as physical, geographical movement.

Transition Years of Diversification: between Guest Work and the Global (1990-2010)

As of 1989 most countries have seen a strong rise in the number of asylum applications. This has led to a debate and to a policy that distinguishes between the acceptance of asylum applications and a rejection of economic migrants. During the 1990s the international smuggling of migrants and the international trafficking of human beings came also closer to the political foreground (Leman, 2015).

It is in the 1990s also that a growing Islam has become more visible, through places of prayers and halal butchers’ shops, and through controversies about the secular, the minarets, a.s.o. In most countries on the Continent this has involved particularly Maghrebians and Turks. The growth of the Maghreb population after 1974 is largely related to family formation and reunification, while a not unimportant part of this migration has disappeared from the statistics via naturalisations and acquisitions of na-
tionality. The same happened more or less for the Turks. However, it’s worth noting that the profile of the current Turkish migration, seen largely from the country of origin, appears radically different and more differentiated than the Maghreb migration pattern. Turks migrate around the world, as the Italians and Chinese have done.

Other migrations have been started up or reinforced. There has been a migration from West Africa, across the Maghreb (transit zone), to the European Union. In the 1990s Italy has been acting for Africa as a springboard, from which networks of African migrants can be set up and spread further to the other countries of the European Union. It will continue in the post-modern era that will follow. And after Mao’s death the migration from a totally different continent, and more precisely from China, has also been intensified, already started up in the 1970s, but increasing in the 1990s. Also in the 1990s, there are workers coming from some Eastern European areas: remaining mobility is typical for them. And we should not forget the trans-national life of the gypsy populations, again largely from the Balkans. At the same time, South America did not remain absent. The main characteristic here is ‘chain migration’ and the fact that the women usually find work as domestic helpers. Many among them arrive via the Iberian peninsula, but also London is an important place of first immigration for them. Independently of this there has been a certain brain migration from South America to the USA, but to some extent on Europe too.

The diversification of the migration patterns in the transition era has gone hand in hand with a feminisation and rejuvenation of migration. The educational systems in the regions of origin have integrated more and more girls, and the labour markets in the host countries have a real demand for women for specific jobs, in the care sector, and also as domestic staff. Younger people in the home country often have a higher capacity in terms of information, communication and mobility than their parents.

Other changes in the migration will also grow in importance in the near future. Consider for example the many Europeans, often of pensionable age, who live for several of the winter months in the warmer areas around the Mediterranean Sea, and even join the permanent seasonal residents, possibly even owning a second home. A good example is the many British and German people who go to live on the Greek island of Crete, often bringing the island’s residents from 550,000 to 2,000,000 for extended periods, or four times the original number (Vanlangendonck, 2002).

Different again, we have the ‘expatriates’, of the type found in Brussels (Bellier, 2002), but who are also present in other large European cities, such as officials in international organisations or executive staff in big companies (Meyer, 2002).

So, the debates are going more and more also about seasonal tourism, circular migrations, brain migrations, ex-pats, and IDPs (internally displaced persons). Some anthropologists prefer even to speak about mobilities and no longer about migrations.

Global Migrations

Today we assist at what is called a refugee crisis. Experts speak of the 21st century as what will be the century of the Mass Migrations. As reason for it, they see the globalisation. Globalisation is indeed an important concept for an understanding of current and future developments. This term implies a cluster of processes in which the members of a community become interconnected in all kinds of ways, not at least due to the existence of a virtual space that did not exist in former times. It has led to a process of ever quickening communication and mobility.

What happens is that people, pressed by important push factors, through the network understand that they may find opportunities to escape the situation or to improve their life in a very important way, for themselves or at least for their children in the future, while escaping their country and migrating to very specific other countries. Of course, normally it may not concern the most poor among the candidates, but it doesn’t mean that the motives are not understandable.

At the side of the candidate receiving countries, one sees – also very understandably – that reasons that may explain their disposition to accept the migrants surfing on globalisation are: the own demographic situation, the constraints of the labour market, and the respect for the strict interpretation of the 1951 Geneva convention.

Which will be the sources of cross-border displacements in the coming decennia? Environmental change, food insecurity, violence, lack of job opportunities (e.g. also at the level of someone’s level of education), the traditional criteria of the Geneva convention, all of these will become sources of human displacement in a context of globalizing world. The places where to go, will be neighbouring countries (for the poor people) or will be determined by the internet at farther distance for middle and high class people, or for poorer people who enjoy the support of a whole community. The distinctions that will be made will be: true refugees (cf. the Geneva convention), survival migrants and economic migrants. Of course, there will also be highly schooled ex-pats and seasonal tourists.

The acceptance or non-acceptance, however, of these people, e.g. the liberal or strict interpretation of criteria will depend on demographic figures in the countries of transit and destination and of the needs on their labour market, and partly also on the acceptance of the outlook of their ethnic-cultural provenance. But even if the situation on the labour market will be an important factor of acceptance or non-acceptance, it will no longer be in a logic of the former modern times Guest Work migrations. It has become highly necessary to develop a migration policy that is adapted to the up and coming decennia. The Canadian migration policy, where one sought for a good balance between demographic needs, labour market constraints and respect for humanitarian duties based on international conventions (as the Geneva convention) may be a good starting point. It should be complemented with an adequate policy vis-a-vis Third World countries, where also Western universities should take their responsibility, by associating some good universities e.g. in Africa to their own campuses in Europe or in North America and establishing efficient exchange programmes for intellectuals from those countries, so that they have no longer reasons to abandon their countries there where they are needed.

References


What justifies open or closed borders in the liberal polity? A normative perspective on the EU refugee crisis

The EU and its Member States anxious for policies on how to deal with refugee movements from war torn Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria headed towards Europe. These movements unfolded into a ‘refugee crisis’ during the summer of 2015 revealing the refugees’ critical humanitarian situation and the EU’s and Member States’ divide response to the situation. While some Member States showed a restrictive position on refugee reception and tried to reinforce EU external and internal borders others have opened their borders and called for solidarity in providing for refugee protection. Unlike ever seen before, EU governments’ positions towards refugee migration differentiate from extremely liberal to extremely illiberal. Political disagreement poses not only the empirical question of how to explain these positions but also the normative question of how to justify open versus closed borders in a liberal polity such as the European Union (EU). The EU defines as liberal in terms of its adherence to norms such as democracy, human rights, rule of law, and social justice. The refugee crisis calls for a reflection on how a liberal polity can justify and legitimise the openness and closure of borders.

Liberal political theory discusses normative justifications for individual rights to inclusion on the one hand and collective rights for exclusion on the other (Cole 2000). In terms of individual rights to inclusion, the obligation of the liberal state to guard those in need of protection and to be hospitable to foreigners leads to the opening of borders. The right to inclusion, first of all, applies to people who cannot expect protection from the state whose citizenship they hold. State persecution of groups of citizens justifies such groups’ search for refuge from their own state by moving to another. The grant of access for non-members is founded upon the liberal state’s own legitimacy with regards to the equality of all its citizens independently of their ethnic, religious, or political status. Denying access to those who are persecuted would mean that the liberal state becomes an accomplice to the persecutory state.

Within contemporary liberal theory, collective rights for exclusion are justified under particular conditions. In this regards, Ackerman, an advocate for universal citizenship and unrestricted movement, holds that: “The only reason for restricting immigration is to protect the ongoing process of liberal conversation itself” (Ackerman 1980: 95). This means that the liberal polity could be threatened because of the liberties it promotes. Completely open borders for mobility and migration could cause the collapse of the various pillars on which the liberal polity rests (freedom, equality, justice). Authors emphasise and qualify different threats that justify closure of the liberal state’s borders. According to Bauböck (1997), restrictions on the grounds of protecting citizens’ social rights act most in accordance with liberal egalitarianism. Social rights allow for the redistribution of resources and more equality among a community’s members. If significantly less equality among members of a society results from open borders, restrictions are then justified (Bauböck 1997: 99). Membership allows for people to commit to each other in order to achieve the liberal project of equality and social justice (Walzer 2003). This approach sacrifices local for global equality, acknowledging that the liberal project of equality and social justice is much more likely to be achieved in the bounded community than a universal global state. Carens (1992) highlights national security as a legitimate reason for restrictions on entry. If “subversives” enter with the goal to overthrow the liberal state, such people pose a serious threat to national security, which would necessitate their exclusion (Carens 1992: 28). Entry can be denied if a person does not accept that the liberal polity treats its members as free and equal moral persons. Those illiberal individuals would pose a threat to the liberal institutions the polity is built upon (Carens 1992).

The principles defined in liberal political theory offer a normative framework for evaluating Member States’ positions during the refugee crisis. Theoretically neither border closure nor complete openness is justified. Openness for people seeking protection is a core claim that cannot be denied without sacrificing to the core liberal claim of protection and human dignity. At the same time, claims for maintaining the security of community, liberal institutions and social entitlements of members justify restrictions of access. Following this train of thought, each EU Member State would have the obligation to offer protection to refugees until their capacity to maintain the liberal polity for their communities has been reached. Transforming this theoretical idea into practice means that a considerable number of refugees could come to the EU before its Member States’ liberal institutions would actually be threa-
The illusion of complete closure vs. the empirics of bordering

Beyond any normative evaluation concerned with how to manage migration and asylum in Europe there is the empirics of the border - that is how states implement border policies on the ground and eventually achieve complete closure. As I discuss now indeed, looking at how Europe’s external border actually works on the ground, one realises a) border closure is simply impossible to be effectively implemented while b) it is not at the border where the management of legal/illegal entrance and residence in the EU actually takes place. First of all, as for today almost the totality of those residing in Europe without the necessary permission – unauthorized residents – have not crossed the border illegally. They have entered the European space mainly by air and with regular permits or forged documents (Cattita, 2014). Yet, even with today’s available technologies, there is no feasible way to secure a border. If we look closely at some of the most symbolic spots of the European external border, it becomes immediately clear as border closure is little more than an illusion, rather than any achievable goal.

For example, while authorities and media concentrate on the overcrowded fishing boats crossing the stretch of sea dividing Lampedusa from North of Africa (Gemi et al., 2012), there are tens of other undetected ways to cross what is possibly one of the busiest maritime areas of the Mediterranean. As I could witness first-hand conducting fieldwork in the area, it is well known amongst locals and border authorities working there as one of the most frequented ways to cross that border undetected is not through Lampedusa. For instance, there are plenty of fishing vessels that simply reach the limit of Italian territorial waters – and especially those facing the Southern coast of Sicily – to transfer into smaller boats migrants who have been hiding below the deck until that point. Once there, these smaller boats will then reach the Italian shores by crossing little more than 12 nautical miles of seawaters. Skeptical about what I was told, I travelled myself many ports of the Southern Sicilian shore, where I saw plenty of small fiberglass boat piled in improvised ‘migrants boats’ graveyards’. Alternatively, leisure boats harboured for example in Tunisia, embark few migrants and take them safely to the Sicilian – or Maltese - ports in exchange of several thousands of Euros. Mazara del Vallo is a port town located in the Westernmost tip of the Southern coast of Sicily. Until less than a decade ago it was the major port of the whole Mediterranean for trafficking fishing vessels. With most fishers employed on board being Tunisians, Mazara’s trawlers were renamed as ‘the Mazara Express’. Mazara’s and Tunisian vessels meet in international waters so that those who want to go back to Tunisia for free embark on the Tunisian vessels, while those who want to reach Italy undetected do the contrary. Authorities can do very little to spot such movements.

In Melilla instead, while authorities and media concentrate on the hundreds of Sub-Saharan Africans that try to climb the nine meters high nets separating the Spanish enclave and Europe from Morocco (de Haas, 2008), the local migrants’ identification and deportation centre was crowded with North Africans or Middle Eastern refugees – especially Palestinians and Syrians –who have entered the city through the authorized gates, using fake Moroccan documents. The Spanish enclave’s Moroccan neighbours of the province of Nador are indeed allowed to enter the city daily, so that a big forged documents’ industry quickly established itself in the Moroccan side. Other times, Moroccans who enter the city with their regular documents – together with the other 30,000 people that daily enter the 60,000 inhabitants’ enclave (Orsini and Schiavon, 2009) – cross inside Europe through away their ID cards or sell them, and denounce themselves to authorities as Algerians. Since no repatriation agreement is in place between Spain and Algeria, these people will be first detained for months and then deported to mainland Spain before being ordered to leave the country. That is when they will go wherever in Europe they have planned to go.

“It is not at the border that the so called ‘illegal immigration’ actually takes place”
If we then look at the more recent Hungarian crisis, once the National government decided to close the border with a series of emergency measures – including the deployment of thousands of soldiers and the building of a net – people simply decided to cross from somewhere else.

Then, while on the one hand it is almost impossible to completely close any border – even more the external one of the EU, as it extends for thousands of kilometres of land and sea - on the other hand it is not at the border that the so called 'illegal immigration' actually takes place. The border covers an only marginal role for the management of migration (Huysmans, 2000). On the contrary, the inherent and high symbolic value of border policies seems to do a lot in terms of putting European liberal values under pressures, as ethnic and cultural relations are exacerbated throughout the process of bordering.

References:


Is Migration Good for the Economy?

Migration is a feature of social and economic life across many countries, but the profile of migrant populations varies considerably. In part this is because of the variety of sources of migration. In much of Europe, for example, citizens enjoy extensive rights to free movement. In Australia, Canada and New Zealand, managed labour migration plays an important role. Other sources include family and humanitarian migration. Whatever its source, migration has important impacts on our societies, and these can be controversial. The economic impact of migration is no exception.

Benefit or burden – what’s the reality? To answer this question, it can be helpful to look at migration’s impact in three areas – the labour market, the public purse and economic growth.

Labour markets

- Migrants accounted for 47% of the increase in the workforce in the United States and 70% in Europe over the past ten years.
- Migrants fill important niches both in fast-growing and declining sectors of the economy. Like the native-born, young migrants are better educated than those nearing retirement.
- Migrants contribute significantly to labour-market flexibility, notably in Europe.

The public purse

- Migrants contribute more in taxes and social contributions than they receive in benefits.
- Labour migrants have the most positive impact on the public purse.
- Employment is the single biggest determinant of migrants’ net fiscal contribution.

Economic growth

- Migration boosts the working-age population.
- Migrants arrive with skills and contribute to human capital development of receiving countries.
- Migrants also contribute to technological progress.

Understanding these impacts is important if our societies are to usefully debate the role of migration. Such debates, in turn, are essential to designing policies in areas like education and employment that maximise the benefits of migration, especially by improving migrants’ employment situation.

This policy mix will, of course, vary from country to country. But the fundamental question of how to maximise the benefits of migration, both for host countries and the migrants themselves, needs to be addressed by many OECD countries in coming decades, especially as rapid population ageing increases demand for migrants to make up shortfalls in the workforce.

Migrant workers make important contributions to the labour market in both high- and low-skilled occupations. Over the past ten years, immigrants represented 47% of the increase in the workforce in the United States, and 70% in Europe (OECD, 2012). Across OECD countries, only a relatively small part of these workforce entrants came through managed labour migration (which represents only a fraction of all movements to the OECD), and more came through other channels, including family, humanitarian and free-movement migration.

In much of Europe, migrants’ employment situation is highest in Switzerland and Luxembourg, whereas is lowest in Germany. In Canada and the United States, has provided new and internationally comparative evidence (Liebig and Mo, 2013). The study suggests the impact of the cumulative waves of migration that arrived over the past 50 years in OECD countries is on average close to zero, rarely exceeding 0.5% of GDP in either positive or negative terms. The impact is highest in Switzerland and Luxembourg, where immigrants provide an estimated net benefit of about 2% of GDP to the public purse. Immigrants are thus neither a burden to the public purse nor are they a panacea for addressing fiscal challenges. In most countries, except in those with a large share of older migrants, migrants contribute more in taxes and social contributions than they receive in
"Migrants contribute more in taxes and social contributions than they receive in individual benefits."

individual benefits. This means that they contribute to the financing of public infrastructure, although admittedly to a lesser extent than the native-born. Contrary to widespread public belief, low-educated immigrants have a better fiscal position – the difference between their contributions and the benefits they receive – than their native-born peers. And where immigrants have a less favourable fiscal position, this is not driven by a greater dependence on social benefits but rather by the fact that they often have lower wages and thus tend to contribute less.

Cross-country differences in the fiscal position of immigrant households are shaped by the design of tax and benefit systems and, even more so, by differences in the composition of the migrant population in terms of age and migrant-entry category.

In countries where recent labour migrants make up a large part of the immigrant population, immigrants have a much more favourable fiscal position than in countries where humanitarian migrants account for a significant part of the immigrant population. Labour migrants tend to have a much more favourable impact than other migrant groups, although there is some convergence over time. On the other hand, the fiscal position of immigrants is generally less favourable in countries with longstanding immigrant populations and little recent labour immigration.

Employment is the single most important determinant of migrants’ net fiscal contribution, particularly in countries with generous welfare states. Raising immigrants’ employment rate to that of the native-born would entail substantial fiscal gains in many European OECD countries, in particular in Belgium, France and Sweden, which would see a budget impact of more than 0.5% of GDP. It would also help immigrants meet their own goals: Most immigrants, after all, do not come for social benefits, but to find work and to improve their lives and those of their families. Efforts to better integrate immigrants should thus be seen as an investment rather than a cost. Migration contributes to spur innovation and economic growth. International migration has both direct and indirect effects on economic growth. There is little doubt that where migration expands the workforce, aggregate GDP can be expected to grow. However, the situation is less clear when it comes to per capita GDP growth.

First, migration has a demographic impact, not only by increasing the size of the population but also by estimated net fiscal impact of immigrants, with and without the pension system and per-capita allocation of collectively accrued revenue and expenditure items changing the age pyramid of receiving countries. Migrants tend to be more concentrated in the younger and economically active age groups compared with natives and therefore contribute to reduce dependency ratios (Gagnon, 2014). Second, migrants arrive with skills and abilities, and so supplement the stock of human capital of the host country. More specifically, evidence from the United States suggests that skilled immigrants contribute to boosting research and innovation, as well as technological progress (Hunt, 2010). The proportion of highly educated immigrants in OECD countries is rising sharply. The number of tertiary-educated immigrants in OECD countries increased sharply. The number of tertiary-educated immigrants in OECD countries is rising sharply, reaching almost 5 million, or 17%, in the past five years. This trend is mostly driven by Asian migration – more than 2 million tertiary educated migrants originating from this region arrived in the OECD in the past five years (OECD-UNDESA, 2013). Few empirical studies have tried, however, to estimate the overall impact of net migration on economic growth, in part because of a shortage of harmonised comparative data on international migration by skills levels. One study that looks at the impact of migration on economic growth for 22 OECD countries between 1986 and 2006 demonstrates a positive but fairly small impact of the human capital brought by migrants on economic growth. The contribution of immigrants to human capital accumulation tends to counteract the mechanical dilution effect (i.e. the impact of population increase on capital per worker), but the net effect is fairly small, including in countries which have highly selective migration policies. An increase of 50% in net migration of the foreign-born generates less than one tenth of a percentage-point variation in productivity growth (Boubtane and Dumont, 2013).

This article appeared earlier on: http://www.oecd.org/migration/

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A los last year, the EU added around thousands of corpses to the mass grave that it has been piling up in the Mediterranean. Estimates differ, many would agree that it at least 31000 people have died in or on their way to entering the EU, since 1992. These needlessly wasted lives speak not only of the EU’s appalling border management. They should be taken as a warning of a far wider tragedy unfolding all across the EU. The dead African migrants could be thought as potentially dead EU citizens. The disregard for their humanity may be seen as a dramatic result of the expanding disrespect for minorities all across the EU.

In 1951, the EU started as a project intended to breathe life into the injured body of a continent mauled by the savagery of nationalistic hubris. The horrid trauma of a landscape filled with doom and the very credible threat of its recurrence brought statesmen around to the then incredible proposal of surrendering part of their sovereignty to a supra-national institution (Vernon, 1953:183). ‘No more war’; brandishing this adage the bold politicians of that time tried to rally the hearts and minds of a devastated Europe. Despite its faceless idealism, this conflict resolution mechanism has indeed managed to turn vicious dictatorships and devastated nations into one of the most developed regions in the world (UNDPIR 2013). By showering wealth on the inflaming rhetoric of unscrupulous nationalists, dispassionate technocrats in Brussels have marginalized such demagogues to the fringes of political life since World War II (Featherstone, 1994). However, the EU’s legitimacy has been eroded by the current crisis, in which new demagogues have found an unprecedented opportunity to put forward their disingenuous yet highly evocative appeals for a retreat into nationalism as the solution to the self-inflicted economic crisis. A little over six decades after the mayhem from which the EU emerged, Europe is again being swayed by an angry political discourse now espoused by increasingly powerful political figures such as Marine Le Pen in France, Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, Nigel Farage in the UK and Marion Kołodziejczyk—in many states and the EU. The overall grand strategy of these tactics is a retreat from openness and an entrenchment in nationalanism. An enthusiasm for diversity has been replaced by an ever-deeper fear of what may be coming from beyond either national or the EU’s external borders. Unscrupulous politicians motivated by the expected reward of political prominence are showing no qualms in going to the basement of their intentions to dust the blunt tools of inflammatory speech. Their solutions to highly complex problems rely on primitive oversimplifications that end up blaming what historically have been the most exploitable scapegoats in times of hardship: vulnerable minorities with poor political representation. For all these opportunistic politicians care, society may be ripped apart if this is what it takes for them to reap the political success they crave.

The EU is manifesting a museum-like mentality that seems to suggest that Europe can only be saved by submitting itself to a glorious taxidermy driven by the ruinous desire to entrench in autarkic nationalism. As if preserving an inessential essential nation in the alchemical form of timeliness was a better alternative than exposing it to the vicissitudes of flows and the naturally unavoidable changes they bring about. It’s a self-destructive scheme that advocates the derealization of the EU in order to keep it pure and homogenous. Afflicted by this ‘border disorder’, the EU keeps confining itself to a speciﬁcally national society may be ripped apart if this is what it takes for them to reap the political success they crave.

What used to be unspeakable anxieties over puriﬁcation have become the baleful cry of xenophobic, racist and EU-skeptical political movements across the EU. Their bitter rhetoric of deportations, detention camps, militarized borders and harassing immigration regimes is becoming not only publicly acceptable, but mainstream in the public debate of both member states and the EU. The overall grand strategy of these tactics is a retreat from openness and an entrenchment in nationalanism. An enthusiasm for diversity has been replaced by an ever-deeper fear of what may be coming from beyond either national or the EU’s external borders. Unscrupulous politicians motivated by the expected reward of political pro-
to them. It is not difficult to see how this antagonism places serious obstacles in the way of integration, divides society and weakens emotional affiliations to national polities and their supranational contain-
er (i.e., the EU). One cannot condemn African migrants without expecting the fallout to affect EU citizens of African descent and the perceptions that their fellow citizens harbor about them. Moreover, the progressive mistreatment of these vulnerable minorities gently paves the way for the persecution of vulnerable minorities of EU citizens, such as Mus-
lems (Bund, 2005), homosexuals, Chinese, Roma (Gezer, 2013), intra-communitarian migrants (ICF GHK & Milieu Ltd., 2013) and Jews (Than, 2013).

If the EU wants to prosper it needs to keep true to the desire to travel, especially when this reason is the desire to travel, especially when this reason is the powerful drive to escape a cruel adversity they have never had any means of influencing (Schapendonk, 2012). EU citizens are no different in this respect. Multitudes of them are embarking for other conti-
nents in search for better lives as result of the eco-
nomic crisis (Economist, 2013a). Migrants need to be given the chance to reclaim their rights and 
be need to be assessed in a lawful and dignified way, which means not only fully abiding by refugee law but also finding ways to make turn their ambitions of residence and citizenship into advantageous po-
lities for the recipient polity. Chasing migrants and locking them in cages or leaving them to drown is inhumane and shameful, as well as a waste of civic 
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Historical Reflections on the 2015 Refugee Crisis

From a historical perspective, the current refugee crisis in Europe is not entirely unprecedented. In this article, which is an authorized transcript of a KU Leuven Metaforum lecture, I will first make some observations on migration and try to answer the question to what extent the current wave today is exceptional. Secondly, I will reflect on our societal reaction towards this migration and examine our expressed solidarity. Thirdly, I will compare the national and the European levels. Finally, I will draw some lessons that can be learned from the past.

Migration
I must say that, as a historian, I have experienced a great deal of déjà vu over the past weeks and months. Indeed, many images were very familiar to me. The Syrian migrants we see today in the Hungarian Puszta reminded me of Hungarian refugees in the same landscape, escaping the Hungarian Uprising of 1956. The boat refugees crossing the Mediterranean Sea are reminiscent of the one million Vietnamese boat people who escaped their country after the fall of Saigon and the Communist takeover in 1975. The provisional shelters we see all over Europe are quite similar to the shelters installed across Europe for Jewish refugees who fled from Nazi Germany.

Even the current political reactions are somewhat similar. At an EU summit in September 2015, politicians agreed to spread 120,000 refugees across Europe. This plan was refused later on by some Eastern European member states. A few decades ago, in 1938 in Evian, 32 states discussed the problem of Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany. This also ended in failure: every state insisted on unfeasible conditions and eventually no one wanted to take in refugees. As a consequence the Evian conference was a huge victory for Hitler. The story about what happened in Evian is little known, because it is too embarrassing for our collective memory. Will this also happen in a few years regarding our reaction to refugees in 2015?

All preceding examples point out that as a historian, I am experiencing a déjà vu. Some people suggest that the current wave of refugees is bigger than any previous. This is not true. Certainly some past instances were smaller, such as the wave of Jews that fled from the Third Reich to Western Europe or the Hungarians that emigrated in 1956. However, during the Yugoslavian wars of the 1990s, far more people left their countries and became refugees. During the First World War, one million Belgians escaped to the Netherlands, which at that time had a population of six million people and accordingly hosted one Belgian refugee for every six Dutch inhabitants. Based on data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, back then there were over four million displaced persons and 600,000 to 800,000 refugees in Western Europe, and this is an underestimation.

I will not go into detail, but just want to make my point clear: the world has faced similar, even larger refugee crises. Today’s numbers are considerable, and it is difficult to predict the future, but the current crisis is not exceptional.

Critics will raise the objection that this crisis is different and that the immigration of Muslim refugees poses a bigger threat. They repeat that Belgian refugees in 1914-18 did not stay forever in the Netherlands and were closer to the local population: they shared the same language and had a similar culture. Muslims, in contrast, are considered to be completely different. They – I quote – import fundamentalism, do not share our values, and want to introduce Sharia law. Poul Scheffer, for instance, argues that Muslim migrants cannot integrate in our society and that their presence has laid bare the bankruptcy of the multicultural society.

Other scholars, however, have a different view. Leo Lucassen, for instance, compared the current fear of Muslims to the perception of other migrant groups in the past and argues that at some point in history all migrants were seen as threats, and that there is little difference between the perception of Jews in the interwar period, or Italians and Germans in the 19th century with the perception of Muslims today. Migrants are always seen as incompatible.

Society
Whereas I see many similarities with the past regarding migration itself, I notice plenty of differences concerning the societal reaction towards the migration.

In the second half of the 20th century, large segments of society rallied behind a foreign cause, for instance for Hungary in 1956, for Vietnam in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, for Anti-Apartheid movements in the 1980s. However, crises in the Muslim world have not had such a mobilizing effect. Palestine has never created such campaigns. The humanitarian campaign for Syria in 2013 only yielded 3.2 million euros. This is much less than other campaigns: we raised over 54 million euros.
for the victims of the tsunami in 2004, or over 25 million euros after the earthquake in Haiti in 2010. It is clear that aid for the humanitarian situation in Syria is a less popular cause than natural disasters. We are less concerned with Islam. The same goes for migrants. Hand in Hand demonstrations on 22 March 1992 and 27 March 1994 in response to the rise of the extreme-right party Vlaams Blok, brought more than 100,000 to the streets. The petition Objektief 479.917 against racism collected more than one million signatures. Later, in 2015, a whole series of music concerts advocating tolerance were held on 1 October – hence its name 0110. The solidarity march for refugees on 27 September 2015, however, had only 15,000 participants and has not been repeated. Just ten days later, on 7 October, a trade union march against the Belgian government’s rigid social policy drew 80,000 to 100,000 participants.

Several elements account for this. First, we do not identify with Syria, at least not to the extent we did with other examples. Concerning Syria, there is no Cold War framework, which explained the solidarity with Hungarians or Poles in the past. We also do not have a postcolonial or – in the case of Germany – a post-WWII guilt complex, that is partly at the base of our aid to the Third World. Secondly, our society has changed since the second half of the 20th century, i.e. the era of the greatest solidarity campaigns. Since the 1980s neo-liberalism has contributed to more individualization and secularization. Since 2008 we have faced a worldwide economic and financial crisis, which leads to fear and impedes solidarity.

Europe
This brings me to a third point of comparison, namely Europe. A striking feature of the societal attitude in a European context is the fact that we only seem to look at events from a national angle. Newly arrived refugees in the Netherlands were until recently perceived as victim of the 20th century and they do not identify with the crisis we are facing in the Middle East. Moreover, these member states have much less experience with migration: they did not recruit guest workers and were historically less appealing for refugees. This led to these countries being very ‘white’. In Poland, for example, 98% of the inhabitants are European and there are very few ethnic minorities. Last but not least, these countries have less democratic tradition and have strong populists and extreme right politicians. The Hungarian Prime minister Victor Orbán is the best known example, but Marian Kotleba, since November 2013 the (Parliamentary) prime minister of the far right party during the current governmental coalition, has also become known in Europe.

The second lesson to learn from history is that new conflicts lead to more polarization and radicalization. We should support a moderate Islam instead of claiming that we are morally superior. So rather than harassing migrants with our values regarding animal rights and the ban on religious slaughter, we should find a way of living together in a way that welcomes differences. The third lesson to learn from history is that new violence leads to new refugees. If we want to stop the flows, we have to create peace and stop selling weapons. The support from Ronald Reagan to the Mujahideen in the Soviet-Afghan war paved the way for the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in the 1990s. MEP Guy Verhofstadt’s campaign of selling weapons to the Syrian rebellions has not solved the conflict. Still, even today some politicians suggest we sell arms to the Kurds. This will create new conflicts: the Kurds have their own agenda, which in fact clashes with the geopolitics of NATO member states.

The conclusion is that these examples demonstrate that we are very involved in this conflict and that we should acknowledge our own responsibility. From a historical perspective, our role is even greater. Europe drew the state borders in the Middle East. It deliberately in our people in order to easily rule them, and also made conflicting promises to Jews and Arabs. Nowadays, we celebrate imperialism heroes such as Lawrence of Arabia without acknowledging the ambiguous role they played. This is remote past, one may think, but Europe has kept its double standard ever since. It explicitly allies with Israel, a country that creates immense frustration in the region and has itself utilized a great deal of violence – think of the Gaza war in 2014. Europe is also an unconditional ally of Saudi Arabia, an un-contested violator of human rights. Simultaneous ly, human rights are one of the major principles in European foreign policy and foreign intervention elsewhere.

Last but not least, we should not forget that many immigrants not only desire to escape violence and war, but also want to build a better future. Europe, or the Western world, is simply richer than many other parts of the world. Importantly, we built our wealth largely by exploiting the rest of the world, by taking resources for our industrial development and flooding markets with our cheaper products from the 19th century onwards. As a historian, speaking from the longue durée, I would say that we are now reaping what we have sown.

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“The world has faced similar, even larger refugee crises.”