

# **Expanding Boundaries**

Borders, Mobilities and the Future  
of Europe-Africa Relations

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## **13 Safe European home – Where did you go? On immigration, the b/orderred self, and the territorial home**

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# 13 Safe European home – Where did you go? On immigration, the b/ordered self, and the territorial home

*Jussi P. Laine*

*The Clash's* (1978) account of the “Safe European Home” provides a captivating narrative about the feelings of displacement and anxiety commonly felt in encountering otherness. The lyrics point to a painful reality in which the freedom of movement of the wealthy and powerful extends further than that of the poor and powerless. They go on to describe how the mere right to move does not necessarily lead to belongingness and acceptance. The song provided inspiration for the argumentation here because of its unblemished articulation of the anxiety caused by unfamiliarity, as well as the yearning for wholeness and the safety of home. As Bourdieu (2000, p. 142) expressed it, whereas the unfamiliar is “out of place”, home is the place “to be”. It is in acknowledging the highly ambivalent and paradoxical effects of the thick, historically rooted, idea of “home” (Duyvendak, 2011, p. 102) reflected in our self-image and used to block immigrant integration that this chapter underlines the need for introspection, for only by looking inwards first may we see outwards clearly and build an honest base for Europe–Africa relations.

In Europe, as well as generally throughout the global north, there has been a consistent drive for ever stricter border and migration policies. However, the persistent attempts to keep immigrants out is at odds with the continent’s increasing need to bring immigrants in (Carr, 2012). Irregular migration has become a field in which estimations often prevail over researched actualities, and hearsay and myths over concrete evidence. The situation has become increasingly paradoxical: what was branded as a “refugee crisis” has become increasingly about filtering between the welcomed and the unwanted rather than a question of mere numbers (Laine, 2020a). European borders have become increasingly unevenly transparent, bringing into question humanitarian pretensions (Harding, 2012) and the ethical premise (Laine, 2018a) of stricter policies. As Finne (2018) expresses it, “[i]mmigration is, literally, the poor man knocking on the rich man’s door, and the enforcement of borders is slamming the door shut”.

In contrast with the mere attempt to close state spaces, support for more deterrent policies stems from the common narratives that posit borders as hard lines and defences against all kinds of “ill” affecting the body of *our* “national” societies. While much of the recent discussion has quite justifiably

been entangled with the resultant reinforcement of “us” versus “them” divisions, the definition of “them” in this equation requires more attention. The interpretation of the recent events that this chapter seeks to advance with evidence is that the question of migration has indeed become an existential challenge for the European Union (EU). Yet, rather than the people on the move being the ones constituting the perceived threat, the challenge the EU faces is equally, if not more, homegrown. Migration has become an issue that sharply divides the European and national political arenas, whereby “they” can no longer be automatically assumed to be found only on the other side of the border. Consequently, the sense of anxiety and insecurity many ordinary Europeans may feel about migration cannot be solved by borders. Both the cause and the solution lie elsewhere.

As scholars of European security have noted, the levels of fear, anxiety, and threat felt by many seem to drastically exceed the actual levels of physical risk to contemporary EU citizens (Kinnvall, Manners, and Mitzen, 2018, p. 149). This chapter relies on the notion of ontological (in)security to explain how widespread anxiety about migration can be seen as stemming from the strains caused by preserving a continuous positive version of the self amidst the perceived crisis. It is argued that in resorting to exceptional measures in coping with the exceptional situation the recent migration pressures have inflicted, the EU and its member states and citizens have deviated from the fundamental value basis which has traditionally held them together. While migration plays a key role in this conundrum, the actual cause of insecurity stems from the European population becoming increasingly divided. This chapter utilises recent Eurobarometer survey data to examine EU citizens’ feelings about and reactions to immigration and the EU’s future, providing a theoretically and philosophically grounded analysis of the lack of stability of the European identity and the bordered conception of the self.

This chapter shifts the discussion of migration as a phenomenon in its own right and with its own dynamics to its broader societal implications. I claim the widespread less-than-welcoming mindset towards immigration throughout Europe cannot be taken explicitly to indicate an anti-migrant attitude. Rather, it is a symptom of the much broader insecurities many Europeans have felt. These insecurities have only been exacerbated amidst the current COVID-19 pandemic, which has also further reinforced the perception of borders as barriers to *foreign* threats. This is to say that migration from Africa continues to be misconstrued and misrepresented for internal European reasons. It is these reasons we must better understand in seeking to reconstruct future relations on a more balanced footing. Amidst multiple overlapping crises, migrants have been used as convenient scapegoats in a strategy to combat anxieties and insecurities caused by other kinds of societal change in search of stability and continuity (Laine, 2020b). With a mounting democratic deficit, growing debt, a struggling labour market, related social security concerns, unfavourable demographics stemming from an ageing population, declining birth rates, and a cumulative brain drain, the

resilience of European societies has already been considerably weakened. It is this backdrop with which I wish to begin.

### **Challenges for the EU as post-national political project**

In seeking to understand how and why the rational accounts of migration as Europe's saviour became so swiftly overshadowed by more emotional perspectives of migration as threat, the bigger picture needs consideration. What *Spear's* (2019), a niche British bimonthly for high-net-worth individuals, termed the "doom-loop" of Europe will not be overcome by solving the migration "problem". While "the death of Europe" is hardly as evident as *Spear's* analysis would lead us to believe, it must be given credit for going against the grain and not even mentioning migration in their extensive take on the European vicious cycle of economic decline and the potential break-up of the EU. Should their logic be taken further, the "migration crisis" may have been the last nail in the EU's coffin, yet it is hardly the reason to consider the need to put the EU in that coffin in the first place – contrary to the then (2018) president of the European Parliament Antonio Tajani's straightforward speculation that "[t]he migration crisis could spell the end of the European project" (Tajani, 2018).

Tajani's thinking may have been influenced by the substantial – yet often rather lopsided – coverage of migration that hijacked much of the European mediascape following what many referred to misleadingly as a refugee or even more broadly a migration crisis (see Laine, 2019). Interestingly, two years before Tajani made his statement – very soon after the tipping point of asylum seeker arrivals in Europe had passed – the European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker admitted in his State of the Union address before the European Parliament in 2016 that the EU itself was in "an existential crisis". Mentioning migration only in passing in his 6,000-word speech, Juncker's core concern (2016) was the lack of solidarity that has been taken by default to be the glue that keeps the Union together. Juncker confessed he had never seen such a lack of common ground between the member states, heard so many leaders speak only of their domestic problems, and seen national governments so weakened by the forces of populism. He continued that he had never seen representatives of the EU institutions setting very different priorities, sometimes in direct opposition to national governments and parliaments.

Juncker was not alone in his concern. His desperation about what was to come was widely echoed throughout the EU executive, not to mention by the growing number of statesmen and political commentators across the continent. Issuing a stern word of caution against falling into the trap of identity politics, Frans Timmermans (in Lefranc, 2016), the First Vice-President of the European Commission, stated that for the first time in thirty years he had really come to "believe that the European project [could] fail". It was not migration as such but the lack of solidarity and unity, as well as compliance with one's own rule of law, that would be needed, in contrast to the observed

regression into state-centric thinking, to manage the general situation to which the sudden increase of migrant arrivals had contributed.

The EU has been duly criticised for securitising migration through its bordering regime and exclusionary practices, which more than anything else have jeopardised its proclaimed ideals and hollowed out its core values (Cuttitta and Last, 2020; Laine, 2020b; van Houtum and Bueno Lacy, 2020). Machiavelli (1966[1532], p. 56) famously wrote that the way many people live “is so far removed from the way they ought to live that anyone who abandons what is for what should be pursues his downfall rather than his preservation”. Given his self-proclaimed intention “to write something useful to whoever understands it”, Machiavelli (1998[1532], p. 61) considered it “more fitting to go directly to the effectual truth of the thing than to the imagination of it”.<sup>1</sup> In discussing what modes of government a prince should assume towards his “subjects and friends”, Machiavelli (1998[1532], p. 61) claimed that many had “imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in truth”. While it seems safe to assume that his remarks may more have concerned Plato’s *Republic* than providing a prediction of the future contractions between the European idea(l) and practice, the underlying logic of Machiavelli’s argument seems to hold true today, as evidenced by the recent surge of political realism.

To keep its promise to act as a “force for good in the world”, as the common self-depiction of the 2000s went, and work proactively to create a world “offering justice and opportunity for everyone” (European Security Strategy, 2003), it may be necessary for the EU to stand for its own values and act accordingly. It is certainly worth striving for the Laeken Declaration’s aspiration for the EU (Bulletin of the European Union, 2001) to play a leading and stabilising role in a new world order. It has been frequently repeated and fine-tuned, but its attainment is unmistakably receding ever further:

Europe as the continent of humane values, the Magna Carta, the Bill of Rights, the French Revolution, and the fall of the Berlin Wall; the continent of liberty, solidarity, and above all diversity, meaning respect for others’ languages, cultures, and traditions. The European Union’s one boundary is democracy and human rights. The Union is open only to countries which uphold basic values such as free elections, respect for minorities, and respect for the rule of law.

(Bulletin of the European Union, 2001)

Instead of simply striving to make the world a better place, the logic of the 2003 strategy already revealed a vested interest: to seek to resolve problems before they reached the EU: that is, to aim for a better world because it would be “more secure for the European Union and its citizens”. This logic has evolved increasingly into a chicken and egg situation. Which should come first: a secure Europe or a better world? Instead of being a win-win situation as it was depicted close to two decades ago, the persistent conundrum now

appears to be closer to a zero-sum game in which the security of the EU is sought at the expense of others. To play a stabilising role worldwide and claim to act convincingly as a force for good for everyone, it must get its internal act together. It must be ontologically secure to give meaning to the space and polity it has been formed to govern (Mitzen, 2018; Kinnvall, Manners and Mitzen, 2018).

### **A homogenous home and the irruptions of enjoyment**

The logic of this chapter's argumentation relies on the notion of ontological security: the security of being that Laing (1960) and later Giddens (e.g. 1991) considered the fundamental need of humans to feel whole, continuous, and stable over time, and especially during a crisis which threatens their wellbeing. The concept was later introduced in the field of International Relations (IR) to improve the understanding of how and why states, much like individuals, are concerned with maintaining a consistent notion of the self to enhance their ontological security in relations with other states (Kinnvall, 2004; Steele, 2008; Mitzen, 2006). This notion has also been extended to the supranational level. The EU, facing many crises and risks to its security and existence, also seeks ontological security in securing its identity and gives meaning to the space and polity it has been formed to govern (Rumelili, 2015; Kinnvall, Manners, and Mitzen, 2018).

This approach suggests that ontological security can be threatened by rapid political change and manipulated by threat scenarios targeting the specific organisation of groups. The potential threat of a perceived negative difference between peoples, cultures, and states therefore needs to be emphasised (Rumelili, 2015). Partly as a result of long-term migration pressures and the more immediate refugee crisis in Europe, threat scenarios have proliferated in which asylum seekers and migrants are seen as challenging the political foundations of the EU and those of European civilisation itself. More recently, the notion has also been applied to the EU, with the aim of better understanding contemporary fears and anxieties among Europeans, and the consequences of this approach for European security (Della Sala, 2017; Kinnvall, Manners, and Mitzen, 2018; Mitzen, 2018).

Ontological security largely concerns the identity, values, and points of common reference that create a sense of group belonging (Mitzen, 2006). On the flipside of the search for stability and continuity is a cognitive-affective resistance to any disruption it may entail. The experience of ontological security is contingent on routinised personal, social, and political orders that hold hard uncertainties at bay, and a socio-spatial environment – home – that embodies a feeling of being (Mitzen, 2018, p. 1374). Home, she continues, is psychologically central to subjectivity, regardless of how it is construed. From the phenomenological perspective, often stressed by environmental psychologists, home is a safe and familiar space where people feel “at ease” (Duyvendak, 2011, p. 27).

Attachment to a home has been conceptualised as “a positive place-bound affection by which people maintain closeness to a place” (Hidalgo and Hernández, 2001, p. 274). However, it is also created by familiar daily routines and the regular settings of activities and interactions (Fried, 2000). This is to say the familiarity of a place is not derived from that particular place alone but from strong social, psychological, and emotional attachments (Easthope, 2004, p. 136). As long as home is considered a bordered container, as the traditional Westphalian notion of territoriality has etched it in our minds, the psychological comfort that borders can be seen to produce remains strong – inflicting in so doing an impression of borders as protective yet vulnerable walls, safeguarding the inside from a perceived external threat (Laine, 2018a). This is demonstrated perhaps most palpably in the concept and practical applications of homeland security and the related reverberation of the narrative, which conveys an effective image of our homelands on the verge of conquest and of being overrun by foreign elements (Laine, 2020a).

These ideas echo Douglas’s (1991, p. 289) work on the material, located aspect of home: “home starts by bringing some space under control”. Following Massey (1994), space ought not however be viewed as an inert platform, as a territorial homeland within which stability and coherence would spring out of a mythical sense of unity between a bounded land and “its” people, but rather constitutive of and inseparable from social relations with others and the outside. Surely, as Hollifield (2004) points out, international mobility creates a tension between liberalism’s universalist free-movement aspirations and the state project’s particularism of bounded security communities. As recent events have shown, this tension manifests itself expressly at the borders and is reflected in migration governance built on the rhetoric of “longing for a homogenous national home” (Duyvendak, 2011, p. 1). The current widespread populist and nationalist appeals to homeland discourses of closure and fear, Mitzen (2018, p. 1383) argues, stem from this mythic sense of the Westphalian home as a comfortable refuge in a threatening world. Offers of a strong and familiar nation state as a solution to perceived uncertainty and chaos have resonated well with the public discourse in many EU member states, yet at the same time effectively watered down the credibility of the EU’s own ideas of a security community.

Given that the European project is grounded in the ambition to create unity not only among its states but among its people, it has become of great importance to assume a more interdisciplinary reading of ontological security. While most agree that ontological security is a security of identity, in much International Relations (IR) scholarship the strong association of identity and belonging with the state has overlooked the significance of society in identity formation. As Chernobrov (2016, p. 582) suggests, “ontological security is not about state per se but about society and its need for a stable and continuous self-concept when faced with a crisis”. The same inner motivations, he continues, lead societies to (mis)recognise the unexpected as anticipated and familiar, to self-populate the other, spilling into supportive

or devaluing narratives about major international crises – and it is this (mis) recognition that enables agents to (re)act as the event becomes explainable, recognisable, and more controllable (*ibid.*, p. 596).

Interpreting societal reactions to uncertainty reveals that we are anxious to preserve a stable identity and transform uncertainty and discontinuity into a recognised routine, even if the latter contradicts rationality or escalates the crisis (Chernobrov, 2016, p. 596). That is, for the sake of ontological security, rationality may be pushed aside and overridden in the search for continuity, even if this compromises values and norms otherwise held dear (Laine, 2018b, p. 233). The failure to measure up to our own ideals surfaces in our psychosocial behaviour in the form of anxiety and insecurity. Questioning one's self-worth easily leads to a defensiveness that tends to be manifested in hostility to others, the glorification of nationalist narratives and radicalisation, and misrepresentations – if not smearing – of migrants. As Chernobrov (2016, p. 596) asserts, a “drawing self” is constantly present behind its portraits of others. The more negative the qualities attributed to the “them” group, the more positive “we” seem in comparison (Laine, 2020a), and these representations seldom seek accuracy. On the contrary, Figlio (2012, p. 11) states that self-love “lives in a world of fantasy, which contact with reality can only contaminate”.

Fantasy, Žižek (1997) explains, maintains and masks divisions within society, often by attributing to reviled others the causes of one's own lack of satisfaction, or *jouissance*, or that of the group to which we assume we belong. By extracting coherence from confusion and reducing multiplicity to singularity, fantasy “enables individuals and groups to give themselves histories” (Scott, 2001, p. 289). Yet fantasy is not the *object* of desire but its *setting*, Laplanche and Pontalis (1986, p. 26) maintain. They continue that, in fantasy, the subject “forms no representation of the desired object, but is himself represented as participating in the scene”. Contrary to the common understanding, fantasy is not antagonistic to social reality. As Rose (1996, p. 3) asserts, “it is its precondition or psychic glue”.

Whether the determinants of the group-based “we-feeling” and the conventional, often inflexible, social-spatial imaginaries and demarcations that maintain it are factual or fictional becomes secondary to their ability to influence socio-spatial behaviours and attitudes – how we perceive different people and places, and how we perceive and interpret our own place and actions. As the question is ultimately about the fundamentals of one's being and the security of the self, these determinants cannot easily be challenged even if proved deceitful or wrong. Fear especially stands out in this conjunction as a factor that cannot be overlooked. While it has been harnessed recently to the advancing of political goals and deliberately politicised by feeding xenophobic readings of the migration situation, fear is a psychological, not a political, phenomenon (Laine, 2020a). It cannot simply be made to go away with a political decision.

To get to the bottom of this, we must dig more deeply into our hearts and minds. The old saying that “home is where the heart is” continues to hold true



in underlining the importance of the emotional bond to a place and the safety it brings. In privileging “factual” knowledge we tend to disregard that it is often our emotional response rather than any scientifically proven fact that helps us deal with reality. Tangibly, new brain imaging research shows that imagining a threat lights up similar regions as its actual experiencing (Reddan, Wager, and Schiller, 2018). Emotions, Aizenberg and Geffen (2013) explain, are closely linked to perception. As recent discoveries about human psychology also indicate, facts seldom change our minds, but reason has its limitations (Gorman and Gorman, 2016; Mercier and Sperber, 2017; Sloman and Fernbach, 2017). While the malleability of public sentiment has been heightened during this era of alternative facts, fake news post-truths, and other deceptive or misleading information (Laine, 2020b), it can be seen to reflect a longstanding human behaviour pattern from the hunter-gatherer era: there was little advantage in reasoning clearly when much was to be gained from winning arguments (Mercier and Sperber, 2017).

However, we know already from the classic study by Ross, Lepper, and Hubbard (1975, p. 880) that both self- and social perceptions may persevere even after the initial basis for such perceptions has been completely refuted: “once formed”, they discovered, “impressions are remarkably perseverant and unresponsive to new input”. Thus, the tendency to embrace information that supports one’s beliefs, and the unwillingness to make appropriate revisions to them and reject information that contradicts them, has come to be widely known as “confirmation bias”. Such bias, Cunningham (2019, p. 9) explains, is especially common when security is considered. Much of this is connected to resistance to change, which, Kanter (2012) explicates, manifests itself in many ways. Kanter lists loss of control as the most common. Change, she posits, can make people feel they have lost control over their territory. It may also have less to do with a particular space *per se* and more with a deeply rooted attachment to it, and the customary b/ordering identity that this territory is seen to confine and nourish. The question is thus not only political but psychological – as is the second factor on her list: excess uncertainty (*ibid.*), which, Chernobrov (2016, p. 596) avers, the human mind understands as self-doubt – the key determinant of ontological insecurity.

It is also important in this respect to differentiate between fear and anxiety. To Alleviate them, we must first understand what they actually are, and how they are formed. While both are triggered in response to threat, fear – generally considered a reaction to something immediate and known that threatens one’s security or safety – tends to be easier to respond to than anxiety – a more general state of distress, nervousness, or dread, the source of which may be more difficult to pinpoint (see e.g. Lang, Davis, and Öhman, 2000). Fear of the unknown is therefore actually anxiety. While the strategies to alleviate these emotions differ, Öhman (2008) clarifies that both can be transformed into defence mechanisms and irrational behaviours that may obscure the recognition of reality. The idea of defence mechanisms, unconscious strategies whereby people protect themselves from anxiety, is rooted in Freud’s (1923)

theory of personality, which – at risk of oversimplification – posits that the mind has three duelling forces (the id, the ego, and the superego). To mitigate the tension emerging in the form of anxiety between the unconscious and primitive urges of the id and the partly conscious drive towards the superego’s moral and social values, the ego deploys strategies of self-deception to avoid discomfort (*ibid.*). This may lead to deleterious thoughts or emotions being projected onto someone else, even without provocation, for the sake of one’s own comfort and security.

### **Money well spent? The value of border security**

“The land should be large enough to support a certain number of people living moderately and no more”, Plato proclaimed in his last dialogue, the *Laws* (Book V, para. 737). He also insisted that in addition to determining the appropriate total number of citizens, it was necessary to agree about their distribution. While Plato’s endeavour to seek a balance between the competing aspirations for monarchy and democracy far preceded the now almost natural Westphalian confines, the underlying issue at hand has remained largely the same: how many, and in particular, who to let in? In pursuing the debate with the anonymous Athenian stranger (representing an ideal version of himself, perhaps), Plato eventually points to the unity of the virtues, the noble, and the good as the b/ordering criteria to be applied and the necessary condition for the long-term success of the sought-after political project. In assuming a position of the other, the stranger within, Plato distances himself from his earlier works on more clear-cut political theory (the *Statesman* and the *Republic*) by involving extensive deliberations on ethics, psychology, theology, epistemology, and metaphysics.

The current era of multiple and constant crises, with the various elements of uncertainty they create, has underlined – perhaps more lucidly than ever – the role borders play in the constitution of difference or bringing order amidst the perceived dangers of chaos. Far from mere markers of sovereignty, the approach taken on borders here accentuates their constitutive role as a fundamental social need. I do not, however, intend to devalue the continued and even increasing prominence of borders as something concrete and fixed. Indeed, our world – and Europe is an excellent example – has become more fenced than ever. In addition to various other measures aimed at controlling and restricting movement, almost a thousand kilometres of physical walls, Benedicto and Brunet (2018) detail, have been constructed along the EU and the Schengen borders since the nineties to prevent displaced people migrating into Europe. Furthermore, thirty-five years since the Schengen agreement dismantled most internal border checks in the EU, and more than three decades since the Berlin Wall was torn down – the key moments in materialising the very *idea* of European integration and unity – new walls have been constructed not only along the external borders of the European space but within it. Whether physical, virtual, or even mental, these walls and

the mindset they create – and of which they are also a symptom – effectively overshadow perhaps the greatest achievement of the European project – the freedom of movement.

Much has been written about Europe turning itself into a fortress excluding those outside and fostering the division between us and them (e.g. Carr, 2012; Jünemann, Scherer, and Fromm, 2017; van Houtum and Bueno Lacy, 2020). The extent to which boosted border security actually makes people feel safer therefore remains debatable. An increasing number of scholars has suggested that this heavy investment has actually backfired. Despite the stated goals of increasing security against a supposed threat, the amplified securitisation has pushed migrants into more treacherous waters (Squire, 2017; Benedicto and Brunet, 2018; Cuttita and Last, 2020; Laine, 2020a) and endangered the lives and rights of people inside the Union. Stricter border controls do little to stop irregular migration. The answers must be sought elsewhere, yet they certainly make it more dangerous – and frankly, fatal (Figure 13.1). This is especially evident in the statistics exposing that the mortality rate increased despite a drastic decrease in the number of arrivals in 2015. Although these official figures are disquieting, those provided by various human rights groups make the situation even more disheartening. For example, according to the “List of Deaths”, collected by UNITED<sup>2</sup> between 1993 and 2019, at least

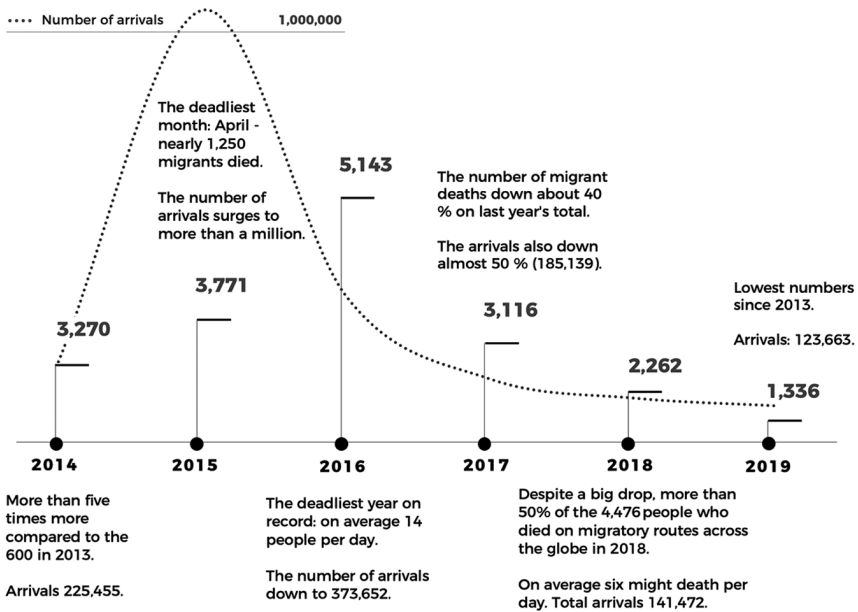


Figure 13.1 Development of the number of migrant arrivals and deaths. Data source: International Organization for Migration (IOM). Illustration by the author.

36,570 refugee deaths can be attributed to the “fatal policies of Fortress Europe”, including border militarisation, asylum laws, detention policies, and deportations – in addition to which “most probably thousands more are never found” (UNITED, 2019). More than forty thousand people died trying to cross international borders in the last decade, no less than half of them at the borders of the EU (Jones, 2016).

Investment in border security has also increased. While straightforward development curves are somewhat difficult to produce because of different calculation methods and the reshuffling of instruments and initiatives, it nevertheless seems safe to say the money spent on border security has grown progressively. The budget of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) has soared from an initial €6.2 million in 2005 to €333 million in 2019<sup>3</sup>, and it is expected to increase by another 34.6 percent to €420.6m in 2020 (EUobserver, 2019). Furthermore, companies that provide technology and services that accompany border walls have received significant EU funding, especially from the External Borders Fund (€1.7 billion during the 2007–2013 budgetary period) and as much as €2.76 billion (2014–2020) from the Internal Security Fund (Akkerman, 2019). The budget for the next EU seven-year period, geared towards addressing the key challenges of today and tomorrow and matching aspirations with action, significantly boosts spending on border protection. For example, the increase includes €8.02 billion for the Integrated Border Management Fund and €11.27 billion to Frontex (*ibid.*).

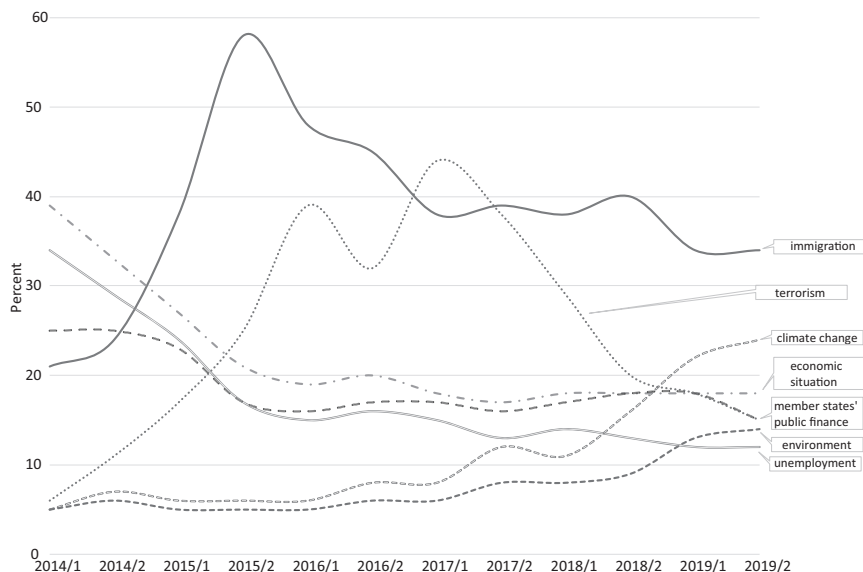
Having acknowledged in 2018 that “migration and border management will remain a challenge in the future”, the Commission proposed to almost triple funding for migration and border management to €34.9 billion during the 2021–2027 EU budgetary period (European Commission, 2018). This would be funded by two instruments, the Asylum and Migration Fund (AMF) and the Integrated Border Management Fund (IBMF), as well as the activities of relevant decentralised EU agencies like the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and the European Asylum Support Office. This was to be granted in addition to a separate allocation of more than €24 billion for security and defence. However, the Juncker Commission’s 2018 overall budgetary proposal for the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) was cut, largely because of Brexit. In the more recent proposal by the current president of the European Council, Charles Michel, the share allocated for migration and border management was cut by almost a third, which in practice would have meant a proportional cut far greater than for any other budget item in what was “already modest” (Koerner, 2020) expenditure, representing a small share of the EU budget (D’Alfonso, 2020). However, having received fierce criticism for his proposal from members of the European Parliament (MEPs), who called it a “scandalous” proposal that would make the EU “irrelevant” – especially in light of the challenges to arriving at a common EU response to the migration situation at the Greek–Turkish border and the current COVID-19 emergency (European Parliament, 2020), Michel (2020) acknowledged his failure. The border budget is therefore likely to be clawed back.

Mere numbers aside, it is noteworthy that border security investment continued to increase, despite the fact that the number of irregular migrant arrivals decreased (Figure 13.1), suggesting that the walling of borders has created a momentum – and business – of its own – that is, separate from the actual “problem” it is supposed to be addressing. While the current (2020) COVID-19 pandemic may explain some of the most recent demands for increased border expenditure, most related decisions were made before the outbreak. Moreover, even in the current circumstances, the extent to which further investment in border security will actually help to alleviate the impact of the coronavirus – apart from enhancing the psychological conformity borders tend to bring and reinforcing the perception that the threat is, as usual, foreign – remains unclear.

### **United we stand, divided we fall**

While it cannot be denied that, during recent events, borders have come to foster binary social orders and categories between the internal “us” and the external foreign “them”, this has often translated in practice into European and non-European migratory pressures that have also increasingly ruptured the inside group. I argue that it is mounting polarisation and internal estrangement that challenges European societies’ resilience and the EU’s very future as a coherent actor and unified space. We have witnessed a rise of strongly polarised narratives across the continent that is fed by various actors with competing ideological interests and rival claims to the truth. Efforts to agree to a common European migration policy have gotten nowhere, as charismatic leaders with strong populist anti-migration platforms have swept to victory in recent elections, most notably in Italy, Hungary, and Austria, and effectively manufactured a crisis to support their own agendas and domestic political objectives to the detriment of the core values on which the European project has relied. As the Hungarian case distressingly illustrates, with similar tendencies having emerged elsewhere, the siege mentality has reached levels whereby solidarity with migrants and refugees has been constitutionally criminalised.

One poll after another has indicated that migration has become a key concern for many Europeans. According to the Standard Eurobarometer data<sup>4</sup>, immigration has topped the rankings, with 30-plus percent support since the inception of what was branded the “refugee crisis” (Figure 13.2). Between 2015 and 2018, terrorism was ranked the second biggest concern after immigration – and as can be deduced from myriad media reports, these two concepts have often been associated with one another in the minds of many. In all but two EU member states (climate change was ranked ahead of immigration in Sweden and Ireland), immigration was ranked the number one concern for the EU, the highest proportions being in Malta (66 percent) and Cyprus (60 percent), and the lowest in Romania (24 percent), Portugal, and the UK (both 26 percent). Although it was the key concern facing the EU for approximately a third of Europeans, it cannot be understated that the



*Figure 13.2* Immigration has become EU citizens' main concern facing the EU over the last years.

Data source: Standard Eurobarometer 92 (autumn 2019).

obvious – yet seldom heard – interpretation of the poll figures is that immigration is not the greatest concern of close to 70 percent. Yet almost seven in ten (68 percent) are in favour of the reinforcement of external EU borders with more European border guards and coastguards, support being strongest in Cyprus and Greece (both 91 percent) and Bulgaria (85 percent), and lowest in the United Kingdom (55 percent) and Sweden (57 percent).

At the national level, the concerns hit closer to home and become more personal, yet the overall situation seems more balanced because several issues are now receiving more equal weight in the assessment than ever (Figure 13.3). In the autumn 2019 figures, even before the current COVID-19 pandemic, health and social security was perceived to be the most important national issue, with the highest proportions in Finland (48 percent), Slovakia (45 percent), and Portugal (44 percent). Immigration ranks fourth – as important as inflation and the cost of living. The category of environment, climate, and energy has moved up to second position, while unemployment ranks third, following a long and steady decline of twenty-eight points since its high in the spring of 2014. Terrorism comes last, at an average of 5 percent (France being the outlier, with 14 percent). Immigration is cited as the most worrying national issue only in Malta (61 percent), Greece (54 percent), and Belgium (25 percent). Mere rankings aside, only 18 percent of Europeans consider

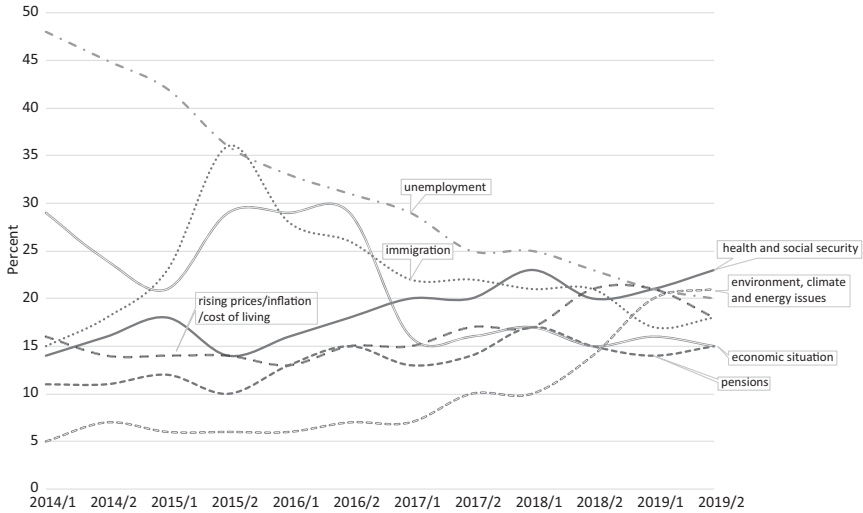


Figure 13.3 Concerns at the national level – the seven most-mentioned items. Data source: Standard Eurobarometer 92 (autumn 2019).

immigration the main national concern, in contrast to the 34 percent who saw immigration as a broader European challenge.

When views on immigration are closely examined, it becomes evident that European public opinion largely continues to perceive immigration from other EU member states much more positively than that from outside the Union. A comparison with earlier surveys reveals that the distinction between the two has only increased: views on intra-EU migration have become increasingly positive; those on immigration from elsewhere have become more negative. The most negative impressions of immigration from outside the EU can be found in Czechia (82 percent), and Latvia and Estonia (both 74 percent). Non-EU migration is perceived positively in only eight countries: Ireland (72 percent), Spain (64 percent), Luxembourg (63 percent), Sweden (61 percent), the UK (57 percent), Portugal (56 percent), Croatia (49 percent), and Romania (45 percent).

Positive impressions of immigration from other EU member states dominate all socio-demographic categories of the population, yet are most prevalent among younger age groups and middle or higher social categories. However, immigration from outside the EU creates more pronounced divisions among Europeans (Figure 13.4); although there are differences between member states, they also exist within states. Students and young people in general see non-EU immigration most positively. They are joined by people in managerial positions. It generates the most negative response among the elderly, poorly educated, unemployed, and those who consider themselves working

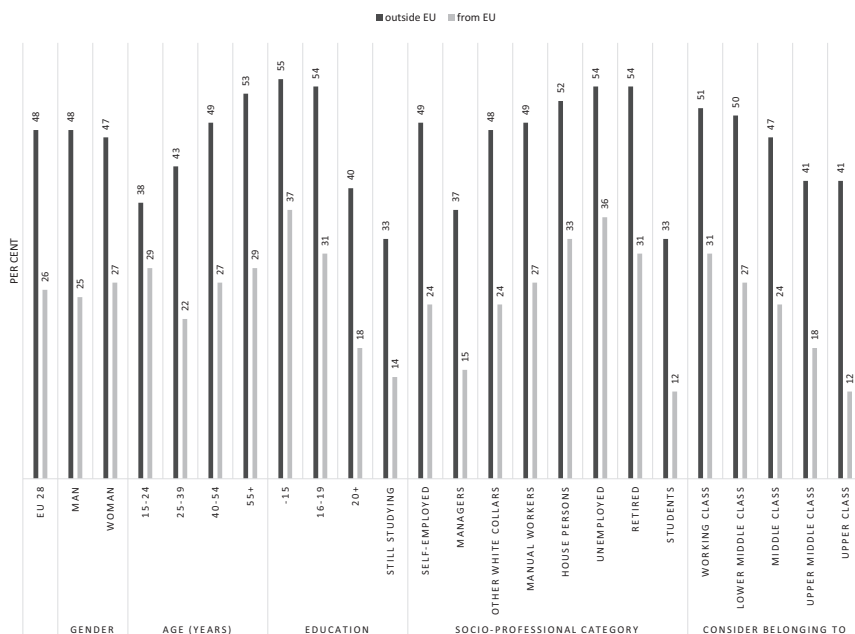


Figure 13.4 Negative view on immigration.

Data source: Standard Eurobarometer 91 – Wave EB91.5 – Kantar (spring 2019).

class. In short, negative views of immigration from outside the EU increase in line with respondents' age and decrease in line with their level of education. This supports the notion that the fundamental premise of the widespread anti-migrant narrative stems from the alleged struggle to secure Europe's welfare state. A majority (82 percent) of Europeans wants more to be done to combat irregular immigration from non-EU countries. Most are of the opinion that these measures should be taken at EU rather than national level. Yet very broad support throughout the EU remains for the principle of the free movement of EU citizens.

At the same time, the EU's positive image had lost some ground by the autumn of 2019, standing at 42 percent (down 3 percent from the spring of 2019), yet remained higher than at any point in the previous decade (Figure 13.5). Although the figures have increased, they also indicate that 58 percent, close to 300 million Europeans, do not view the EU overly positively. Similarly, the level of trust in the EU, which was at an all-time low before the "refugee crisis", has since improved (from 31 percent to 44 percent). The highest proportions of respondents trusting the EU were in Lithuania (72 percent) and Denmark (68 percent); the lowest in the autumn of 2019 were in the United Kingdom (29 percent), Greece (32 percent), and France (33 percent).



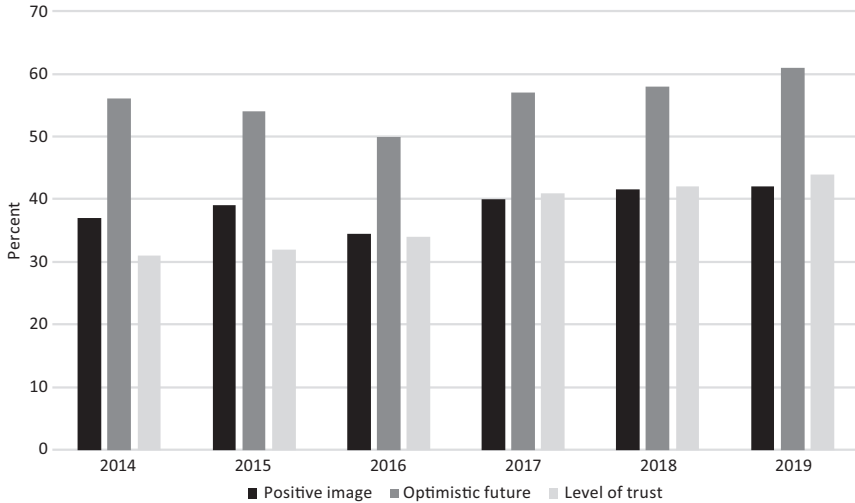


Figure 13.5 Views on the EU, %.

Data source: Standard Eurobarometer 91 – Wave EB91.5 – Kantar (spring 2019).

The level of trust in the EU is higher than in national governments, and its increase is an indication that the harsh action the EU has taken in attempting to manage the situation has gained support among citizens. More than six in ten Europeans are optimistic about the EU's future. The most optimistic perspective is held by the Irish (85 percent), Danish (79 percent), and Lithuanians (76 percent), while optimism (in 2019) was less pronounced, unsurprisingly, among the British (47 percent) and the French (50 percent).

While the average trends are interesting in themselves, they also obscure more than they illuminate in not showing the spread of results and their uneven distribution. A closer assessment of the socio-demographic categories, supported by a general observation made on the ongoing public and political debate, seems to suggest that Europe is more divided than a cursory statistical overview would suggest. There are differences in perspectives between different EU member states, yet there are also major differences of opinion within them. It is considerably more accurate to conclude that half the population does not trust the EU and half does than to claim average trust levels are approaching 50 percent.

### Conclusion: A broken home, a broken heart

Migration has become an issue that sharply divides today's European and national political arenas. This chapter claims it is these divisions over migration rather than the immigrants themselves that have tested the unity, and

hence resilience, of the EU and European societies. These divisions are real, but they not only divide Europe into various national agendas as is often depicted; the “nations” – to the extent they actually even exist – have also become increasingly torn. At either end of the spectrum, reactions to immigration have become, above all, emotional. While emotions should certainly not be dismissed as meaningless, misinterpretation can occur if their wisdom creates its own momentum, contradicting rather than complementing reason. As thinkers from Aristotle and Nietzsche to C. S. Lewis have all argued, feelings must be intertwined with reason to achieve the good life.

The gruesome fact that the EU’s external border has become the world’s most lethal border is telling in terms of a variety of factors. It should urge us to rethink the value of *border* security as such, as opposed to making *people* feel safer. While the road to dystopia may well be paved with good intentions (Davies, 2016), the mere silent toleration of the “troubling situation whereby death becomes a norm through which migration is governed” (Squire, 2017, p. 514) suggests a deviation from the conventional collective values, ideas, and ethical concerns for which Europe has stood and which has held its various parts together. While it indeed seems that “one may smile, and smile, and be a villain”,<sup>5</sup> the attempts to manage migration by setting aside Europe’s core values, to follow Machiavelli, are paving the way to its own downfall, with considerable social and political repercussions.

The accentuation of the perceived difference between states, cultures, and people becomes a major security risk, which increases within contexts of socioeconomic stress and geopolitical instability. The feeling of ontological insecurity has led to the defence of actions that have manifested themselves in antagonism towards others, fuelling misrepresentations of immigration. At times of crisis especially, the extent of association and interests to be cared for tends to shrink. As crisis deepens, the definition of “us” tightens. The national and sometimes regional interest tends to be prioritised above broader European ones to the extent that they differ, and under increased pressure, most people seek to seize the interest of their own family – if not of themselves personally – first. As these closer-to-personal interests are improperly mingled with the state’s interests and are not necessarily aligned, the common interest – the voice of the people that serves as the basis of the state’s unity – tends to become increasingly polyphonic.

The anxieties stemming from the dissolving of the invisible social glue and the self’s resulting rebordering, it is argued, create a sense of ontological insecurity that in turn triggers antagonistic perceptions of difference and anti-immigrant attitudes. Instead of accuracy, to follow Chernobrov (2016, p. 596), the self becomes motivated by the avoidance of anxiety. From this perspective, the securitisation of the immigration agenda can be seen to be facilitated by a profound fear of the loss of one’s own b/ordering identity and the meaning of home as a result of mixing with others. Feeling at home is thus a discriminating and differentiating phenomenon: “it necessarily divides those with whom we feel at home from the rest. If home is everywhere and we

feel at home with everyone, ‘home’ tends to lose its meaning” (Duyvendak, 2011, p. 106).

However, by combining these various perspectives and reflecting them onto the empirical evidence, the situation comes to resemble homesickness more closely, even if you are already at home. It is a lingering feeling of acute isolation and being sorely disconnected from a self or time that no longer exists. It is a painful feeling of losing touch with reality, however utopian that may be, whereby our actions come to be guided by our imagination. Ideas of nations as “gated communities” or the EU as a “fortress” are fantasies in which there is no place for inconvenient facts. As Marcus (1979) summarised his review of *The Clash’s* “Safe European Home”, “home is a crueler joke than paradise”. Even if it is imperfect, home is still where the heart is – and as so often in life, we tend to construct walls and barriers not so much against others but because of our own fears and the desire to safeguard what is internally fragile.

## Notes

- 1 Machiavelli talks about *verità effettuale*. I have chosen to use a more recent translation “effectual truth” here instead of the 1966 translation of “practical truth” for clarity.
- 2 UNITED for Intercultural Action is the European network against nationalism, racism, fascism, and in support of migrants and refugees, consisting of more than 550 organisations from a wide variety of backgrounds, from forty-eight European countries, working together on a voluntary basis. See: [unitedagainstreugeedeaths.eu](http://unitedagainstreugeedeaths.eu).
- 3 Compiled from Frontex’s annual budgets ([frontex.europa.eu/about-frontex/key-documents/?category=budget](http://frontex.europa.eu/about-frontex/key-documents/?category=budget)).
- 4 The Standard Eurobarometer surveys, conducted at the request of the European Commission, consist of approximately a thousand face-to-face interviews per country. All the data in this part of the chapter is derived from Standard Eurobarometer surveys 91 (spring 2019) and 92 (autumn 2019) unless otherwise specified.
- 5 Shakespeare, W., Hamlet: Act I, Scene V.

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