

# MIGRATION, EQUALITY & RACISM

44 OPINIONS

Ilke Adam  
Tundé Adefioye  
Serena D'Agostino  
Nick Schuermans  
Florian Trauner  
[eds.]

VUBPRESS



**MIGRATION,  
EQUALITY  
& RACISM**



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# PREFACE

All the major challenges that we face today as a society require a multidisciplinary approach. And yet almost all our scientific institutes are organized within the boundaries of one discipline.

To change that, in the fall of 2016, I brought together a group of researchers of all ages and working in very diverse fields of science. My question was simple: think about what you would like to research together in the light of the challenges we face today as a society.

This resulted in various project groups: one on the idea of a humane city, another on the social consequences of robotization, a third one on migration and, in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, a new ad hoc group emerged. The members of the project groups think together, discuss each other's ideas, write texts that circulate in the group and which, after a while, are brought together into a book. Three books have since been published – *De Humane Stad* (2017), *Homo Roboticus* (2019), *Post viraal naar een nieuw normaal* (2020). This is the fourth book in the series.

The topics of migration, equality and racism have triggered salient societal and political debates. It is clear that you can only approach such major social challenges in an interdisciplinary manner. They prove, for those who still doubt this, how intertwined everything is and how the fields of scientific disciplines inevitably both overlap and complement each other. Only by bringing different expertise together and engaging in dialogue do we understand complex problems and can we start working on solutions. This book is the result of that conversation between disciplines.

The various project groups sail under the flag of POINcaré. This name is a reference to the French mathematician and scientific philosopher Henri Poincaré (1854-1912), who described, among other things, the principle of free research, which continues to inspire the scientific and social project of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel today.

Our teaching, research and societal outreach are based on a radical humanism. This radical humanism translates into the principles of freedom, equality and solidarity.

For us, freedom stands for free inquiry: the principle that thinking must never submit itself. For us, equality stands for fairness, equal opportunity and recognition of diversity. Solidarity stands for our commitment to the major social challenges and our concern for a respectful relationship with fellow human beings and with the world.

These values are the common thread running through the initiatives of the POINcaré group. Each time the question is asked what the impact is of expected developments on our values and how we can best safeguard them.

Nobel Laureate in Economics Robert J. Shiller wrote: ‘In the longer run and for wide-reaching issues, more creative solutions tend to come from imaginative interdisciplinary collaboration.’

That must also be the ambition of our universities. At least that is the ambition I share with the members of the POINcaré group.

Caroline Pauwels,

Rector Vrije Universiteit Brussel

# INTRODUCTION

by Ilke Adam, Tundé Adefioye, Serena D'Agostino, Nick Schuermans  
and Florian Trauner

While we were compiling this book, the world changed in a way so dramatic that hardly anybody could have predicted. The coronavirus pandemic caused global social and economic disruption. It led to the closure of borders, slashed possibilities to get access to asylum in Europe, and made it impossible for transnational families to reunite. Covid-19 also exacerbated the structural inequalities already faced by migrants and minorities in Europe.<sup>1</sup> Migrants and minorities are overrepresented in the labour sectors that are more exposed to Covid-19, and in the sectors suffering job losses due to the corona-induced economic crisis. The corona crisis also led to increased ethnic profiling by the police due to enhanced controls for public health reasons. Inequalities already existing in health, at work and during policing were reinforced during the pandemic.

In the middle of this unforeseen context, on 25 May 2020 George Floyd, an African-American, was killed by the police during an arrest in Minnesota. Floyd's death was the last straw that broke the camel's back. It came on top of the deaths of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arberry and many others also killed by racist police violence in the US. Protests were sparked off in the US and spread internationally, including to Europe and Belgium. The BlackLivesMatter movement flared up far beyond the USA. It also reinvigorated existing protest movements that draw attention to past and present cases of police violence, such as the death of Dieumerici Kanda who hung himself in a police cell, Adil C., killed during a police chase<sup>2</sup>, Akram Kadri killed in Antwerp, the little Mawda and many others. In the weeks and months afterwards, the problem of structural racism faced by minorities began to show up in political and media agendas. Claims made by racialized anti-racist activists for more than a decade already were now finally heard, even if policy responses have so far remained modest. In Belgium and Brussels, the anti-racist claims have strongly centered around Belgian's colonial atrocities and the link with current-day racism.

Such sudden metamorphoses are particularly intense for the topics that this book addresses: migration, equality and racism. For several decades already, the topics of migration, equality and racism have triggered salient societal and political debates.

Rare are the days when we can wake up without encountering new news reports on these divisive issues. Migration is always hot news because it touches upon issues of sovereignty, national identity, prejudice and inequity. Divergent ideological views, or the different ideas we all have on the ideal society and how to reach it, adds to the polarization. It influences the views we might have on how important it is to reach equal chances to a good life for migrants and minorities, and it affects the strategies we propose to reach these equal chances.

For many, migration raises unfounded fears that migrants are taking away jobs and making undeserved claims on social security. Others see ‘our norms and values’ threatened when new migrants, especially Muslims, arrive. Racism fuel these fears, shown by the simple fact that the immigrant groups with the largest numbers in Belgium (for example, Dutch and French nationals) are not considered as threatening, and not even considered as real migrants . This concept seems to be reserved for ‘others’. For others, migration raises hope and expectations, for example for boosting population growth, for stimulating rich new encounters and booming economies, for increasing creativity, solidarity and fostering new opportunities for those who arrive and aspire to have stable jobs and build better opportunities for their children. Politicians have exploited these fears and, rarer, the hopes, for political gain, leading to an overrepresentation of the images of migrants as job-stealers, criminals and a threat to ‘the European way of life’.

These hopes and fears notwithstanding, migration is a fact. It is as old as humanity. Recent constructions of walls and fences have shown that it cannot be stopped. Slogans that continue to defend a similar discourse are misleading. The persistence of wars, political oppression and economic inequalities provide explanations for some migration movements, but these are not even the main explanations. Migration is mainly driven by the ever-existing human drive to search for better opportunities and preferred lifestyles.<sup>3</sup>

Migration thus *is* and *will be*. It is a component of our societies. It is therefore necessary to have informed debates on migration, and the process of settling in that follows. Informed debates are not based only on personal opinions or experiences, or on the newspaper article one has just read. Informed debates should also be inspired by academic research and critical thinking. This academic research is abundantly available. However, it is most often published in scientific journals and books, and only reaches a small audience. This knowledge is also split up per discipline. Moreover, in the academic journals in which academics publish, researchers often refrain from telling *what should be done*. They try to tell us *what is* and to explain *how it came to be*.



# Academics take a stance

In this book, more than 80 academics of the VUB and co-authors are trying a different approach. As philosophers, lawyers, psychologists, health scientists, sociologists, geographers, criminologists, communication and political scientists we are here joining forces. Together we are writing not for our colleagues but for a wider audience that wishes to learn and participate in an informed debate. We also take a stance on what should be done, and say clearly what we think is good and what we think is bad. Academics are not neutral – nobody is – and our opinions and proposals are far from sacred. But they are based on academic research: systematic and controlled observations, empirical and critical inquiries into how certain phenomena are interrelated, and we do this by applying strict rules for analysis. In doing so, we question common sense ideas on migration, equality and racism and propose solutions that might disturb the reader. These solutions are not necessarily aligned and might even contradict each other. Academics do not necessarily all agree, as their work is inspired from different disciplinary angles and diverging positions. This book is thus not one coherent one-size-fits-all recipe for just migration and equality policies. Instead, it is a thought-provoking kaleidoscope of informed opinions on different possible paths to reach just migration and equality policies. Our book is intended to inspire readers who wish to spark an informed debate on migration, equality and racism. It is meant to offer ideas to people who want to learn more on how and why humanism has often remained an empty box for migrants and racialized groups. Or to provide fuel to those who search for inspiration for a just future for all.

The journey towards this book started in April 2019. Soon after the creation of the Brussels Interdisciplinary Research centre on Migration and Minorities (BIRMM), the VUB Rector Caroline Pauwels asked the coordinators of the centre, Florian Trauner and Ilke Adam, whether they would be interested in publishing a collective and accessible book that would transcend disciplinary boundaries. BIRMM members were enthusiastic about that idea, and two of them – Nick Schuermans and Serena D’Agostino – actively volunteered to join the editorial team. Lynn Tytgat, project coordinator at the VUB rectorate, and Jane Verlinden, VUB events coordinator, were asked to assure the practical coordination and contacts with possible sponsors, media and cultural institutions. KVS joined the initiative as a partner for the book launch, and one of its city dramaturges, Tundé Adefioye, contributed to the project as a co-editor and author. First abstracts of the papers received feedback during the summer of 2019. In November 2019, the first drafts of the papers were presented and discussed collectively in a book workshop. Afterwards, several rounds of peer review followed.

Most of the authors who have contributed to this book work at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. Many of them also call Brussels home. As such, it should not come as a surprise that many opinion pieces in this book deal explicitly with Brussels. Pictures from Brussels, taken by Esmâ Alouet, illustrate the text. Brussels also ranks as the second city in the world for having the most diverse population. It counts over 180 nationalities and over 60% of its population is foreign-born.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, it is the capital of the European Union, which steers national migration and anti-discrimination policies. While this book could thus carry a “made in Brussels” label, it does not deal solely with the capital. Rather than limiting our attention to the 19 municipalities that make up the Brussels Capital Region, we have opted for a ‘relational approach’. In such an approach, it is assumed that migration patterns, everyday racism and inequalities in one place are affected by processes elsewhere. On the one hand, it is clear that many decisions made in the European institutions or NGO headquarters located in Brussels have repercussions all over the world. On the other hand, it is also obvious that the political situation in Syria, droughts in Africa, protests in Paris, op-eds in Flemish newspapers or decisions taken by the Minister of Education in Namur may all have an impact on the Brussels reality. For this reason, we have refrained from excluding opinion pieces that deal with Flanders, Wallonia, Belgium, the European Union or other parts of the world. In all opinion pieces, lessons can be drawn to improve the lives of Brussels’ current and future citizens.

## Overview of the book

This book is divided into 4 main sections.

The *first section* talks about the relationship of ‘**humanism**’ – the guiding philosophy of our university – to the topics of the book. Two papers show that humanism, in a manner different to what is often perceived, is not a straightforward and ready-made answer in the strife towards more just migration policies and more equality for immigrants and minorities. The first paper, by Gily Coene, shows how humanism is hard to define, and has inclusionary as well as exclusionary features. She argues for humanism ‘as a praxis of criticism’ that invites academics working on migration and minority issues to keep on refining their ‘techniques of making trouble’ and ‘to continue to engage in resisting the common sense’, a practice that reflects well the central mission of this book. The second paper is written by Mariska Jung and Sophie Withaekx. In the wake of humanism as a practice of criticism (Said, 2004; and Coene, in this book), they ‘approach humanism with

caution'. The authors warn the reader to be 'mindful of the fact that the racial, gendered and colonial underpinnings of the human (in humanism) need to be better understood before we can reimagine the human' and thus contribute to a more just world for migrants and minorities. Drawing on these ideas, we consider the remainder of the book to be an exercise in humanism as a praxis of criticism or a 'technique of trouble-making', in the words of Edward Saïd.<sup>5</sup>

In the *second section*, the authors take a critical look at dominant conceptions of migrants and refugees, **migration** policies and migration debates. They question common sense ideas that tighter border controls (Giacomo Orsini; Angela Tacea and Laura Petrache Le Gern ; Anna Simola) and cooperation with migrant sending countries (Philipp Stutz and Ahmad Wali Ahmad Yar) are efficient tools to govern migration; or that all refugees want to come to Europe (Israa Sadder and Hanna Schneider), and that their dream life starts once arrived (Lena Swinnen, Omar Cham and Geertrui Serneels) or that a humanitarian discourse on refugees is the best of all moral options (Eline Severs). Other authors in this section demonstrate how 19<sup>th</sup> century pseudo-scientific ideas still linger on in migration debates (Soumaya Majdoub and Patrick Deboosere) and how the capitalist market logic, governing news media, lends a helping hand to the radical right by the way in which migration is covered in the media (Jonas Lefevere). Migration is governed not just by one political authority only – the EU, or the state (Belgium) or the regional or local level. The papers by Nette Nöstlinger and Florian Trauner demonstrate that neither the EU nor the city are the holy grails to just migration policies, but that some policies can be better governed by the more global institutions, and other better by the local authorities.

The *third section* sketches a portrait of the **inequalities** migrants and minorities face in different societal spheres (education, employment, care etc), and authors propose thought-provoking solutions to address these. The first papers in this section focus on *education*. Emery, Laurijssen, Boone and van Noord show how the complexity of the Belgian education system creates a severe disadvantage for pupils with migratory roots. The authors argue for, among other things, greater transparency, and propose the postponement of educational tracking in order to foster equal opportunities. Christil Asamoah, Sophie Withaecx and Iman Lechkar showcase their ideas on how to foster equality for marginalized groups in the university. Their insights show how to 'do' and 'not-do' decolonization. Decolonization is far more than just 'replacing white with black or non-Western authors', (Asamoah) or 'happy diversity talk' (Withaecx) but to 'reshape and question power structures that determine what knowledge is' (Asamoah), 'make space for painful stories' on racism (Withaecx) or create a real 'pluriversity' (Lechkar).

The papers on *housing and employment* show that solutions to address inequalities must have the courage to move beyond classical public policies. Hala El Moussawi demonstrates, for instance, that good and well-located housing for asylum seekers is quintessential for starting a new life in Belgium. She argues against dispersal policies that send asylum seekers to all corners of the country and pleads for more structural assistance in the quest for housing once refugees leave the asylum centres. Moving to the labour market, Amy Weatherburn and Paul de Hert question the common sense idea that exploitation is mainly happening with undocumented workers, and that giving a legal status to migrant workers would end their exploitation. This is not so, as many legally staying EU migrants are also victims of labour exploitation. To end this injustice, they plead for a multi-faceted policy with a more central role for the social inspections, which should be done in collaboration with relevant authorities, NGOs and raising greater awareness in the general public. Ilke Adam and Billy Kalonji continue with a questioning of all too classical policies for fostering labour market participation of Afro-Belgians. They try to explain to the president of the European Council and former Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel (who seemed not to understand) how apologizing for colonial atrocities is one tool among many for fighting the underemployment of Afro-Belgians.

Five papers in this section also explain how to improve inequalities in access to *care*: health care, elderly care and foster care. They are written by medical doctors, a philosopher, a historian, educational scientists and psychologists. Ann Roex, Rita Vanobberghen and Hakki Demirkapu plead for more diverse care teams in Brussels as a way of improving the quality of care. Dirk Lafaut and Marjolein Schepers argue for (self-)awareness raising on implicit bias and selectivity among health care providers in their decisions on ‘who deserves care’. Saloua Berdai-Chaoui, Ann Claeys, Sylvia Hoens, Honghui Pan and Ann-Sophie Smetcoren criticize the exaggerate focus on ‘culture’, in the explanation of difficult access to care of elderly migrants. They show how racism and ageism are overlooked as barriers in access to care and need to be taken into account if we want to work towards accessible services for all older adults. Frank Vanholen and Johan Vanderfaillie and Liesbet De Backer examine how to improve life chances for unaccompanied minors, migrant or refugee children who have been separated from their parents. Both advocate a more personalized care than that provided through the current accommodation centres, through appointing guardians and buddies with well-aligned roles (De Backer) and by due support for foster care families (Vanholen and Vanderfaillie).

Inclusion and equality also happen through *culture and sports*. Elisabeth Bekers and Ilke Froyen propose the building of a more inclusionary literary canon, because ‘Until the

lion has a voice, the tales of the hunt will only be those of the hunter'. If we only read stories from the standpoint of Western dominant groups, our horizon is limited, and we miss out on innovative literary techniques and creative conversations. Eva Swyngedouw questions the underrepresentation of ethnic and racial minorities in the cultural sector. She calls for quotas and diversity action plans, the eradication of the current precarious working conditions for artists and for ending the distinction between the socio-cultural and cultural sectors, as made by policymakers. Marc Theeboom questions the all too easy assumption that sports can help to include marginalized youngsters on the pretext that it would 'automatically' lead to the acquisition of well-valued competences like a sense of responsibility, communication skills, problem-solving skills etc. However, argues Theeboom, acquiring these competences does not come automatically. It needs to be explicitly organized, and sports coaches need to be trained to teach not just sports skills but also personal and social development skills.

Several authors in this book also move off the beaten track with their proposals on how to foster equality in the *politics and policy* sphere. What if every person in Brussels had access to all basic services, irrespective of their migration trajectory or legal status? The papers by Bas van Heur et al. and by Ronald Crouzé et al. are inspired by the conception of citizenship of Hannah Arendt. She considers citizenship not as a legal status, but as acting and creating together as human beings. The authors favour a city open to all. Whilst they admit that this might seem utopian in the current political climate, where would we be if academics practised self-censure in possible ideas for a future that is hopefully better than the present? Karen Celis' innovatory paper shows how to improve the representation of ethnic minorities in the Brussels politics. Many might ask what can be still be improved on that front in Brussels Region, as there is no greater diversity in any other parliament in the world than that seen in the Brussels one. Celis pleads for institutional innovation that fosters more co-creation of public policies by legislators *and* concerned citizens, including those who are least well-off and even marginalized. Deniz Ay continues on the track of institutional innovation, pleading for an empowerment of cities to foster more inclusive and efficient immigrant integration policies.

The last part of this book's section on (in)equalities focuses on the role of *religion*. Filip van Droogenbroeck, Bram Spruyt and Jessy Siongers attempt to nuance the dominant knowledge on the relationship between religion and attitudes of tolerance towards LGBTIQs. They show that it is not so much religion as such that fosters less tolerant attitudes but the absence or presence of a religious 'quest orientation'. This is a difficult word that refers to the willingness of people to entertain doubts and be self-critical.

Public authorities, they argue, can invest in nurturing this religious quest orientation. Shilpi Pandey and Stefaan Smis, in a second paper on religion, question the European approach to secularism, as it seems incapable of accommodating diversity.

The *fourth section* of the book puts the spotlight on **racism** – a strong hurdle that migrants and minorities face in the long road towards equality –, but also on their identities and sense of belonging. Identity, as famously defined by the late sociologist Stuart Hall, is a coin with two sides: recognition and belonging. It is only when a person feels recognized that he or she can feel ‘belonging.’<sup>6</sup> Racism is more than prejudice; we talk about racism when racial prejudice is combined with the power of a dominant group to reinforce racial prejudice. Yet, there are different types of *racism*. Exclusion, inferiorization, subordination and exploitation have indeed specific characteristics for different groups because of different social and historical contexts (see for example the papers of Adam and Kalonji, and D’Agostino). In this book we consider the term racism in the plural – as racisms – to emphasize and further reflect on such multiplicity. The papers under this section show that “there is not a unitary system of signification that can be labelled racist nor is there a unitary perpetrator or victim.”<sup>7</sup>

The first four papers of this section analyze racism, the next three focus more on possible solutions. The paper by Géraldine André, Safaa Charafi, Laura Westerveen and Dounia Bourabain sets the scene. In their paper ‘Brussels is Tarred with Racism’ they go against the dominant flow regarding the perception of Brussels as the most tolerant region in Belgium wherein ‘racism does not exist.’ They confront the reader by questioning the all too individualist conception of racist acts as ‘individual and conscious acts by bad individuals.’ They point to implicit and hidden kinds of racism that are systemic, and which are embodied by institutions. It is because of this form of racism that migrants and minorities have fewer chances to land good jobs, to pursue educational tracks of higher value and thus find good housing even in diverse and seemingly tolerant cities. Mariska Jung, in the next paper, explains how the politicization of ritual slaughter in Belgium and elsewhere cannot be explained by reference to animal ethics alone, but should also include racism. She shows how animal ethics, from the British empire to Nazi propaganda, have historically functioned in the establishment of racial hierarchies and oppression. Serena D’Agostino’s paper immediately follows, illustrating the relevance of talking about racism in a plural form, as racisms, by showing how a specific form of racism, anti-Gypsyism, is sometimes considered as legitimate and reasonable. Discrimination and racism do not only impact on equal chances to a good life, but also on identity, as Yijia Huang demonstrates well in her paper. Governments and the general

public sometimes criticize the fact that Muslim Belgians do not feel Belgian enough, but then they also have to realize that identity comes with a feeling of recognition, which is difficult when you do not feel welcome or are discriminated against.

With the papers of Dounia Bourabain et al., Tundé Adefioye and Pieter-Paul Verhaeghe we move towards possible solutions to counter racism and discrimination. Bourabain et al. kick off with a ‘yes we can’ attitude and recommend fostering steered positive intergroup contact as well as positive action in employment and education. Adefioye calls upon the university (yes why not VUB?) to create a bachelor or master programme in ethnic studies, similar to Black Studies taught in the US and the UK. He sees this as ‘a crucial tool of liberation’. Such an initiative would not only map and archive the reality of Black, Moroccan, Turkish and other people of colour in Belgium and Europe and study their important contributions to the arts and humanities. It would also document, valorize and help to spread understanding of their struggles for equity and liberation. Pieter-Paul Verhaeghe, as the next author in line, advocates why efficient anti-discrimination policies need to be equipped with the set-up of ‘situation tests’, a field experiment in which candidates with similar relevant features (except for possible grounds of discrimination like ethnicity, race, gender, etc) apply for similar jobs or advertised housing rentals.

The last five papers of the book all touch upon issues of identity and belonging, albeit in very different ways. The paper by Petrus te Braak et al. shows how the Brussels identity is an inclusive identity to which young people, with or without a migration background, feel more connected than they do to being Flemish, Walloon, Belgian or belonging to whatever other country or region. They call upon Flanders, Wallonia and Belgium to learn from Brussels on how to make their identities more inclusive. Lena Imeraj and Tuba Bircan warn against the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ logic of current diversity policies. They plead for a recognition of ‘diversities’ in a way that recognizes the diversity within the diversity. Only in this way will we recognize people ‘for who they truly are’. Gabriel Zohar demonstrates the effects that the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ logic can exert on the life chances of minorities. Ethnicity, together with class, are both regrettably powerful predictors of educational and employment opportunities, and this is particularly strong in Belgium. Zohar pleads for ‘a shift in the collective mindset to one of greater recognition of the fact that it is possible to belong to any ethnicity without being automatically located somewhere at the fringes of society as outsiders’. The two last papers of this book demonstrate how, even after living a lifetime in Belgium or even after a presence of several generations, some migrants are still not considered as fully ‘from here’. Lars Breuls and



Kristel Beyens show that, even if you have lived your whole life in Belgium, if you commit a crime, you are punished doubly. Or, using the words of the French rap group Zebda: ‘je suis celui qu’on a puni deux fois, ici et puis là-bas’. Over 20 years of campaigning in Belgium had successfully led to the suppression of this double punishment for most categories of foreigners, but in 2017, under the administration of Theo Francken, it was reintroduced. Contrary to official discourse, Marijke Van Buggenhout, Nadia Fakil and Els Dumortier argue in the final paper that the Belgian children in Syrian detention camps are indeed ‘paying for the sins of their parents’. A state of exception is at play where a violation of human rights is justified because these children are born out of parents that are considered public enemies: not only are they paying for their parents’ mistakes, they are also paying for their ethnicity, as their parents are increasingly being stripped of their nationality.

The 44 papers in this book clearly show that humanism, in its sense of promoting human rights as liberty, solidarity and equality, is far from being guaranteed for all. Migrants and minorities do not have equal opportunities to live a good life. They face inequalities in many areas, including housing, education and employment. The authors in this book have practised humanism as a ‘practice of trouble-making’, as a ‘praxis of criticism’. They dare to question common sense ideas and say what has gone or is going wrong. But they have not stopped there. The authors also offer hope and put forward a very diverse set of solutions for a more just future for all.

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# Towards a Radical Politics of the Human

by Gily Coene

*"(...) humanism [is] a usable praxis for intellectuals and academics who want to know what they are doing, what they are committed to as scholars, and who want also to connect these principles to the world in which they live as citizens."*

(Edward Saïd)<sup>1</sup>

Humanism is hard to define. The term is applied alternatively to historical movements like Renaissance humanism, to contemporary philosophies of life (like secular humanism), to specific areas of study and approaches (like the humanities) and to legal-political frameworks like human rights law or humanitarianism. Although humanism can refer to a variety of ideas and beliefs about what human beings are, what they are morally entitled to, what kind of moral or knowledge ideals they should strive towards and so forth, it has nevertheless been rightly attacked for a number of reasons, including its exclusionary and elitist assumptions – bourgeois, androcentric, white, heterosexual or eurocentric.

Humanism therefore seems to be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it signifies ethical and democratic ideals that inspire people to struggle against grave injustices in the world, to create solidarity across national, ethnic and other divisive social boundaries and to criticize unequal power relations and oppressive structural forces. This inclusionary side is, for instance, powerfully reflected in the activist slogan 'no human is illegal', which strongly condemns the criminalization of migration and dehumanizing treatment of refugees and immigrants. On the other hand, the development of the humanist paradigm is historically entangled with violent oppression, colonization and exploitation. This darker side, to borrow Walter Mignolo's<sup>2</sup> phrase, can also be witnessed today, for example in assimilationist discourses that urge immigrants to adapt to 'more enlightened' European standards and norms. This is all the more painful if one considers

that human rights – widely regarded as the moral cornerstone of Western Enlightenment – are the rights most violated within Western countries with regard to the treatment of immigrants and asylum seekers.

The quotation by Edward Saïd that heads this chapter stems from *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, the last and posthumously published work of this widely known author of monumental works like *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*. Throughout his life in exile and his critical intellectual work, Saïd was very much aware of the entanglement of humanist ideals with colonial and racist projects. However, in reflecting on how to engage with the complexities and conflicts of a post 9/11 world, he also affirms humanism as a critical practice. For Saïd, humanism refers to a “technique of trouble-making” that is found among different traditions and contexts around the world.

Critical post-colonial writers like Sylvia Winter<sup>3</sup> discuss in-depth how the fundamental ambivalence of the Western humanist paradigm already comes to the surface in the early manifestos of the Renaissance, including the famous 15<sup>th</sup> century Oration *On the Dignity of Man* by Pico della Mirandola. In this manifest, man is described as an indeterminate creature that has been given the opportunity by God to form and determine himself according to his own desires and judgment. Next to this liberating idea, God explains to Adam in the manifest that he is “free” either to “degrade” into the “lower” forms of life, those at animal level, or to “rise” to the “higher” forms at divine level. The new paradigm served to legitimate social hierarchies between those who believe that they tend towards the higher level (being transcendental, spiritual, rational, autonomous, moral, enlightened etc) and those who are perceived to tend towards the “lower” or “animal” level – and by extension being natural, physical, dependent, irrational, immoral, feminine, infantile, etc. The later modern idea of humanity, expressed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century declarations on the rights of men, was no less touched by such ambivalence. Although the proclaimed ideal of human equality was important to the liberatory struggles of slaves, women, workers and colonial subjects, it equally served to legitimate their very exclusion from the political realm of the abstract rational individual. For this reason, Leopold Sédar Senghor talked about the 20<sup>th</sup> century ‘Convention of European Rights’ instead of the ‘European Convention of Human Rights’ because the rights of this convention did not apply to the subjects of colonial states.<sup>4</sup> This ambivalence did not stop in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Feminist lawyers like Catharine MacKinnon concluded that, more than 50 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, women are still not considered as fully human beings by contemporary international human rights standards. Although there is growing recognition over the past decades that sexual and gender-based violence

constitutes a violation of basic human rights, it is still not specifically addressed within the framework of refugee law.<sup>5</sup> Like the Greek and Roman ideals of *humanitas*, the modern idea of human dignity seems to apply first of all to the already privileged.

Hannah Arendt demystified the idea of humanity in probably one of the most penetrating ways when she commented on the situation of refugees and displaced persons in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, concluding that “*the world found nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human.*”<sup>6</sup> The paradox of the refugees’ plight was not that their human rights were violated, writes Arendt, but that they – in being nothing more than human – were deprived of their very “*right to have rights.*”<sup>7</sup> The human rights paradox that Arendt refers to is somehow inherent in the democratic organization of states where the principle of “we, the people” implies boundaries and criteria for citizenship that are inclusive for some and exclusive to others. Yet, although Seyla Benhabib<sup>8</sup> regards such boundaries and criteria as inevitable, they should respond to universal principles and remain subject to continuous democratic iterations. Admission and citizenship can therefore not be refused or attributed on the basis of gender, ethnicity, religion or language, since this would contradict the very principles that liberal democracies adhere to. However, criteria based on skills, or qualifications of means and income are acceptable, according to Benhabib, because they do not ‘formally’ exclude people on the very basis of their identity. Yet, the current shift in migration policies to ‘selection by merit, not by origin’ in the global race for brains, skills and talents is no less problematic in creating exclusionary global hierarchies and unequal opportunities. As Ayelet Shachar<sup>9</sup> remarks, migration regimes in the West may officially appear to be colour-blind, also race/gender- or national origin-blind; but their new market-oriented boundaries of membership and belonging are no less exclusive for those who cannot easily sell themselves as a ‘net benefit’ to the new society.

The deadly consequences of today’s migration regimes can be witnessed on an almost daily basis. They clearly illustrate that human rights are still empty boxes for the world’s underprivileged. Yet it would be hard to imagine how to improve their situation just by consigning all humanist ideas and concerns to the dustbins of history. Different scholars therefore attempt to rethink humanism in a more critical and inclusive way, sometimes under headings such as post-humanism, post-human humanism, critical humanism and so on. The critical queer theorist Judith Butler<sup>10</sup>, for instance, has called for a ‘new humanism’ that asserts our common physicality and shared vulnerability, while political theorists like Anne Phillips argue that a more radical sense of ‘politics of the human’ is needed. Such politics would not necessarily strip away differences between human

beings, but would refuse to attach hierarchical significance to them.<sup>11</sup> The radical politics of the human thus become first and foremost a fight against inequality and discrimination that does not require people to conceal their particularities and differences in order to be recognized as fully human.

I believe it is very hard to be critical of current migration practices without making any reference to humanist concerns. Humanism seems to be part of both the problem and its solution. As Saïd explains, humanism should not signify a shared set of characteristics or ideas that one is supposed to embody or represent, but rather refer to a “*paradoxal mode of thought (...) always restlessly self-clarifying in search of freedom, enlightenment, more agency.*”<sup>12</sup> Humanism entails a sceptical attitude that breaks with widely accepted common sense ideas and discourses (*doxa*), but in a constructive way, driven by a search for better knowledge and greater justice for those who have been oppressed, neglected, marginalized, excluded and silenced. This resonates with Bourdieu’s negative philosophy and his call for a “*permanent enlightenment of the enlightenment.*”<sup>13</sup> Bourdieu criticizes a moralistic abstract universalism that mystifies existing inequalities and thereby serves to justify relations of domination and social exclusion. Although Saïd and Bourdieu are both highly critical of the oppressive ideas and projects that have been proclaimed under the banner of humanism, reason or enlightenment, they also stress that, without reference to critical arguments or universal values, one would not be able to challenge such ideas and practices as false, hypocritical and in need of radical change.

As a critical mode of thought, humanism invites academics concerned with migration and minority issues to keep on refining their “techniques of making trouble” and to continue to engage in resisting the ‘common sense’, including the one that is to be found amongst themselves.

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  - 3 Wynter, S. (2003). Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its overrepresentation – An Argument, *The New Centennial Review*, 3(3): 257-337.
  - 4 Simpson, B.A.W. (2004). *Human Rights and the End of Empire. Britain and the Genesis of the European Convention*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 739.
  - 5 MacKinnon, C. (2007). *Are women human and other international dialogues*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- 6 Arendt, H. (1976). *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company. Despite Arendt's pioneering analysis of imperialism and racism, her work is not free from eurocentric and racial prejudices. For a further discussion on how these views are related to Arendt's political ideals, particularly her celebration of the American republic, see Patricia Owens, Racism in the theory canon: Hannah Arendt and 'the one great crime in which America was never involved', *Millenium*, 45(3): 403-424.
- 7 Arendt, H. (1976). *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company.
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- 10 Butler, J. (2004). *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. New York: Verso Books.
- 11 Phillips, A. (2015). *The Politics of the Human*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 12 Saïd, op. cit. p. ibid. 6; 83; 73.
- 13 Bourdieu, P. (2003). *Méditations pascaliennes*. Paris: Editions du Seuil.







# Questioning 'the Human' in Humanism

Mariska Jung & Sophie Withaecx<sup>1</sup>

In its meaning of 'human-centredness' and of foregrounding values of autonomy, liberty, equality and sovereignty, humanism has become an appealing ideal for people and communities around the globe. With humanity as the common denomination uniting us all, humanism holds out the promise of surpassing boundaries between humans based on gender, race or religion, which have served for centuries to consolidate a social order based on fundamental inequality, oppression and exploitation. This promise has, however, not been delivered. Discourses of equality, solidarity and human rights often remain an empty shell, in which differentiations among humans exclude certain categories of people from the rights and recognition accorded to others. Moreover, humanism produces 'the human' as a superior kind of living creature, installing a hierarchy that legitimates the oppression and exploitation of animals, nature and the environment.

In this contribution, we present perspectives on humanism which find that the problem of exclusion is inherent to the particular notion of 'the human' centralized by humanist thought. Feminist and postcolonial perspectives have pointed out that this exclusion is not the result of a 'wrong' application of humanism, but the logical consequence of the concept of 'the human' that lies at the heart of humanism. Solving this problem therefore requires something different from applying humanism in the 'right' way. It involves inquiring into the genealogies of the concept of 'the human' by adopting a critical position towards the power relations among 'humans', and between 'human' and the 'non-human'. For some, such rethinking can lead to a reinvention of humanism purged from implicit notions of superiority. Others question the desirability of human-centered humanism at all, and theorize about a code of ethics that moves beyond human exceptionalism. Whether or not humanism should be abandoned or reimagined, we argue that it is imperative to question carefully the notion of 'the human' and to challenge its racial, gendered, speciesist and colonial underpinnings.

# The human is overrepresented

One of the intellectuals who has famously taken ‘the human’ as a central object of inquiry is Sylvia Wynter<sup>2</sup>, a Caribbean literary critic who builds on the work of anticolonial writers such as Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire. She interrogates the idea of ‘the human’ by thinking through humanism in relation to colonization, race and gender. According to her, the idea of ‘the human’ is an overrepresentation of one specific conception of what it means to be human, which violently blocks out alternative modes and possibilities of being.

In her seminal article *Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation – An Argument*, Wynter traces the roots of this overrepresentation back to the Middle Ages and into the present. The encounter of Western imperialists with the non-Western, indigenous ‘Others’ in the Americas was conditional for the overturning of a previous theocentric worldview and gave rise to what she called Man1: the early renaissance worldview in which ‘the human’, rather than the divine, became the centre of the world. This centering of ‘the human’ was enabled by installing new standards of what constituted ‘humanity’. The capacity for reason first complemented and later replaced the previous standard of adhering to the true religion (Christianity) as a distinguishing mark of who is or is not ‘human’. The indigenous populations of Africa and the Americas were assumed to be lacking first ‘a soul’ and later also ‘reason’. In this way they became excluded from humanity and could ‘justly’ be expropriated, enslaved and exploited. With the advancement of biological science and the prominence of Darwinian thought in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the idea of ‘the human’ became firmly grounded in secular scientific knowledge and gave rise to Man2: not only was ‘the human’ now considered to be the sole species capable of reason, ‘the human’ was now also the one who was ‘naturally selected’ to become an exploiter and consumer of natural resources. Inequality and structural oppression, strongly induced by colonial violence and exploitation, thus became re-interpreted as the apolitical outcomes of natural selection and deselection.

These conceptualizations of the human eliminated the conceivability of other ways of being human and instead overrepresented the ‘Man-as-Human’. Only by positioning himself in opposition to non- or not-quite-human beings, could Western Man become installed as the centre of the world. The figure of Man is thus premised on the negation of the humanity of other human beings and does so by constructing them as Others.

# The human is white

The constitutive role of race in producing the dynamic of Self/Other and its reflection in the relationship colonizer/colonized has been famously described by Franz Fanon in his book *Black Skin, White Masks*.

*"Dirty nigger!" Or simply, "Look, a Negro!"*

*I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects.<sup>3</sup>*

In this passage, Fanon describes how the look of 'the white man' reduces him to a thing, a projection, an object. The insight comes as a shock, when Fanon suddenly realizes that he, who had always thought of himself as a human in the midst of other humans, is not recognized as human being but only as 'a Negro'. He is thus not an autonomous creature with his own independent identity, but an element in the historical-racial scheme drawn up by white colonizers. In this scheme, the black man, the colonized, the 'negro', does not stand for an individual subject, but for a body, a 'race', a counterpoint against which the white subject can identify *himself* as a human being.

Fanon powerfully expresses how Western thought has normalized the connection between humanity and race. He is famous for putting into words what this means for those who become aware of their exclusion from this humanity. For Fanon, and other postcolonial thinkers, this process of gaining consciousness is a painful but necessary first step in shaping a 'new human being', a step which would allow both colonized and colonizer to free themselves from the harmful dynamic in which ages of oppression have positioned them. However, for Fanon, this 'new humanism' would only be envisageable after a long and intense anticolonial struggle.

## The human is male

Gender has also played a pivotal role in consolidating a particular image of ‘the human’, by associating universality and humanity with male bodies and characteristics. Feminist analyses have demonstrated how gender has served to mark ‘woman’ as man’s Other in terms of her ‘lack’ of male qualities, and as man’s inferior mirror image.<sup>4</sup> This split has been much influenced by Descartes’ body/mind distinction and his definition of rationality as a form of pure thinking through introspection and disembodiment, as opposed to emotionality and embodied knowledge. Thus entrenching longstanding notions of female inferiority, the male/female-binary and its associated opposing characteristics (reason/purity/disembodiment versus emotion/impurity/embodiment) became ‘scientifically’ grounded and legitimated the exclusion of women from academic and political life.<sup>5</sup> In a dynamic similar but not identical to the construction of the colonial Other, ‘woman’ would come to be perceived as a ‘lack’ and hence inferior version of the male standard.

Feminists of colour – both in the West and in the global South – together with later postmodern and queer scholars, have further pointed out how the category of gender is also entangled with constructions of race and sexuality. This has done much more than merely dividing ‘humanity’ between ‘men’ and ‘women’. Maria Lugones’ concept of ‘the coloniality of gender’ is crucial to understanding how the category of gender has equally played a central part in the process of dehumanizing the colonized.<sup>6</sup> Through its articulation of ideals of masculinity and femininity, modelled on the ideal of the European bourgeois colonizer, gender has functioned simultaneously as ‘a mark of the human and a mark of civilization’. Due to the ‘irrationality’ and ‘bestial sexuality’ ascribed to the indigenous colonized peoples, they were not seen as conforming to these ideals of masculinity and femininity. Instead, they were constructed as non-gendered beings, excluded altogether from the categories of men and women, and thus from the category of ‘the human’. Placed on a par with animals, colonized people became marked not by (human) gender, but by (animal) sex only: ‘Colonized people became males and females. Males became not-human-as-not-men, and colonized females became not-human-as-not-women.’ The perception of the indigenous populations of Africa and the Americas as oversexualized and promiscuous has become a recurrent expression in both ‘scientific’ and popular discourses and has thus contributed to marking them as uncivilized and non-human.

# The human is not an animal

This categorization of indigenous peoples as animal-like and therefore not-quite-human, illustrates how much of Western thought, including Enlightenment humanism, is premised on an ontological distinction between humans and animals. Posthumanist scholars such as Cary Wolfe<sup>7</sup> theorize that the differentiation and hierarchization between humans and animals is constitutive of the idea of the human itself. That means that ‘the human’ does not exist without a self-defining story that disavows animals and animality. This narration can be traced back to the Old Testament and Roman and Greek philosophers, and fundamentally shapes Western understandings of humanity, of the world at large, and of science and knowledge production more broadly still.

The humanist discourse of species, in which the human is distinctive from and superior to animals, becomes concrete in what Wolfe calls the institution of speciesism. The institution of speciesism is the general ethical acceptance of violence against animals on the basis of their classification as ‘animals.’ Moreover, it means that the narrative of ‘the human’ necessitates the sacrifice of the animal and animality.<sup>8</sup> One of the consequences of this discourse is that it will “always be available for use by some humans against other humans” (p. 8) through marking them as animal or animal-like. Indeed, this happened for example during European colonialism when black people were compared to apes and with 20<sup>th</sup> century Nazism when Jews were equated with rats. Yet within academia and in the fields of humanism and posthumanism in particular, questions concerning the relations between humanity, animality, race and blackness loom large.<sup>9</sup> Thus, while we cannot think of the human without disavowing the animal, as posthumanism teaches us, neither can we think of the human without racial superiority, as decolonial and black feminist intellectuals demonstrate.

Where to go from here? Does this mean we have to abandon humanism? In his acclaimed text from 1955 *Discours sur le colonialisme* Aimé Césaire fundamentally critiques humanism yet does not do away with it all together.<sup>10</sup> He aspires to “a humanism made to the measure of the world”. A radical idea that we have yet to reach, especially given the ways in which movements for emancipation continue to be co-opted when the pie of liberal humanism is enlarged on the one hand while restrictions are entrenched on the other. This is epitomized for example in the violent work done by naming and categorizing people, with categories such as ‘refugee’ and ‘economic migrant’. This artificial division between deserving and undeserving humans haunts our seas, shores,

asylum centres and streets. We thus approach humanism with caution, as we are mindful of the fact that the racial, gendered and colonial underpinnings of both ‘the human’ as well as ‘the animal’ need to be parsed and put into conversation with each other before we can reimagine ‘human’.

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- 1 The names of the authors are presented in alphabetical order. Both authors have equally contributed to this chapter. They adopted a feminist approach to co-authorship and collaborative writing. See: El Kotni, M, L. Z. Dixon, and V. Miranda. (2020). Introduction: Co-authorship as Feminist Writing and Practice. *Member Voices, Fieldsights*, February 6, <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/introduction-co-authorship-as-feminist-writing-and-practice>
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**MIGRATION**









# Open Borders to (better) Govern Migration

by Giacomo Orsini

Most decision-makers these days are convinced that the best policy – perhaps the only effective policy – for curbing unwanted migration is to close the national border. In recent times, national and European authorities began implementing a range of repressive measures designed to erect additional barriers against undesired foreigners. Yet, contrary to what one might expect, the reports on what actually happened at the borders demonstrate that restrictions of this kind have little or no effect on increasing a country’s capability to control unwanted migration, let alone place limits on it.

Opening borders, on the other hand, can resolve most of the tensions that nowadays arise around unauthorized migration. As studies have shown, *allowing people to migrate legally*, by authorising foreigners to enter a national territory via regular legal channels, will in practice enhance the capacity of national authorities to manage immigration.

Since the nineties, the European Union has adopted a consistent approach to controlling migration, taking an increasingly hostile stance towards unwanted migrants attempting to enter Europe. To this end, the EU and its member states have signed several agreements with neighbouring countries on controlling unauthorized migration into their territories. One of the latest of these agreements is the (in)famous deal concluded with Turkey. Similarly, national authorities have also been introducing new and far more restrictive visa requirements for non-EU citizens wishing to access the Schengen Area. At the same time, entire portions of the EU’s external border have been fenced off and equipped with state-of-the-art surveillance technologies.<sup>1</sup>

Advocates of closed borders justify their position to their followers by claiming that opening the borders of Europe would lead to “*a flood of millions of desperate Africans*”<sup>2</sup> But where is the data to support this scenario? Figures on migration in the African continent reveal the same trend as elsewhere in the world: when deciding to emigrate, most people will cross national boundaries but still try to stay close to their country

of origin. In 2019, almost 90% of the total number of international African migrants migrated to another country in Africa. None of them travelled as far as Europe or North America.<sup>3</sup>

This trend holds true whether people are migrating from the countryside to the city or simply moving to another country with a healthier economy. If there are no restrictions to crossing borders, migrants in Africa and Europe will usually stay on the same continent.<sup>4</sup> Enough data on real migrant flows is available to prove that there is no justification for assuming that opening borders will automatically lead to a spurt in emigration out of Africa. On the contrary, there is sufficient evidence to show that, at least in the case of the EU, closing borders does little or nothing to stem the flow of unwanted migration.

While the EU's efforts to close its borders date back to the late nineties, available research figures reveal that during the same time there was no significant decrease in the number of unauthorized foreigners entering or setting up home in Europe. Indeed, studies show that most undocumented migrants to the EU arrive with a valid visa, then stay on in that country after their visa expiry date. Hence the most likely place to look for unauthorized migrants is not the national border.<sup>5</sup>

This argument is strengthened by the fact that the majority of undocumented migrants who enter the EU by crossing its external border without a valid visa do actually have the right to some form of international protection within the EU. Whether arriving via the Mediterranean or the overland Balkan route, legally speaking, and perhaps also morally speaking, they thus have the right to access the EU.

Rather than facilitating control, "closing" borders deviates migrants' journeys away from safer routes into less patrolled but more dangerous alternatives. There, people often put their destinies in the hands of smugglers, consequently increasing business opportunities for criminal organizations – and insecurity for both migrants and the host societies. More generally, reducing legal options to migrate makes it harder for law enforcement to keep track of foreigners. After all, when successful, unauthorized migration goes undetected.

In contrast, by keeping borders open and verifying the identity of every person making the border crossing, national authorities are able to make use of the more complete information on individual identities to control who is coming through and to enforce

public order. Therefore, if governments really want to control who enters and who exits their country, their authorities must keep the border open and provide more, not fewer, opportunities for legal migration.

Efficiency in controlling migration is not the only benefit afforded by an open border. The removal of obstacles to legal migration will also lead to a series of other positive effects for both migrants and the host countries. These effects can be seen clearly in the labour markets, for example.

Maintaining the competitiveness of European job markets fuels another argument frequently advanced in support of closing national borders. It is claimed that if no restrictions are put in place, European-born workers will suffer from unfair competitive advantage if employers use non-European workers. It cannot be denied that in several parts of Europe the less attractive jobs are frequently taken up by migrants. However, the availability of foreign labour is blamed for the general degradation of workers' rights and a generalised drop in wage levels. Many people believe this is because migrant workers are less demanding than local workers. The truth is that, when borders are closed, undocumented migrants are all too easily recruited to the informal labour market. No ethnic or national group has any 'natural predisposition' to accept being overexploited at work. But, in the absence of residence and labour permits, migrants will accept even the most precarious working conditions in order to hang onto both their jobs and the right to remain in the country.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the degradation of labour markets should be laid at the door of closed borders rather than blamed on immigration *per se*. If borders are open, allowing migrant workers to enter legally, this makes them less vulnerable to exploitation because their living situations are less precarious. It also reduces the risks of unemployment for locals and the aggregated pool of available workers makes it easier to get a good match for supply in relation to demand in job markets, so they function better.

The EU provides a good example here. Since Europeans are given equal rights across national labour markets, the costs of hiring a native or an EU migrant are the same – making it eventually more convenient for employers to hire locals who, for instance, already know the local language. However, a specification is necessary here since many supporters of closed borders conflate the effects of posted work with those produced by the freedom of movement granted to Europeans.

Within the European common market, companies are entitled to operate in any other EU member state. Their employees may then work in the host country until their contracted work is finished but the conditions for their employment are governed by national contracts. It can happen that their national contractual working conditions might be of a lower standard than those valid in the host country. This often results in ‘social dumping’, and can lead to a degradation of labour conditions for the entire job sector. National companies may be forced to lower their own employment standards in order to stay competitive.

Setting posted work aside, legal migration is best for matching supply to demand in the local job markets. Unemployed migrants are free to search for a new job in another country if they are able to move without having to face excessively harsh legal and administrative costs for migrating. Portugal provides a good example of this. During the recent economic crisis, non-EU migrants established with relatively secure legal status in Portugal were better able to ride the wave of economic hardship than undocumented foreign workers. Migrant workers whose documents were fully in order were able to migrate to search for jobs elsewhere anywhere in the EU.<sup>7</sup>

In conclusion, for any country wanting to control illegal migration, closing its borders is the least effective policy. Not only is it inefficient, it also generates numerous human and financial costs affecting migrants and the host country alike. In contrast, if the country opens its borders, this policy is more intelligent as it opens the way for legal migration, which enables national authorities to control and manage immigration. Allowing foreign workers to become properly documented is another means of relieving further tensions that tend to arise over irregular migration. To see how successful this policy can be in action, look no further than those labour markets which have accepted a successful injection of legal migrant workers.

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# When Border Enforcement Backfires, Alternatives Exist

by Angela Tacea and Laura Petrache Le Guern

Rawan, a 12-year-old boy who fled from Aleppo in Syria, told us:

*'We're now refugees. People don't like us. No one is loyal, everyone lies. I was a kid before. I am older now. I know more.'*

Faced with constant public and political pressure, the European leaders are favouring tighter border controls over more integrationist measures. But tighter border control policies do not stop immigration. While restrictive regulations may curb illegal immigration, they are also undermining humanistic values such as understanding, tolerance, acceptance of foreign customs and ideas, openness. They also nurture a public vision of irregular migrants as illegitimate beneficiaries of fundamental rights.

In the context of mixed public opinion on immigration and the rise of anti-immigration political parties, EU member states seek to protect their national sovereignty against migration inflows, mainly by reinforcing their border controls. Of course, debates about migration should not be reduced merely to the dichotomy between 'open' versus 'closed' borders, nor is any country systematically the most or least restrictive towards immigration. In fact, some countries have been simultaneously opening and closing their borders even before the coronavirus pandemic.

However, research shows that border controls designed to secure the national territory (e.g. surveillance, detention) have been constantly reinforced over the years at the level of both individual nation states and the EU. Based on a selection of data for nine countries between 1999 and 2008<sup>1</sup>, the Immigration Policies in Comparison dataset shows a clear upward trend of border and land control policies.<sup>2</sup> The same trend can be observed if one looks at the European budget allocated to internal security. Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, saw its budget

reinforced every year from 6 million EUR in 2005 to 420.6 million EUR in 2020, a 34.6% increase compared to 2019. At the same time, 41% of the Home Affairs EU funding is spent on the Internal Security Fund compared to 33.5% on Asylum, Migration and Integration. The EU is not only better equipped to control its external borders, but has also started to externalize its borders by creating buffer zones around external borders, acting in transit countries and establishing agreements with the countries of origin of migrants in which they control the departure of people from their own coasts.

But how efficient are tighter border controls?

When immigration policies become more restrictive, immigration flows may still increase. Despite Europe's massive investment in external border controls, people continue to arrive in the continent. This does not mean that restrictive immigration policies do not matter. More restrictive regulations, namely tighter border controls, do lead to lower migration flows. But, while the EU is implementing extensive border controls to prevent illegal immigration, its action indirectly pushes unauthorized migrants (including those that might qualify for asylum) into the hands of smugglers or even to their deaths.

In January 2019, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that since 2017, 2,700 people are believed to have died or gone missing while crossing the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe. On 19 June 2018 a wooden boat carrying an unknown number of migrants capsized off the coast of Libya. As UNHCR reported, 'Out of the estimated 100 passengers, only five survived.' The same day another boat sank at a different location off the Libyan coast. 'Seventy people are believed to have drowned in this incident.' Many deaths, like those described above, occur frequently in the Strait of Sicily and in other coastal areas of the Mediterranean, making it the 'most deadly stretch of water for refugees and migrants' in the world. Death is the most extreme negative consequence of tighter border controls. However, travellers who manage to survive their long journeys between different countries, different political systems and legal frameworks, also continue to face different forms of violence and fundamental human right infringement.

Mahathi, a 15-year-old unaccompanied Afghan minor living in the Moria camp in Lesbos, describes his life in the refugee camp as '*a prison. I thought that European countries were developed, fair, human. I don't see that here. The Europeans don't give a damn about us.*'<sup>3</sup>



Khaled, a 29 year-old Syrian migrant, whom we met in the Migrant Integration Lab<sup>4</sup> said:

*'After all the death that we saw in Syria,  
as a person, when you go out and survive,  
when you can cross borders and reach a safe place,  
you start to feel that being human (alive) is  
the most precious element that you ever had.'*

European policies that prioritize border controls and security issues over more integrationist immigration policies encourage a vision of 'irregular migrants' as non-legitimate beneficiaries of the fundamental rights such as health, education and housing.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, narratives portray migrants in irregular situation as liars, social benefits abusers or people stealing the jobs of nationals. The criminalization of migration through establishing an 'offence of solidarity' against those who try to assist migrants by providing minimum access to shelter, food and healthcare creates a climate of suspicion and rejection among those who provide social services. It is hardly surprising then that the police or other agents in charge of fighting 'the illegal migration' might have difficulties in recognizing a migrant as a victim of human rights violations in need of protection.

To mitigate and halt the negative consequences of tighter border controls, comprehensive innovation and a paradigm shift are needed. European countries need to raise public awareness to address the media, community leaders, policymakers and people in the public eye. Political leaders should craft a positive public discourse of migration and consider sustainable integration systems that would eliminate hate-speech, intemperate language and provocative actions that exploit fears and uncertainty within our societies.

Immigration can be regarded as politically, socially and economically positive, on condition that migrants can be sustainably integrated into the receiving communities. Awareness and Informative Campaigns, social cohesion and open dialogue tools, such as social events aimed at connecting locals and newcomers, can help to develop sustainable communities and favour intercultural dialogue. Social innovation and capitalizing on newcomers' talents can be strengthened through entrepreneurial education and training, tailored services and tailor-made learning sessions for newcomers and vulnerable groups.

It could be a solution, for example, to create an entrepreneurship-friendly environment for both migrants and the native-born population and help migrant entrepreneurs through access to credit.

It is vital to develop longer-term policies that promote intercultural dialogue. There is an urgent need to develop sensitive policies of inclusion, welcome and solidarity. However, we believe that part of the rejection of migrants by local host communities comes from the fact that integration policies produce a specific category, that of migrants. In order to prevent the rejection of integration policies and to combat the rise of extremism, the integration of migrants and their access to employment must not be handled outside the integration of specifically involved national groups. The integration process should be done simultaneously for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups like second- and third-generation migrants, also unemployed nationals, demoralized and disenfranchised groups, in a way that encourages dialogue, knowledge and joint projects. It is thus a question of defining comprehensive and lasting integration policies for all individuals and populations in disarray who need to rediscover their identity through social and professional integration via common projects.

Thinking about ‘borders’ is not going to help in the construction of a sustainable future. In today’s uncertain international environment we should seize the opportunity to advance human dignity through a revitalized response. As we stand at a key junction, we should attempt to rectify the world’s inclination to adhere to closed borders (an attitude that damages human lives) and should work together towards a shared and better future.

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# Malthusian Fears in Current Migration Debates

## When the Pseudo-Science of Numbers is Used Against Humanity

by Patrick Deboosere and Soumaya Majdoub

Why is it important to analyze Malthus more than two centuries after he published his essay ‘on the Principle of Population’? First, because his population theory still looms over the migration debate and, second, because he fought the Enlightenment by using a ‘scientific’ discourse.

Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834), a cleric of the Church of England, is best known for his population theory. Simply stated, Malthus argues that human population would always grow more rapidly than food supply if population growth were not restrained by what Malthus called “preventive checks”. The poor are poor because of their own behaviour and uncontrolled reproduction. It makes no sense, according to Malthus, to help the poor, because then they will reproduce in high numbers. Scarcity, he believed, helps to maintain a balance between natural resources and the humans competing to consume them.

Malthus was popular among the ruling classes in 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain because his theory was helpful in creating a cheap and willing workforce for the industrial revolution. By abolishing poverty relief in the countryside, the poor were forced to rejoin the industrial workforce. His population theory also claimed to reveal the deep causes of the spiraling poverty crisis in late 18<sup>th</sup> century England. ‘Science’ justified why charity and helping the poor were not only unnecessary but even counterproductive, thereby liberating the ruling classes of all moral constraints.

Malthus was very clever in combining old prejudices (like the idea that that poverty exists by the will of God) with scientific argumentation and the use of statistics. He replaced God by the laws of nature. Just as Newton had used the laws of physics to explain the movements of the planets, Malthus introduced his 'law' of population to explain poverty. His first trick was to present an idyllic past with an equilibrium between food production and population (a historical claim without any empirical evidence). Next, he pointed to the paradox that *'notwithstanding the immense sum that is annually collected for the poor in England, there is still so much distress among them'*.<sup>1</sup> Then, he comes to the reason for this increasing poverty: population growth had outpaced available resources and the fundamental cause of this was that helping the poor creates more poverty by inciting the poor to reproduce in the absence of scarcity. The theory of population allowed Malthus to invert cause and effect and at the same time point to the vanity of utopian socialists who believed that it was possible to change the world by human laws. He argued that well-meaning people contributed to the poverty crisis by supporting institutions for poor relief, not realizing that opposing a natural law is pointless. The success of Malthus's ideas lies in 'naturalizing the social'.

Malthus walked in the footsteps of Edmund Burke, who wrote 'Thoughts and Details on Scarcity'. *'We the people'*, Burke wrote, *'ought to be made sensible that it is not in breaking the laws of commerce, which are the laws of nature, and consequently the laws of God, that we are to place our hope of softening the divine displeasure to remove any calamity under which we suffer, or which hangs over us'*.<sup>2</sup>

Malthus' population theory proved to be wrong and the law of population totally baseless. Already during his lifetime, couples in England were starting to control their fertility and the birthrate began to decline. The industrial revolution changed the economic landscape. Technology increased agricultural yield. Malthus had neglected the inventiveness of mankind. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century his population theory was largely abandoned. However, the roots of negative attitudes towards migration can be traced back to this period, when population growth first came to be viewed as a threat.

Malthus' popularity revived in the decades of rapid population growth after the Second World War when 'neo-Malthusians' recycled Malthus ideas on population growth and scarcity of resources and applied these to the world system. By then, population was no longer thought of and addressed within nations, but across them on a global scale, making it clear why, ever since, policies addressing migration are impregnated by Malthusian thinking.<sup>3</sup>

There is indeed an evident tension between population pressure and available resources, but neo-Malthusianism has overlooked what alternatives exist to cope with this tension. Most importantly, by presenting the challenge as a natural law with dire consequences for humanity, neo-Malthusianism has introduced a fundamental and erroneous pessimism concerning our common future. The fear of overpopulation has dominated our world view for decades and has shaped our way of looking at the Global South.

However, there has been no massive starvation on the scale predicted, and no real shortage of natural resources. After a peak growth of 2.3% annually in the late 1960s, yearly population increase has slowed down to around 1%. Total fertility has fallen markedly in many countries. So much that today close to half the world's population lives in a country where lifetime fertility is below 2.1 births per woman, which is roughly the level of zero population growth.<sup>4</sup> The main drivers contributing to this reversal are playing out in all areas of the world, ending population growth in the coming decades. Meanwhile, food production has been increasing much faster than population growth. Remaining food shortages are mainly related to distribution problems, not to scarcity. Global poverty is still a tremendous challenge. But for the first time in human history, absolute and relative poverty have been decreasing for over twenty years.

The neo-Malthusian ideas on population growth are still extremely influential in the current migration debate. The idea of an ever-growing world population is reinforced by the almost daily images of refugee streams and overcrowded boats in the Mediterranean. This helped to forge a fear of invasion in the richer countries of the world. The Malthusian fear of overpopulation and scarce resources is reemerging with force, not least because some political parties hope to gain extra votes by stirring things up.

Today Trump's immigration policy is inspired by the publications and the ideology of strong anti-immigration lobbies such as the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), the American Immigration Control Foundation and the American Border Patrol. All of them have been founded by John Tanto and financed by Cordelia Scaife May, one of the heirs of the immensely rich Mellon Scaife family in the US. FAIR, for instance, received \$56.7 million for the fiscal years 2005-2017. Cordelia Scaife May was strongly influenced by neo-Malthusianism and financed many organizations for birth control such as NumbersUSA.

It is striking that some commentators have linked the refugee crisis to overpopulation, even though it was clearly linked to the man-made wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.

Most people prefer not to migrate and the huge numbers of Syrian refugees in Europe in 2015 were the consequence of a brutal conflict and not of overpopulation.

Very early in the refugee crisis, Malthusian ideas popped up again with what we have now come to know as the ‘counter-intuitive solution’ – namely, that the best thing to do about misery and poverty is to do nothing, for anything that is done will only exacerbate the problem.<sup>5</sup> Helping refugees is considered to create a ‘pull-effect’. Hence it is not the war that is creating the refugee crisis but the NGOs, through their assistance to refugees. The NGO’s assistance to refugees in the Mediterranean is deemed responsible for their deaths, not the decision of the EU to force airlines to control visas and punish them financially when accepting refugees on board.

These parallelisms are not by chance. It is crucial to understand that Malthus wrote his essay against the ideas of Godwin and Condorcet, and more generally against the ideas of the French revolution and the values of ‘freedom, equality and solidarity’. Malthus’ population theory is deeply entwined with his resistance against these ideals. He provided a ‘scientific’ demonstration that human nature cannot change and that the ideals of the French revolution are not feasible. He developed a theory that justified the ongoing inequality in Britain, a theory that helped to ignore the unequal access to political and economic power and to the most elementary resources to survive. His ideology was an ideology of inequality. The poor were not human beings with equal rights to the rich.

Since the end of the Second World War, with Fascism defeated, the fundamental idea that all humans are equal was enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948. Article 1 establishes the link between equality and solidarity, Article 2 the entitlement to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the Declaration. In addition, Article 2 emphasizes that *‘no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty’*. Finally, Article 14 introduces the right to asylum.

The refugee crisis was for N-VA president Bart De Wever the perfect leverage for his ongoing fight against the values of Enlightenment. De Wever’s offensive against the basic references of international law and against ‘*Gutmenschen*’ refers directly to the Malthusian criticism of the naïve well-meaning people who help the poor. According to De Wever, refugees are not seeking safe shelters but financial support, and this would

put at risk “our” social welfare state.<sup>6</sup> ‘Gutmenschen’, with their humanist approach, are, for De Wever, feeding the intolerance against migration. This is a contemporary adaptation of the classical anti-Enlightenment thesis of the conservative Edmund Burke. It reflects the idea that these damned ‘philosophers’ with their ‘damned human rights’ are destroying the nation.<sup>7</sup>

The migration debate, more specifically the way we handle the refugee crisis, is more than ever intrinsically linked to the defence of humanism and the values of freedom, equality and solidarity. We need to deconstruct the neo-Malthusian world view on population growth and on poverty alike by using data-driven analysis that opens the way for us to improve the living conditions of all human beings while preserving the future of our planet.

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# Caught in a Trap

## Refugees: Neither Man nor Animal

by Eline Severs

There is no reason to call the intentions of humanitarians into question. But it is important to realise that their discourse may, unwittingly, reproduce unhelpful representations that deny, overlook or otherwise undervalue the equality of refugees. Their emphasis on a shared humanity paradoxically re-affirms the much-rehearsed binary opposition between ‘saviour’ and ‘victim’ and, by extension, between the Enlightened West and the barbaric Other.<sup>1</sup> This locks refugees into a permanent trap of subordination: while animalist discourses deny their humanity outright, humanitarian discourses make refugees’ humanity conditional upon victimhood, or their readiness to being reduced to an object of aid from benign Western states.

### A politics of ‘fearism’<sup>2</sup>

Since the summer of 2015, it has become commonplace to deploy the term *refugee crisis* as a way of referring to the increased numbers of people arriving in Europe via illegal channels. In 2015, the United Nations recorded over a million refugees reaching mainland Europe by sea. Although this signalled a vast increase from previous years and, in this sense, constitutes a real political event, the *crisis* terminology is not without criticism because it obscures whose crisis it is. The concept primarily draws attention to the difficulties hosting countries experience as the result of the increase in newcomers. It draws attention away from the traumatic experiences of the displaced people themselves.

Critics have in this regard pointed to the *politics of fearism* (that has pervaded reporting and policymaking on refugees). The use of animalistic or inanimate collective terms (such as ‘swarms’, ‘flocks’ and ‘tidal waves’) immediately dehumanizes and decontextualizes refugees and puts the spotlight on the threat they pose to host countries:



as almost identical members of harmful collective gatherings they constitute a plague to be contained or, at worst, eradicated.

## The logic behind dehumanisation

The disquieting figure of the refugee and the politics of fearism it provokes have been thoroughly theorised by Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben. In the context of World War II, Arendt<sup>3</sup> was one of the first to describe the processes of subjectification that stripped Jews in exile from their identities. In Germany, they were perceived as *Untermenschen*. Yet their flight out of the country did little to upgrade their status. On the contrary, it turned them into *voluntary prisoners* (shut up in camps for their protection) or *enemy aliens* (as citizens of a hostile nation, they were liable to be apprehended and forcibly removed). Arendt powerfully demonstrated how the figure of the *Jew* became the subject of state discourse, and how recognition of their humanity was subordinated to political agendas.

Agamben elaborated on the reasons why we tend to refer to refugees as ‘animals’. The root of the problem, according to Agamben, lies in the rival concepts of universal humanity (extending rights to all) and national sovereignty (attempts to restrict entitlements to specific groups of people). Agamben argues that refugees expose the incompatibility between these two concepts, and in so doing they are the cause of mental discomfort for people who hold both values dearly.

How does Agamben arrive at this conclusion? Having fled their home countries, he argues, refugees find themselves in a *state of exception*.<sup>4</sup> Of course they are still human, but they are no longer citizens able to call upon their states for protection. The same holds for receiving countries: they do not automatically grant refugees citizenship status. Hence, refugees enter a state of exception: while their humanity is not necessarily called into question, their ability to receive humane treatment becomes conditioned by the national goals of receiving countries, and the extent to which the refugee in question aligns with the national aims of stability, order and security of the receiving country.

The figure of the refugee, in this sense, exposes the myth of human rights. It reveals how human rights enter into competition with notions of state sovereignty. More concretely, it reveals how, in today’s globalized world, the sovereignty of states depends crucially on

their capacity to declare a ‘crisis’ or state of emergency, allowing them to suspend human rights in order to secure national aims, such as safeguarding domestic systems of social security.

The *politics of fearism* may, in this context, be conceived as the by-product of cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance refers to the mental conflict that occurs when a person holds two beliefs that contradict each another. Confronted with rising refugee numbers, we desperately seek to believe two mutually contradictory propositions: humanity (the rights that humans enjoy as a simple fact of birth) versus state sovereignty (the right to exclude people to achieve a better fit with national aims). The tensions between both propositions create mental discomfort. A discomfort which we attempt to resolve by referring to refugees in animal terms.

Only by magnifying the potential threat which refugees pose to the state can the suspension of human rights be justified. The use of metaphors, such as tidal waves, floods and swarms, suggest an invasion with a collective purpose, unknown at present, but with the clear effect of destabilising a state, its public order and social security. Construed as a ‘*problem amenable to a solution*’,<sup>5</sup> refugees become less than human. A subject of state discourse. A *thing* to be handled.

Similarly, descriptions of refugee camps as *jungles* (Lesbos, Nord-Pas-de-Calais) depict refugees as ferocious, anti-social individuals, ready to devour our communities, if given the chance. The refugee camp becomes, as Agamben argues, a demonstration of the inhumanity of refugees. Its poor living conditions and the miserable conditions that refugees endure become testimony of the ‘*life not worth living*’.<sup>6</sup> Dehumanization, in this vein, becomes an instrument to justify the state’s rejection of refugees’ humanity and to treat them accordingly.

## The return of the human

In their attempts to provide a counter-discourse, NGOs, international relief organizations and left-wing politicians have turned to the Enlightenment and its universal premises, to human rights in particular. Their arguments for a more humane treatment of refugees are often accompanied by a plea for open borders and a criticism of the right of nation states to exclude fellow humans. Carens, for instance, invokes liberal commitments to

individual freedom and self-determination to argue that the freedom of movement across borders is a human right and a just means for redistributing wealth between the Global North and South.<sup>7</sup>

It is not difficult to see the parallels with the work of Peter Singer, the renowned animal rights activist and philosopher. While defending animal rights, Singer stated that ‘*equality is a moral ideal, not a simple assertion of fact*’.<sup>8</sup> Rather than describe an actual *sameness* among humans, equality is a prescription of how we should treat humans. He rejected the assumption that factual differences in ability between people (such as strength or intellect) justify differences in how we treat them. It is precisely the opposite, Singer argued: when we invoke the concept of equality, we make abstraction of people’s factual differences and, instead, emphasise their shared capacity for suffering, making them *worthy* of our consideration.

Obviously, Singer primarily sought to expose the arbitrariness of *speciesism*, or the routine differences drawn between animal and human life. But his argument for conceiving equality as a moral ideal (not as a descriptive reality) is also central to discourses that seek to counter refugee dehumanization. Statements such as ‘*no human is illegal*’ seek, for instance, to undo the everyday criminalization of refugees and to distract from the factual differences between refugees and people with citizenship status. And this, in an attempt to render refugees’ claims of sameness (more specifically, their entitlement to humane treatment) more acceptable.

## The reproduction of neo-colonial power relations

Yet, despite their best intentions, humanitarian discourse is not without criticism. Like animalist representations, it locks refugees into a subject position. The emphasis on the moral obligation of receiving countries to treat their fellow man as human paradoxically reinforces neo-colonial hierarchies between the Global North and South. Receiving countries are presented as morally superior, who are called upon (as the result of their colonial legacies and burdens) to act responsibly. This notion of superiority in turn reinforces the regulatory authority of receiving countries whose right to define criteria regarding entrance, recognition and treatment of refugees is seldom questioned.

Refugees, at the other end of the spectrum, are scripted into a particular subordinate position that impairs their capacity to act and formulate demands vis-à-vis the international community. As recipients of aid, the recognition of their humanity (and therefore of their identity as right-bearing individuals) depends crucially on their willingness to accept and perform the role of victim. Refugees' humanity is never 'natural' or unconditional. Instead, it depends on their acceptance of the 'state of exception' in which receiving countries place them.

This insight is crucial: it shows how prevailing political discourses structure refugees' experiences and testimonies in ways that cancel out and render invisible the diversity of their life experiences and talents. Clearly, receiving countries also lose out by failing to recognise and grasp the economic advantages of talented newcomers. Yet, the cost is strongest for refugees who find themselves perpetually locked in a trap of subordination. Always the subject of discourse, too rarely the maker.

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# EU Migration Cooperation with Third Countries: A Flawed Approach

by Philipp Stutz and Ahmad Wali Ahmad Yar

The European Union's current approach to cooperation with third countries on migration and development is flawed. It is flawed due to the EU doing too little to take into account the demands of developing countries, as its cooperation with Afghanistan shows. Instead, its objective is to curb unwanted migration by transferring border control instruments to the countries of migrants' origin or transit. However, while the EU approach is meant to reduce migration, it can actually achieve the opposite. A broader approach to migration governance that addresses the needs of people in these countries, enhances trade relations and development cooperation, or includes education programmes, would be more effective.

## The case of EU–Afghan migration cooperation

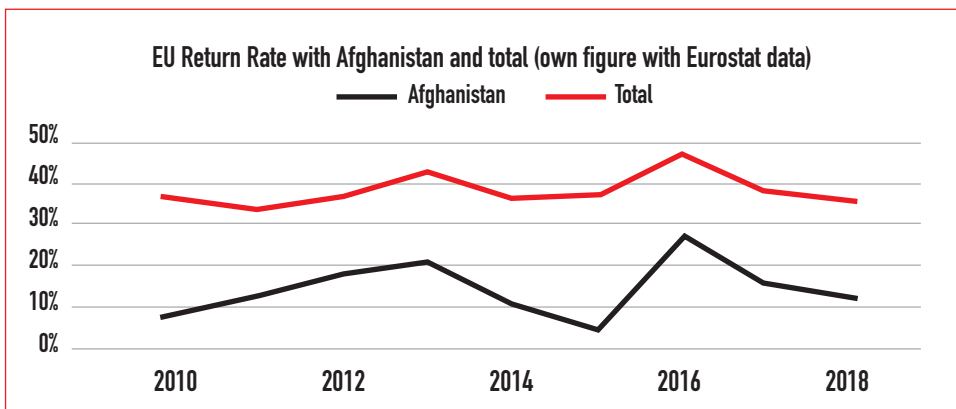
We look at the EU's migration cooperation with Afghanistan to illustrate how the EU is interacting with countries of migrant origin and transit. The EU concluded the 'Joint Way Forward on migration issues' (JWF) with Afghanistan during the 2016 Brussels Conference, which brought together representatives from 75 countries and 26 international organisations to discuss the foreign aid and development plans for Afghanistan. Afghanistan was promised €5 billion extra and a reintegration package for returned Afghans. The EU's main objective was to increase the number of returns. As it turned out, the JWF did not help either with development in Afghanistan or with an increased return of undocumented Afghan migrants in Europe.



One of the reasons why these agreements do not yield the expected results is the EU's overarching focus on one area of migration governance – the return of irregular migrants and rejected asylum seekers. This is a questionable priority, since the percentage of undocumented Afghans who actually left Europe after receiving an order to do so was never higher than 21%, with the exception of 2016. Another reason why this policy is so flawed is due to the weak and ineffective coordination between the EU, the different Directorate-Generals, the EU member states and the people of developing countries. This leads to development projects that are often run directly by the EU without local expertise. Or they suffer from mismanagement of funds by corrupt government officials as, according to Transparency International, Afghanistan is one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Crucial research is lacking on the root causes of migration from Afghanistan in order to find out what its people need.

## The EU's focus on return

To facilitate returns, the EU concluded 18 Readmission Agreements, mostly with the EU's neighbouring countries. Interestingly, the cooperation partners also commit to take back third country nationals from countries other than their own if those people had transited through their country. This is highly controversial, but the EU insists on it – even though it is rarely used. In addition to these agreements, more recently the EU concluded six informal arrangements that should boost return with countries that were previously unwilling to readmit people, including Afghanistan, while other partner countries are situated in Asia and Africa. Increasing the number of returns has not proved successful for the EU in recent years, either with Afghanistan, or beyond.<sup>1</sup>



Since 2016, more than 85,000 Afghans have received an order to leave, with the EU returning almost 16,000 of them forcefully. This corresponds to a return rate of 11.6% for 2018 (2014: 3.9%), compared to an overall EU return rate of 35.6% in 2018 (36.3% in 2014). Only a small fraction of these people were returned by Frontex, whereas most have been sent back bilaterally without the involvement of the EU. Another 8,200 left the EU for Afghanistan voluntarily during the same time period. However, in practice the EU sends back about 50% of returned people on a voluntary basis – which raises questions about the EU’s focus on enforced return and migration management beyond Europe. Returnees are promised reintegration and social support, but critics say these promises are scarcely kept once people are back in their country of origin. Many only receive assistance on arriving, mostly provided in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR, but get no further reintegration support. Instead, return should be accompanied by offering short-term vocational, skills or language training, to give people the means to re-establish their lives in their country of origin. The difficulty for returnees to reintegrate in their country of origin is often underestimated because of the stigma of ‘people having failed to make it in Europe’. With such training the stigma could be vanquished.

Was it worth it to convince the Afghan authorities with €5 billion of development assistance to accept its returnees? The return figures did not increase beyond the one-off figure of 2016 and were probably only higher in 2016 due to the high number of Afghans who had already arrived in the EU in 2015. The more people that arrive, the more people can be returned (also voluntarily), since their expectations about Europe may prove deceptive. The situation of returnees has not improved, given that unclear election outcomes, the withdrawal of the international community and the partial return of the Taliban have together created greater instability and more unfavourable conditions for return. Moreover, the EU, being so focused on return issues when concluding the JWF, had not installed safeguards for its funding. Several international watchdog organisations, like the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, report that billions in financial assistance were lost in widespread waste, lax oversight and endemic corruption. Criticism has also arisen regarding the ‘voluntariness’ of the voluntary return programmes, since migrants may feel pressured to return.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the focus on people’s voluntary cooperation is a one-way street: returning people – especially if they are willing – is easier, but looking at family reunification in Europe, there is often little budget or assistance provided.

## Ignoring the needs in partner countries

The EU ignores what people in Afghanistan actually want and need, and mostly relies on short-term fixes by convincing politicians to sign agreements on return in exchange for financial support. This approach may have the opposite effect from what the EU intends. It can increase rather than decrease migration.<sup>3</sup> It can create or exacerbate situations in which potential migrants have even greater incentive to migrate to Europe or just have to flee. In countries which are safer, opportunities for legal migration may reduce irregular migration,<sup>4</sup> but with countries like Afghanistan, the hiring of seasonal workers and establishing circular migration schemes is, by contrast, unrealistic due to the lack of security. Regional cooperation would be a better solution, for instance by helping to improve the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan, where many Afghan refugees live. The EU could also resettle Afghan migrants from Pakistan instead of returning them there.

The situation in Afghanistan has been unstable and unsafe since the installation of the new government by the US in 2001. The EU and its member states have been active in investing in social development projects and providing financial, peace and security assistance, as they are the second biggest military and financial supporter of Afghanistan after the US. But when it comes to political developments, negotiations, or the withdrawal of troops, the EU has always relied upon the US to take the lead. After almost two years of negotiations between the US delegation and the Taliban, in February 2020 an agreement was concluded that allowed the Taliban to form a new government with other Afghan parties. However, despite playing an important role in Afghanistan's development since 2001, not one single EU delegation nor EU representative was involved in the negotiations. All of this reveals a pattern by which the EU follows the priorities of the US rather than coming up with its own evaluation of the situation and taking an independent position. In the elections of 2014 and 2019, the international community contested the results due to widespread fraud; on both occasions the EU had backed the US-favoured candidate who was accused of corruption. Besides, considering the ethnic and demographic complexities, favouring one candidate over another easily leads to civil unrest.

Rather than contributing to these unfavourable situations for the Afghan population, international actors, especially the EU, should be focusing on working together with local politicians, political parties and authorities from different ethnic backgrounds. They should stop supporting corrupt authorities, in order to prevent the misallocation of

funds. Instead of having to flee, Afghans could find jobs regionally if job matching were implemented or a domestic migration law developed.

The EU's objective in cooperating with third countries, especially with Afghanistan, is the return of persons and migration control, mostly by concluding agreements that do not take into account the social and economic realities present in a country. In so doing, international actors neglect what people need and ignore the fragility of the security situation, when they should be focusing on supporting democracy and human rights with broad long-term commitments. The one-sided EU engagement, together with mismanagement of funds, compels citizens of third countries to undertake the dangerous journey of illegal migration.

Conducting research to figure out what people, local institutions and also migration organisations define as a social problem would be a first step in remedying this situation. This research would create an added value for EU migration cooperation – beneficial to the EU, partner countries and, of course, to potential migrants. But it would entail a shift in EU policy from focusing on control to engaging in actual development cooperation. In particular, the EU's approach to potentially corrupt third country governments has proved ineffective, as it has not resulted in improved situations for people, nor has it eliminated the root causes of migration. The EU's recent 'New Pact on Migration and Asylum' follows in the footsteps of previous policies – which gives us little hope that the EU is willing to end this flawed approach.

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# Not all Refugees Want to Come to Europe

## Most Stay Close to Home

by Israa Sadler and Hanna Schneider

In 2015, the arrival of around one million people on European shores and 1.2 million first-time asylum applications in EU member states created the so-called ‘European refugee crisis.’ For several weeks, large groups of refugees arriving by boat and walking through South Eastern Europe dominated public news and debates. For the European public, it seemed that the whole world was trying to seek shelter here. Years later, local media and policymakers still often portray Europe as the primary destination for people on the move.

Yet, taking a look at the numbers of refugees displaced world-wide, we see that most refugees stay outside Europe. In 2015, 13.9 million refugees (out of a total number of 16.1 million refugees world-wide) were hosted in developing countries. Thus, developing countries hosted 86% of the world’s total refugee population in 2015.<sup>1</sup> In 2018, the refugee population had risen to 20.4 million people. 84% of all refugees were still hosted in developing countries.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the vast majority of refugees stays close to home – at least as long as they have enough resources and possibilities to live their lives in dignity and peace. These resources and possibilities include access to education, medical services and the labour market as well as a secure legal status.

The situation of people fleeing the war in Syria merits particular attention, since Syrian refugees made up half of all refugees who arrived in Europe during the ‘European refugee crisis.’<sup>3</sup> In fact, over half the Syrian population has been displaced since the beginning of the war in spring 2011. In the first two years, most people endured the conflict at home or within the Syrian borders, but since 2013 the number of Syrian refugees who crossed the borders in search of protection has been growing fast.<sup>4</sup> However, it was only two years later that people started arriving in large numbers on European shores. Where did they go before 2015?

They went to where the majority of refugees goes – to their neighbouring countries. In the Syrian context, this means that people predominantly fled to Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, where the refugee population has risen dramatically since 2013. As a result, Turkey has hosted the largest number of refugees world-wide for the last five consecutive years. Germany was the only European country figuring among the five main countries of asylum in 2018 (Pakistan, Uganda and Sudan ranked second to fourth).

Importantly, this ranking does not consider the size of the host country and it includes mostly the large countries. When taking into account the host country's national population, Lebanon comes top as it currently hosts the largest number of refugees relative to its population size: in 2018, one person in six in Lebanon was a refugee. Jordan ranked second, with one person in 14 being a refugee, and Turkey third in 2018, with one person in 22. That said, in 2015 many Syrian refugees decided to move on from the country they first sought protection in and tried to make the journey to Europe. What had triggered these decisions?

Having fled their own country, refugees have to establish new lives – often with minimal resources and limited possibilities to fulfil basic needs. These include the need for safety as well as physiological needs such as food, water, warmth and rest. Once these basic needs are fulfilled, people seek to fulfil two other categories of needs: psychological needs and self-fulfillment. Psychological needs refer to 'belongingness' through emotional relationships with family and friends and a feeling of accomplishment. Self-fulfillment needs refer to the possibility of achieving one's full potential.<sup>5</sup>

Without access to education, medical services and the labour market, it is very difficult for anyone to fulfil all listed categories of needs – and sometimes the denial of access to these services and opportunities makes it even impossible to secure one's basic needs for safety and sustenance. While many people in the world are scrambling to fulfil their basic needs, refugees are often faced with even higher barriers to integration as well as an insecure legal status that is subject to change, depending on the political circumstances in the host country.

In the years following the beginning of the war in Syria, the number of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries rose exponentially. In the first years of the war, host countries such as Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon adopted a welcoming stance towards refugees. But their economies became heavily impacted by the Syria crisis and the influx of people. Coupled with changing political climates, other domestic problems and the drying up

of donor funds, the living situation for Syrian refugees has become increasingly difficult (albeit to different extents) in their first countries of asylum. Since the prospects of returning to Syria were – and still are – very slim in 2015, many refugees decided to make the dangerous journey to Europe because they could not see any future for themselves and their families in a neighbouring country.

Still, one should keep in mind that the European Union struggled in 2015 to handle 1.2 million first-time asylum applications (with Germany and Sweden receiving almost 50% of all asylum applications). In the same year, Turkey alone was hosting 2.5 million refugees in its territory. This also constituted an increase of 900,000 refugees compared to 2014, which had to be managed by one country alone. In the European Union, 28 member states could have shared the financial burden between them. Instead, no EU member state wanted to be the first (and therefore presumably the only) one to receive refugees in its territory, for fear of creating a ‘pull factor’: according to this logic, opening the doors to some refugees would attract many more to try their luck as well.

A common tactic of EU member states was – and still is – to call for a European solution instead of national initiatives (often coupled with the action of doubling the numbers of their own border guards). Unsurprisingly, such appeals generally lead nowhere. The ‘burden’ of receiving and hosting refugees is yet again pushed onto those countries who find themselves geographically nearest to the area of conflict.

This perception that refugees are, and forever will be, a burden on host countries is a strong driver of deterrence. But this perception fails to recognise the potential that refugees bring with them: since demographics in Europe are changing and societies are ageing, new labour forces are needed in many EU member states. As the example of Germany shows, refugees may fill at least some of those gaps.<sup>6</sup> Maybe not in a few weeks or months after their arrival in a new host country – and sometimes not even after a few years – but eventually many refugees are able to contribute to the prosperity of their new host country. Although this should not be the declared reason for accepting people who have fled war and persecution in the first place, it could change the perception of refugees as being a burden on a host country in the long run.

Of course, countries which currently host the majority of the world’s refugees do not have time to wait for the long run. Instead, governments that are faced with rising public debt, conflict near their borders as well as extreme refugee numbers (as is the case in Lebanon) need to find solutions rapidly. Unfortunately, these solutions, such as excluding refugees

from the labour market, often make it impossible for refugees to provide for themselves and to contribute to their host countries.

This creates a vicious circle where refugees are not allowed to integrate. They are thus forced to rely on assistance from their host society, which in turn leads to more deterrence instead of integration. This forces refugees to move on to different countries (if at all possible), where once again they are not allowed to integrate.

To break this vicious circle of short-sighted solutions, it is important that countries which are not hosting a comparatively high number of refugees – as is the case for almost all EU member states – should provide adequate (financial) assistance to the current major refugee-hosting countries. This could literally buy time for host countries to find long-term solutions for their refugee populations. It cannot be denied that refugees will need financial assistance in the beginning. They will also need time to become acquainted with a new culture and language, and to find employment or establish a new business. But if there are no barriers to education or the labour market, they will be able to fulfil their own needs. And if they have access to medical services and a secure legal status, they will be able to take sustainable long-term decisions and thereby contribute to the prosperity of their host country.

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# COVID-19: Political Will is Needed to Safeguard the EU's Asylum Policy

by Florian Trauner

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, EU member states differ more and more in how they receive and deal with asylum seekers. This threatens the *common* European asylum policy, which has been an EU objective for the last twenty years. The EU and its member states need strong political will to prevent the system from failing and to maintain the right of asylum across the European Union.

When the coronavirus arrived in Europe, not all EU member states reacted in the same way. Many states have maintained their asylum standards. A few have even increased the rights of asylum seekers. A case in point is Portugal, which has provided asylum seekers (and other migrants) with temporary access to citizenship rights. This allows them to use the country's healthcare facilities in about the same way as the native Portuguese during the COVID-19 pandemic.

More restrictive practices have become more frequent. This starts with how migrants seeking international protection are now allowed to enter Europe. Given strict border controls and restrictive visa practices, it was already very difficult for refugees to enter the EU legally. One exception has been the resettlement programmes often run by the UN's Refugee Agency (UNHCR). They allowed a number of refugees (such as Syrians having fled to Turkey or Jordan) to come into the EU in a regular and controlled manner. Once the coronavirus spread, these operations were suspended.

Border controls have also been tightened for migrants arriving in a spontaneous and undocumented way. Italy and Greece have been the countries receiving most of these migrants. In April 2020, Italy opted to take the unprecedented decision to declare its own seaports 'unsafe' due to the pandemic.<sup>1</sup> In effect, this stratagem prevents rescue boats

with undocumented migrants from landing. The Greek-Turkish border has been sealed against Syrian refugees and other migrants since late February 2020. At that moment, the Turkish President had urged them to leave Turkey and go to the EU. Among the measures taken by Greece was a temporary suspension of applications for asylum. Consequently, the number of asylum applications in the EU has been heading towards a record low. In March 2020, 18,515 new asylum applications have been counted in the EU. This is less than one third compared to the same month a year earlier.<sup>2</sup>

Greece and Italy have long held particular responsibilities. According to EU's Dublin system for asylum seekers, the first EU member state that enters into contact with the migrant is responsible for his or her asylum application. This system puts considerable pressure on the asylum systems of Greece and Italy as the two key EU border states. In early 2020, more than 38,000 migrants found themselves in overcrowded refugee camps on Greek islands. They were not able to practise either self-isolation or social distancing. A group of seven member states, including Germany and France, agreed to relocate 1,600 vulnerable migrants, mostly children, from these places.<sup>3</sup> Other member states, however, refrained from cooperating. Their main concern was that a relocation would create a 'pull factor' for other migrants to cross the Aegean Sea towards Greece. Although beneficial for the lucky individuals concerned, such relocation would also fall short of emptying the camps and reducing the risk for the remaining migrants.

An uneven distribution of asylum seekers across the EU has already posed a central challenge for many years. In 2019, one in four asylum seekers arriving in the EU had applied in Germany. France, Spain, Greece and Italy closely followed while many other member states, notably in Central and Eastern Europe, had very low numbers. Slovakia ranked lowest with 39 applicants per one million population, Hungary had a ratio of 48.<sup>4</sup> States with higher numbers of asylum seekers have long called for greater solidarity from their EU partners – yet often in vain.

A few EU member states may be using the COVID-19 pandemic as an argument for diluting the right of asylum more permanently. In March 2020, Hungary announced an 'indefinite' entry stop for migrants based on the argument that there would be 'a clear link between illegal migration and the coronavirus outbreak.'<sup>5</sup> Already before the pandemic, it was very difficult to get access to asylum in Hungary. In the wake of the migration crisis of 2015 and 2016, the country has installed a 175 km steel and barbed wire fence, four metres high, along its southern borders and has placed limits on access

to asylum procedures. Due to COVID-19, other countries have also tightened up their border controls and closed down administrations in charge of asylum procedures. A total of 17 Schengen states have reintroduced internal border controls and tightly restricted movements.

Looking back at how states reacted in history to different pandemics reveal that borders tend to remain closed for a relatively long period of time.<sup>6</sup> The reduced access to asylum rights and the suspension of the Dublin system both risk to become semi-permanent. Greece, Italy and other EU border states may find it convenient to refer to health concerns when refusing to accept Dublin transfers from northern member states. These transfers concern migrants who have left the EU's border states and gone further north. The responsibility for dealing with asylum seekers changes after six months. This implies that the state in which they are currently living takes over responsibility from the state in which they first arrived. In plain language, most asylum seekers who recently arrived in Belgium, the Netherlands or Germany can no longer be sent back to Italy or other border countries once the coronavirus triggered lockdowns. Up to 6,000 asylum cases are likely to be affected by this shift of responsibility in the first months after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>7</sup>

The EU needs to pay more attention to what is happening in the field of asylum. If EU member states make it impossible for persecuted people to find shelter in the continent, Europe will lose its credibility as a promoter of human rights abroad and at home. The right of asylum is a central human right. It implies that persons persecuted in their home countries for reasons such as race, religion or political opinion can find shelter in another state. It is possible to safeguard and even to improve the common European asylum system. The European Commission gave a list of practical tips on how to conduct asylum procedures during a pandemic. For instance, authorities may allow the lodging of asylum applications online and conduct virtual interviews with migrants. The institution has also announced a new proposal on how to reform the Dublin rules and ensure a fairer and more harmonised asylum system. Member states need to be incentivized to work together to ensure a fair distribution and common standards. New health measures are now likely to be added to any reform of the EU's asylum system. They could include mandatory vaccinations, health screenings and checks, possibly even standard quarantines.

The COVID-19 pandemic will leave its mark on European societies. The way we deal with asylum seekers will be no exception. Health checks will become a new norm for

those seeking to arrive. With good will, they will ensure the safety of both the newcomers and the rest of the society. Let us ensure that health concerns will not become the pretext for some member states not to take charge of asylum seekers at all.

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- 3 See Wallis, E. (2020). Who will be on the list of 1,600 refugees relocated from Greece? InfoMigrants.net (accessed 23 April 2020).
- 4 Eurostat (2020). Asylum in EU Member States. Press Release 48/2020, 20 March 2020.
- 5 See Daily News Hungary (2020). Orbán: There was a clear link between illegal migration and the coronavirus, 11 March 2020.
- 6 See Politico.com (2020). Pandemics Close Borders – And Keep them Close, 25 March 2020.
- 7 European Commission (2020). Covid-19 – Guidance on the implementation of relevant EU provisions in the area of asylum and return procedures and on resettlement, C/2020/2516, Brussels.











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# Short-Sighted Policies Drive Young EU Migrants into Precarious Jobs

by Anna Simola

*Following its political objective to improve Europe's competitiveness and productivity, the European Union (EU) encourages young people to be mobile. Intra-EU mobility is viewed as an excellent means for enhancing their 'employability'. Brussels, which promotes itself as the Capital of Europe, is one of the key destinations for European-minded young professionals. They typically move there in search of international job opportunities. However, the real situations young EU migrants face in Brussels can differ radically from their expectations. For example, Brussels' attractiveness produces intense competition for qualified jobs, which exposes young migrants to unemployment and precarious conditions of work. Furthermore, the Belgian state is currently targeting EU migrants with policies seeking to restrict their access to legal residence and welfare rights. These policies particularly affect unemployed migrants, as well as those in insecure, temporary and irregular jobs.<sup>1</sup> These policies, I argue, are in many ways short-sighted. Perhaps unintentionally, their inevitable outcome is the emergence of a growing group of EU citizens living in Belgium with insecure legal status and/or without access to social protection. Not only is this likely to have adverse effects on the lives of young EU migrants in precarious work positions, it is also prone to increase the supply of EU migrant workers ready to work under precarious conditions, therefore undermining the labour conditions in the market as a whole.<sup>2</sup>*

The popularity of nationalist and xenophobic parties has brought the control of migration into the mainstream of Belgian politics.<sup>3</sup> Hence, following a more general trend in various EU countries, the Belgian state has increasingly sought to select the 'freely-moving' EU citizens it wants to receive. To this end, Belgium has made full use of the vagueness of the EU legal framework: It has restricted the conditions for social protection entitlements for legally resident EU citizens. It has also limited the access



of EU citizens to legal residence as a means of stopping them from claiming social protection. In 2011, a system of data exchange was established between the social security administration and the Belgian immigration office. Since then, their officers have issued orders to an unprecedented number of EU citizens who had lost their jobs and/or received social assistance to leave the Belgian territory.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the initial conditions laid down for residence registration have also become stricter. This makes it difficult for EU migrants to obtain a registration certificate with a national registry number without proof of continuous employment.<sup>5</sup>

I conducted interviews with young university-educated EU migrants and analyzed their experiences in the context of these policies. The participants of the study had arrived in Brussels from southern Europe or the Nordic countries with the intention to work, but experienced periods of unemployment at some point of their stay. None of them was inactive, but even when not employed, they were all engaged in different types of unpaid work and training while feverishly searching for paid employment. Moreover, they all had experiences of precarious jobs, ranging from short-term projects, internships, temporary agency work and involuntary self-employment in highly-skilled sectors, to low-paid, ‘on-call’ and often informal work in sectors such as food, hospitality and care. Their work contracts and working conditions were characterized by insecurity, temporariness and low (or no) pay, which made it very difficult for them to establish a livelihood in Brussels. This financial insecurity was further reinforced by their exclusion from social protection in Belgium. What is more, many of them had not been able to register as residents in the municipalities of Brussels, as their employment histories were not considered adequate to provide grounds for long-term residence in the country.

One example is the story of Paula, from Spain, who had come to Brussels through the Erasmus student exchange programme for the last year of her studies. After her graduation, she saw no professional prospects in her field in Spain and decided to stay and search for work in Belgium. In the interview she described the intimidating manner in which she had been treated when dealing with the local authorities in Brussels. She had applied for the professional insertion benefit meant to buffer the initial job search period of recent Belgian graduates in a similar situation. However, as Paula had not graduated from a Belgian university, the benefit was not granted to her. Instead, the officer handling her case called her a ‘social parasite’. Afterwards, she accepted several parallel short-term and low-paid jobs to survive. Despite the fact that she was effectively working, when she went to the city hall to register as resident, she was threatened with expulsion:

*'I never had a contract longer than three months and that was not good enough. ... they gave me a paper saying, "If by this and this date you haven't found work, [that means] expulsion from the Belgian territory." And then I didn't return.'*

Paula's story shows how the Belgian practice of expelling citizens has pushed young EU migrants into marginal and even 'illegal' positions. Indeed, an outstanding feature of this policy and its bureaucratic implementation has been its inexplicit, insidious and even randomized nature. In fact, the Belgian government has not offered information to the general public or to the persons directly affected regarding the exact grounds on which the expulsion orders are issued or their legal or economic consequences.<sup>6</sup> In addition to the insufficiency of the information provided, the randomized bureaucratic implementation of the policy has led to a general confusion and the circulation of rumours about other EU migrants' experiences. The consequences of the insecurity produced are reported in the interviews: many of the participants had considered it safer not to register their residence or, if they had nevertheless started the registration process, not to make claims for social protection entitlements. They were thus living and working in the country outside all the formal structures and protections of the state.

The interviews further reveal some of the effects of the reinforced insecurity on young migrant workers' lives, their careers and their wellbeing. Often it critically increased their dependency on employers. They not only relied on them for their income, but sometimes also for their legal status. This limited their room for manoeuvre in the competitive labour market and hampered their chances of obtaining better jobs and work contracts.<sup>7</sup> Depending on the alternative resources within their reach, as well as the work opportunities available for them outside Belgium, some of them decided to leave while others stayed, despite the hardship they faced.<sup>8</sup>

Alicia, another young Spaniard, had not found professional paid work after the initial internship that had brought her to Brussels. Over several years, she combined unpaid professional work to develop her 'employability' with low-paid 'survival jobs' in restaurants, shops and private homes. Her story illustrates how financial insecurity can force young workers to abandon their professional projects and leave. She explained:

*'The truth is that I don't know anything about my rights here ... I know from other people that I shouldn't get into bureaucratic hurdles ... Even though I feel very attached to this city... I don't have money to live for the next month or the one that follows... Or I need to do work that takes away my time and energy and has no prospects, only to continue living here. ... But I've got to the point where I cannot continue ... I've decided I will return to Spain at the end of the month ... because I need to rest ... I want to invest in my vocation but here I can't because I'm always depending on money and on time and I have neither.'*

To be sure, the effects of these policies that reinforce the insecurity of precarious EU migrants are not limited to inactive 'welfare tourists' whose alleged prevalence has been at the heart of the public and political calls for a more stringent control over EU migration. Nor are they limited to the lives of the migrants who become subject to these policies when seeking to establish their professional careers in Belgium. Arguably, they also increase the employers' opportunities of finding qualified workers who are ready to work under poor conditions. This way they encourage increasingly precarious employment practices at both ends, top and bottom, of the Brussels labour market, which is far from the original objective of these policies. It also shows up the political negligence on the part of the EU in allowing its member states to implement policies that so clearly conflict with its aim to foster a genuinely intra-European labour market where all EU citizens can compete on an equal footing.

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  - 2 Simola, A. (2018). Lost in administration: (Re)producing precarious citizenship for young university-educated intra-EU migrants in Brussels. *Work, Employment and Society*, 32(3): 458-474.
  - 3 Gsir S., Lafleur, J-M., & Stanek, M. (2016). Migration policy reforms in the context of economic and political crises: the case of Belgium. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42(10): 1651-1669.
  - 4 Lafleur, J-M., & Stanek, M. (2016). Restrictions on access to social protection by new Southern European migrants in Belgium. In: J.M. Lafleur & M. Stanek (eds.), *South-North Migration of EU Citizens in Times of Crisis*. Basel: Springer: 99-121.
  - 5 Simola, A. (2020). EU citizenship as precarious status for precarious workers: Implications of national policies restricting EU citizens' rights for young university-educated EU migrants in Brussels. In: S. Mantu, P. Minderhoud, & E. Guild (eds.), *EU citizenship and Free Movement Rights: Taking Supranational Citizenship Seriously*. Nijhoff, Brill: 190-214.

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# Transit Migration: Brussels Does it Better

by Nette Nöstlinger and Florian Trauner

‘Transit migration’ (also seen as ‘transmigration’) is the term used to describe the situation where migrants get marooned in one European Union (EU) member state while seeking to reach another member state. This situation is governed by EU asylum law. According to the EU’s Dublin regime,<sup>1</sup> a migrant is allowed to submit only one asylum application for entry into the EU, and this is usually done inside the first EU country of entry, most often Greece or Italy. Most migrants do not want to – or simply cannot – stay in either of these countries, so they move onwards. Many of them find themselves stranded in Brussels while hoping to cross over to the United Kingdom (UK), their final destination.

Transit migration poses a challenge to all Europe, yet no European solution is on the horizon. Since 2015 the city and the people of the Brussels Capital Region have been proactive, adopting a robust approach that is far more hands-on and constructive than that of the Belgian federal government. The Brussels region therefore deserves not only to have a bigger say on transit migrants but also to receive more substantial financial and logistical support.

## Transit migrants in Brussels

Greece and Italy have been struggling since 2015 with overcrowded reception centres and painfully slow asylum procedures amidst fierce public controversies. This chaotic situation has prompted many asylum seekers to abandon these two Southern EU ‘frontier states’ even if such a move is prohibited by the Dublin rules. The UK is a particularly attractive destination for many migrants arriving from outside European because its official language is English, the presence of diaspora communities, and it has a reputation for offering illegal labour opportunities to undocumented migrants.

However, given that the UK is now applying strict entry controls, many migrants trying to get to the UK (often with the help of smuggling networks) will end up as transit migrants in places such as Brussels.

The situation in Brussels intensified after France's dismantling of the 'Calais Jungle' in October 2016. Sheltering up to 3000 migrants, this encampment in the North of France had served as a main springboard for transit migrants seeking to enter the UK. Most Jungle migrants were relocated within France, yet its clearance also prompted many of them to view Brussels as an alternative. 400-500 migrants turned up and started sleeping in the Maximilian Park in Brussels, with numbers going up to 700-800 in later years.<sup>2</sup> At the outset, the Belgian federal government made no undertaking to protect or inform these migrants, arguing that, since they had not submitted their asylum application within Belgian borders, they were in theory 'unknown' to the Belgian State.

The municipal elections in 2018 caused 'transit migration' to become a hot topic of political debate, despite the fact that it falls within the competence of the federal government. Several mayors complained about the presence of transit migrants tucked away in harbours and on railway car parks in their communal territories. There were strident calls from the New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) led by Theo Francken, then State Secretary for Asylum and Migration. His party portrayed migrants – particularly asylum seekers – as a cultural and economic menace posing a security threat to the Belgian welfare state and society, especially if they happened to be 'Muslim and male'.<sup>3</sup>

Francken and Jan Jambon (N-VA), who was then the federal interior minister, put together a '9-point plan to tackle transit migration.' They proposed a number of repressive objectives for controlling migration.<sup>4</sup> The police implemented a range of actions designed to halt 'illegal transit movements.' In May 2018, during one of these actions, a two-year-old Kurdish girl named Mawda was shot dead, caught in the crossfire after police had opened fire on a van carrying migrants. Eleven people were later charged with human smuggling and participation in a criminal organisation. However, the criminal trial was criticised as a 'trial against solidarity',<sup>5</sup> since four of the accused were Belgian citizens who had offered housing to transit migrants, while the seven others were undocumented migrants trying to reach the UK. This trial highlighted the ambiguous approach adopted by the Belgian federal government: first, refuse to acknowledge the presence of transit migrants in Belgium, then get rid of them via security-oriented policies such as forced deportation.

Civil society organisations lost no time in taking up their positions at the opposite ends of the political response spectrum. Immediately after 2015, two civil society NGOs took the lead in providing practical support for this group of migrants: the ‘Citizens Platform for Refugee Support’ and the ‘HUB Humanitaire’.

Since 2017, the Citizens Platform has been creating links between undocumented migrants and residents in and around Brussels who offer to host these migrants for one or more nights. One year later, the same NGO opened its Porte d’Ulysse shelter which provides temporary accommodation for up to 350 people. By May 2019, some 8000 Brussels residents and smaller numbers in Flanders and Wallonia had each hosted a transit migrant for at least one night. 4000 volunteers had offered other forms of assistance. Over 50,000 people had followed the citizens’ platform actions via social media such as Facebook.

The second key NGO is the HUB Humanitaire, initially based at the Brussels North rail station and now established in a building at the Port of Brussels. Set up in October 2017 as a joint initiative of several established organisations, including Doctors without Borders and the Red Cross,<sup>6</sup> the HUB Humanitaire brings together the expertise of different civil society actors to meet specific migrant needs. The NGO provides medical services (with particular emphasis on mental health), collects and hands out clothing, and helps trace family members lost during the long migratory trek. Where possible, the Hub helps migrants to contact their families back home and provides practical help with resolving social and legal issues (e.g. navigating Belgium’s asylum procedures).

Strong relationships have been forged between these civil society NGOs and politicians at local and regional level. The Brussels Region was instrumental in helping the NGOs to set up the HUB Humanitaire and the Porte d’Ulysse shelter by providing financial grants and logistical assistance. In contrast, the Federal government’s repressive approach has met increasing opposition in and around Brussels and has been challenged by local politicians. One example of this was the campaign against search warrants. Municipal officials in Brussels and Wallonia pressed their local politicians to condemn the federal law that allowed house searches of the homes of ordinary citizens suspected of hosting undocumented migrants. (In Flanders, however, this campaign faltered due to the absence of support from any municipality.) Thanks to Belgium’s federal set-up, the Brussels Region was able to act independently on this issue. As it holds substantial autonomy at regional level, the Brussels region is able to oppose and even circumvent the federal authorities.

In fact, it has already done so by including humanitarian assistance towards transit migrants in its agenda for helping homeless people.<sup>7</sup>

## Urban empowerment: a humanist approach

In Europe and the US, repressive migration policies put forward at federal level often find resistance at local and urban community level. This comes as no surprise. Federal politicians often feel pressure from their electorates, who are assumed to oppose further migration. This leads them to bring in repressive measures for controlling ‘irregular’ migration. At local level, however, residents get to know undocumented migrants, making their acquaintance through their children going to the same school, or living in the same neighbourhoods. As a result, daily interactions turn the abstract concept of ‘migrant’ into real people who are not just migrants but also ‘individuals’ whom local people care about.

Several cities in Europe and the US have proactively positioned themselves against the repressive approach of their national governments. The underlying idea is that irregular migration – in whatever form – will not disappear quickly, but will become entrenched in today’s immigration systems. Providing dignified living conditions and according basic rights to migrants not only benefits the migrants themselves but also strengthens social ties within the community.

All the above holds true for transit migration in Brussels too. A long-lasting solution can only be possible if the EU Dublin rules for migration are reformed. Although the European Commission has proposed a permanent relocation mechanism for distributing asylum seekers more fairly across Europe, there is stalemate in the negotiations at EU level. Given the absence of a pan-European solution, another way forward is to empower the local level. Here the Brussels Region has already taken important steps. In 2020, the Brussels government granted €2,785,000 to the NGO ‘Bxl Refugees’ and €1,090,000 to ‘Doctors of the World’.

Brussels can do even more. But as long as migration is a federal competence, the region will need to obtain more support from the Belgian federal government and authorities. This could be done in three ways. First, the Brussels region should receive financial compensation for its efforts. Second, migrants should be provided with correct and objective information about procedures such as voluntary return, relocation or asylum application, all of this clearly explained in a language they can easily



understand. According to MYRIA, the Belgian Federal Migration Centre, ‘public authorities cannot hide behind NGOs and citizens’ initiatives when it comes to their obligations to protect fundamental rights.’<sup>8</sup> Third, federal officials are urged to share more information from the Eurodac database (containing fingerprints of asylum seekers) with regional officials.

Many transit migrants are genuinely afraid of the EU Dublin rules. All too often, it is difficult to understand the reasons underpinning Belgian federal government decisions to apply or to waive the Dublin rules. As a result, a transit migrant is forced to dwell in uncertainty whether or not he or she will be allowed to stay or will be forced to return to another EU member state. It is unacceptable that transit migrants should find themselves incarcerated, through no fault of their own, in a refugee shelter somewhere in the middle of Belgium for months or even years, only to be repatriated to Athens or Rome and forced to start over.

Transparency and proactive engagement on the part of the authorities will lead to trust. This trust will empower transit migrants to make informed decisions on how to end their uncertainty and take control of their lives.

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- 1 See Regulation (EU) 604/2013 of 26 June 2013 (referred to as Dublin-III-Regulation).
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  - 3 De Cleen, B., Zienkowski, J., Smets, K., Dekie, A., & Vandevooordt, R. (2017). Constructing the ‘refugee crisis’ in Flanders. Continuities and adaptations of discourses on asylum and migration (pp. 59-78). In: M. Barlai, B. Fähnrich, C. Griessler, & M. Rhomberg (eds.), *The migrant crisis: European perspectives and national discourses*. Berlin: LIT Verlag.
  - 4 Bruggeman, F. (2018, September 10). Francken en Jambon stellen 9-puntenplan voor in aanpak van transmigratie: dit zijn de maatregelen. VRT NWS.
  - 5 MYRIA (2018, November 7). Start van een beladen proces over mensensmokkel (persbericht). Retrieved from <https://www.myria.be/nl/publicaties/start-van-een-beladen-proces-over-mensensmokkel-persbericht>
  - 6 The full list is: Doctors Without Borders (MSF), the Red Cross, the Citizens Platform for Refugee Support and Doctors of the World
  - 7 See in more detail Nöstlinger, A. (2019). Where is the Belgian state? The (non-)occurrence of interaction on the issue of transit migration in Brussels, (MA Thesis, VUB, Brussels).
  - 8 België, op de weg naar het Verenigd Koninkrijk, MyriaDOC 10, Januari 2020. Retrieved from [https://www.myria.be/files/Myriadoc\\_10\\_transitmigratie.pdf](https://www.myria.be/files/Myriadoc_10_transitmigratie.pdf)

# Traumatised Newcomers: Towards a Society that Heals

by Lena Swinnen, Omar N Cham, Geertrui Serneels

A growing number of human rights groups highlight the extensive psychological trauma migrants and refugees undergo as a result of their arduous journey to reach Europe. It is not unusual for this journey to be haunted by experiences such as (sexual) violence, torture and imprisonment or abduction by armed militias. As a result, many newcomers<sup>1</sup> suffer from mental illnesses such as post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety or depression. When this trauma is left untreated, it may influence the migration and acculturation process, leaving newcomers in a vicious circle of struggling for survival.

Research shows that lengthy asylum procedures and stays in centres are detrimental to mental health.<sup>2</sup> This is something we see daily in our clinical practice. Many trauma patients with stories of bombing, human trafficking and persecution are more concerned, however, with not being able to work because they do not yet have full mastery of the language, or having to share a one-bedroom apartment with seven people, or with loneliness, than they are with the horrors they have experienced in their past. The pressures of migration and acculturation often constitute a more acute cause of stress than personal traumatic experiences.

For us as trauma therapists, it is clear that many newcomers deal with vulnerabilities that cannot be addressed by therapists alone. Migration and acculturation must not be considered *per se* as causing mental illness needing therapy in the first instance. This kind of stress can most effectively be alleviated by the host society through social and healthcare services. Newcomers can be supported, for instance, through establishing social networks that foster integration. An integration-centred approach considers connectedness with the host society as a foundation of mental wellbeing. By not responding adequately to the issues concerning a newcomer's place in society, we fail in respecting the newcomer's fundamental human right to physical and mental health.

Upon arrival in Europe, newcomers in need of psychological support are confronted with many obstacles. These obstacles include a lack of basic security, also linguistic, cultural and financial barriers, insecurities regarding asylum procedures and a lack of the right expertise within the regular services for dealing with the specific problems that migrants face. Taboos and misconceptions about mental illness and therapy live on in many cultures. Lack of awareness about mental health and access to different health care services can prevent newcomers from finding their feet in the host society and becoming mentally healthy too.

This is illustrated by Bakary's story. Currently living and studying in Brussels, he talks about his childhood friend who, like many young Gambians, came to Europe to continue his education. His friend travelled through Libya, where every day new stories of atrocities committed against migrants come to light. Given the traumatic nature of the journey, the absence of adequate mental health care after arrival, and the long duration of the asylum procedure, Bakary says his friend is not doing well. He experiences angry outbursts, flashbacks, hyper-arousal and lack of concentration. He is nervous and forgetful. All of these constitute signs of post-traumatic stress disorder. What is more, Bakary says, the situation of his childhood friend is deteriorating as he also has other problems, such as not being able to secure employment due to his legal status. Without any decent income, it is also hard to find adequate housing. In fact, Bakary's friend has no means for making plans for his future, or for living in a safe and secure manner. This prevents him from fostering new hope that could enable him to cope with the difficulties of acculturation. These aspects are just as detrimental to his psychological health. Bakary is convinced that his friend does not have access to mental health care because of his legal status, although actually he is entitled. This is an example of how newcomers are prevented from receiving proper treatment by not being made aware of their rights.

In order to care for the mental health of people arriving in our countries, the stress and difficulties related to the migration and acculturation process should not be individualized but rather be treated at their source, in other words, within society. Both migration and acculturation are psychologically intense. The acculturation process means that people have to start rebuilding their lives in a new environment in which they do not understand the language or the cultural code. Migration means leaving behind everything and everyone you know. Hence, it entails a major mourning process: migrants lose their native language, cultures, societal positions and jobs.

While complex or frozen grieving does require treatment, a normal mourning process should not be treated therapeutically, as this runs the risk of leaving the person worse off than if there had been no therapy. First, a mourning person needs people who encourage him or her to continue daily life. The role of professionals who foster integration is of primordial importance in this respect: they have a privileged (because for them practically and culturally more natural) working relationship with newcomers. Integration fostering support not only helps reduce the migration and acculturation stress, but also allows for early detection of post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental illness and to treat this effectively in the context of specialized trauma therapy. We cannot expect psychotherapy to solve newcomers' stress levels and despair due to bad housing and lack of security. Instead, we as trauma therapists need newcomers to hope and believe in a new future so they can find the courage in therapy to face their background war traumas.

In this respect, we need to educate both professionals and newcomers about mental health in a culturally diverse community. Trauma therapists should work broadly, involving and mobilizing the social systems in which newcomers find themselves. In Belgium, organisations such as the non-profit organisation Solentra actively work and advocate for access for newcomers to qualitative mental health care provided (using interpreters) in their native language, regardless of their legal status. New approaches such as the PACCT methodology<sup>3</sup> emphasize cooperation between primary social and integration services on the one hand, and specialised mental health care services on the other hand. This creates the conditions necessary for newcomers' wellbeing. By not recognizing the problems newcomers face upon arrival in Europe as a societal responsibility, we fail to acknowledge our active role in their mental health and wellbeing and deny them a fair chance to start rebuilding their life.

If the EU were to recognize its active role as a society in newcomers' wellbeing, it would be able to seize the opportunity to foster integration on a far more profound level. The dominant societal discourse we often hear is not one of hope but rather of alarmist views claiming that we cannot carry the burden newcomers put on our social security systems, or that Europe will not survive but disintegrate. Newcomers, on the other hand, show great resilience in their hope as well as in their determination to rebuild their lives after the hardships they have endured. The very definition of the word 'refugee' embodies the idea of hope: if you do not trust that it will be better or safer somewhere else, you would not have left in the first place.

Could Europe perhaps learn from refugees? By reacting to the refugee crises with a stronger focus on the opportunity and the human potential that newcomers bring? This means choosing to be a society that heals instead of a society that harms the people seeking safety inside our borders, to be a society that fosters hope and believes in humanization. If connectedness is the basis of mental wellbeing, how can newcomers re-establish their faith and hope in others within the framework of trauma therapy when the dominant societal rhetoric regarding newcomers deprives them of such hope and fails to offer them a safe space to rebuild their lives? Offering trauma therapy is vital, considering what newcomers have endured in their country of origin and during their migration journey. Such therapy can only be truly successful, however, if we can offer them the opposite of what they were running from: a welcoming and stable basis to start anew.

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- 1 We define 'newcomers' as both refugees and migrants (once arrived in country of destination), as both groups face trauma and similar migration and acculturation stress effects.
  - 2 Laban, C.J., Hajo, B.P.E., Gernaat, M.D., Komproe, I.H., van der Tweel, I., & De Jongh, J.T. (2005). Postmigration Living Problems and Common Psychiatric Disorders in Iraqi Asylum Seekers in the Netherlands. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 192(12): 825-832.
  - 3 The PACCT methodology (*Psychiatry Assisting the Cultural diverse Community in creating healing Ties*) is a stepped care model to effectively address war trauma and to ensure newcomers' human right to accessible, effective and qualitative mental healthcare (Serneels et al., 2017). On the one hand, this model consists of an outreaching, capacity building program that mobilizes natural stakeholders, and prevents or detects mental health problems early on in order to alleviate psychosocial suffering, help bridge the gap with the new society, and foster resilience. On the other hand, it offers highly specialized transcultural consultations with an interpreter and with awareness for the social, legal and cultural context.

Serneels, G., O'Driscoll, J. V., Imeraj, L., Vanfraussen, K., & Lampoo, A. (2017). An intervention supporting the mental health of children with a refugee background. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 38(4): 327-336.

# Migration and the Radical Right: A Catch-22 for Journalists

by Jonas Lefevere

In the 2019 European parliamentary elections, populist radical-right parties enjoyed big wins across Europe. Examples include the wins by the extreme-right Flemish Interest (Belgium), the Forum for Democracy (Netherlands), AfD (Germany), and Victor Orbán's Fidesz (Hungary). Their hard migration stances and populist rhetoric were key elements for achieving these successes. However, research also points to the media as a crucial enabler of their success. Not only do radical right parties have substantial media savvy, their core issues of migration and crime are appealing to journalists, creating a situation whereby increased media coverage of such parties acts as a catalyst for their success. The result is a catch-22 for journalists: they need to cover these parties, given their political and societal relevance, but at the same time journalists should be wary of their role in propagating the success of such parties, by acting as a catalyst for their success.

Migration has dominated the public debate in the wake of the 2015 migration crisis, but it is far from a new issue. In 1995, Freeman noted a disconnect: although the public did not support increased migration, governments tended to allow more migration.<sup>1</sup> In the 90s, the radical right leveraged this disconnect and pushed migration on their national political agenda. Their identity-based ideology casts immigration and globalization as threats to national identity. This forced mainstream parties to take position on the issue, often leading them to take stricter stances on migration to fend off the challenge posed by the radical right. In a recent book Cas Mudde, a prominent researcher on the radical right, calls this the 'mainstreaming' of radical-right viewpoints.<sup>2</sup> This mainstreaming further raised the prominence of migration as a key issue worthy of political attention. Issues that feature prominently on the political agenda tend to become more important for the public at large as well. In recent years, the public salience of migration further increased in Germany, the Czech Republic, the UK, Sweden and Poland, although its importance remained stable or decreased in other countries.<sup>3</sup> This evidence supports the notion that the politicization of the migration issue increases the public salience



of immigration: the countries witnessing an increase in public salience tended to have successful radical right-wing parties, for example AfD (Germany), Swedish Democrats (Sweden), Law and Justice (Poland), Dawn/SPD (Czech-Republic) and the Brexit party (UK).

Media and journalists played a crucial role in spurring the rise of the migration issue. In short, politics is mediated: what the public knows about politics, it knows through media. Although social media are becoming more important, legacy media are still a dominant source of information for the public at large. In covering politics, journalists saw increased political attention to migration and began increasing their coverage of the issue. In turn, this signaled the issue's importance to the public, which then pushed the issue even higher on the political agenda. Media coverage therefore creates a feedback loop between migrations' political relevance and the public importance of the issue. Of course, media had to cover migration because it became politically relevant. However, research has shown that media coverage is a crucial enabler of the success of the radical right, and nowhere is this clearer than in their coverage of migration. To begin with, the rising public importance of the migration issue also caused it to play a bigger role in people's vote. Because many people are opposed to further increases in migration, the radical right stands to gain from increased immigration coverage. As people's opinions on migration have a bigger effect on which party they vote for, they tend to vote for the party that has similar opinions as their own. Furthermore, the radical right has a dominant reputation on immigration. Research by Henrik Seeberg demonstrates that the European public considers radical right parties to be best able to handle immigration by a substantial margin. In fact, journalists and media often offer an (unwitting) helping hand here: coverage on immigration often includes the radical right, as they are quick to capitalize on media opportunities linked to one of their core issues. In comparison, mainstream parties were, for a long time, more hesitant to pay the issue much attention. This has allowed many radical right parties to establish themselves as the prototypical 'immigration' party, compounding the electoral gains offered by media's attention to migration. A case in point: a large-scale study in 11 EU member states shows that exposure to media coverage on immigration increases the odds of voting for the radical right.<sup>4</sup>

This creates a dilemma for media: journalists know that immigration coverage disproportionately benefits the radical right. This is problematic as it challenges media's role as an independent intermediary: media become an integral part of the mediatization of immigration. The dilemma is worsened by the way in which media covers the issue. Covering immigration has tangible benefits for journalists. The issue resonates with their

audience, and journalists are keen to cover it since it helps them attract an audience. The fragmented media landscape pushes journalists to maximize the attractiveness of their news items by highlighting problems and conflict since audiences are more attracted to negative news. Immigration coverage ticks these boxes with ease, as there is ample political conflict on the issue, and the issue is easily cast through a negative lens. However, this negative lens resonates disproportionately with the viewpoints of the radical right. In Austrian newspapers coverage of the 2015 immigration crisis, for example, emphasis lay on negative and conflictual elements such as security threats and economic implications, while the less conflictual humanitarian considerations were less prominently featured.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the radical right itself is an attractive source of information for journalists. This is partly due to their continued electoral success, but also because journalists know that the radical and confrontational rhetoric of these parties attracts an audience.

So, journalists face a catch-22 that is difficult to escape. Should they follow audience preferences at the risk of disproportionately advantaging the radical right, or approach the issue through diverse coverage, at the risk of losing their audience? The perils created by this catch-22 are obvious: journalists need to cover immigration because it is a key issue, but economic forces push journalists to cover migration in ways conducive to the success of the radical right.

Is there a way out of this dilemma? My proposed solution is simple but difficult. The media need to provide more balanced reporting on migration, with greater attention to its upside, the humanitarian implications, and present the full spectrum of viewpoints on the issue. However, this requires that journalists push back against the mounting pressure to produce content that attracts audiences but fails to inform.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, journalists need to refrain from their tendency to provide a podium for the radical right. When Cas Mudde was asked what he thought of a Belgian journalists' interview with an alt-right politician, he said this:

*'I would not have done it. ... It [the alt-right] is mainly a media phenomenon, and they know it. My problem with such interviews is that you make them bigger than they are. But anyway, left wing media are simply addicted to radical right-wing scandals.'*<sup>7</sup>

I tend to side with Mudde's skepticism: media are prone to be riled up by the radical right – to their own detriment. Still, I hope to be proved wrong: especially in countries with strong journalistic traditions, journalists may escape their catch-22 by disregarding and opposing the dominant economic incentives.

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**EQUALITY**

# The Opacity of the Education System Creates Disadvantages for Pupils with Migration Backgrounds

by Laura Emery, Ilse Laurijssen, Simon Boone and Jochem van Noord

Despite many attempts from policymakers to reform secondary education in the Flemish community, including their careful use of vocabulary to suggest otherwise, the educational system is hierarchically structured with the general track being regarded as the most prestigious track and the vocational track being seen as the least prestigious track; in between we find the artistic track and the technical track. Although this hierarchy between tracks is actively denied in official educational discourse, it is inherent in how the education system is organised and pupils act upon it when making their study choice. Not all pupils act in the same way, however. Pupils with a migration background are having a hard time finding their way in the education system and this is partly caused by hampered access to strategic information.

Previous research shows that working class and immigrant pupils have a less heterogeneous social network and are less efficient at obtaining knowledge about the educational system.<sup>1</sup> Other research on newly arrived migrant students shows the importance of formal and informal knowledge of the education system for uncovering the complexities inherent in the educational structure.<sup>2</sup> One of those complexities is the hidden tracking that already confronts pupils in the first grade of secondary education. Officially, the first grade is said to offer a common curriculum to all pupils. In reality, this common curriculum accounts for only 27 hours per week. The remaining five hours are devoted to optional courses. Indisputably, there is a hierarchical ordering among the optional courses, Latin is generally seen as the most demanding option, while technology and arts are seen as the least demanding options and modern sciences are situated somewhere in between.<sup>3</sup> What adds to the complexity is that not all secondary



schools offer the same optional courses. Pupils have to obtain information not only on the educational system, but also on the specific curriculum in different schools.

The hierarchical logic continues through the other grades with the system of certificates. At the end of each school year pupils receive a certificate which guides them in their educational choice for the next school year. With an A-certificate, pupils can move up to the next grade. With a C-certificate they must repeat their grade. With a B-certificate, pupils can move up to the next grade, but are excluded from certain study options as specified by the teachers' advice. In that case, they can choose to stay in one of these study options, but then they must repeat their year. Often, the B-certificate redirects pupils from general to more vocational education, and it does this rather elegantly, i.e. without pupils having to suffer grade repetition.<sup>4</sup> This makes changing from the general track to the other tracks easier than changing from the vocational track to the other tracks. In practice this last scenario almost never happens. The general track seems to be a well-guarded fortress with a one-way door. Under the pretext of safeguarding the chance for good students to excel, students who do not immediately fulfil the rigid academic requirements are directed to other tracks. This undermines the perceived value of the other tracks and demotivates students in those tracks.<sup>5</sup>

This is in contrast with how ambitious pupils with migrant backgrounds often are. Initially, they are attracted to the prestigious general track. However, these pupils often have less insight in capacities needed and existing thresholds for enrolment.<sup>6</sup> Teachers more often recommend a vocational trajectory to migrant pupils, regardless of their academic potential. They often reason that pupils with little academic support from parents and who do not speak the language of education at home will not manage to be successful in more academic tracks. Of the pupils in the general track, 12% do not have Dutch as home language in school year 2017-2018. In the vocational track this means 22% of the pupils. The differences are even larger with regard to the educational level of the mother. In the general track 11% of the pupils' mothers have little education, while in the vocational track the figure is 43%.<sup>7</sup>

Pupils who receive advice on a vocational study often do not know how small the chances are for upstreaming. Thus seemingly 'leaving the door open' makes it difficult for immigrant students to understand the actual consequences of their educational choice. Given their limited sources of strategic knowledge they more often follow the advice of teachers, while other pupils mostly disregard their teachers' advice.<sup>8</sup> After a few years they sometimes realize that they are not where they want to be. As one Somalian

boy puts it: “Sometimes things get in the way and teachers don’t always see what is in you. They said I could always learn more later, but I’m not sure.”

Another example of seemingly leaving the door open can be seen in the transition to higher education. In theory, all four tracks in secondary education will grant access to higher education (although for vocational education, this comes only after 7 instead of 6 years). The chances of succeeding in higher education, however, differ greatly between pupils who have graduated from different tracks.<sup>9</sup> Pupils from the vocational track are not prepared to go on to higher education. The fact that this option is open to them stimulates unrealistic aspirations. It takes strategic insight to recognize this mismatch of skills and knowledge. More recently, efforts are being made to define which tracks in secondary education are meant to lead to higher education (general education) and which tracks are meant to prepare pupils for the labour market (vocational education). This higher formal transparency in educational tracks, however, is not realized to its full extent, as some tracks in technical education are described as primarily directed to labour market entry whereas others prepare for both labour market entry and higher education.

To tackle inequality in the educational system, providing transparency regarding its structural hierarchy is an important first step. Otherwise it is tailor-made to suit Belgian middle-class educational decision-making. Furthermore, if we want to reveal more of the available potential, the current tracking system should be thoroughly reviewed. One way to eliminate hidden tracking, for instance, is to postpone the first selection and propose a common curriculum to all pupils during the first two years of secondary school. In the higher grades, steps should be taken to prevent the vocational track from becoming the inevitable place for students who are directed away from the other tracks. Choosing between tracks should be a positive and ambitious choice. That way we debunk the hierarchy and make the tracks true equivalents of each other. Downplaying the discriminatory realities embedded in the educational system does not make it more equal, it only creates more barriers against immigrant pupils trying to find their way.

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# Belgian Universities: Decolonize Your Curriculum!

by **Christil Asamoah**

While Belgian student bodies are becoming increasingly diversified, the inclusion of non-Western<sup>1</sup> perspectives in the academic curriculum<sup>2</sup> remains a significant challenge. Up until today, university curricula have tended to exclude the perspectives of certain marginalised groups. The black and minority ethnic (BME) community, women, LGBT+ people, people with disabilities and non-Western scholars are still largely invisible in academic curricula. This invisibility is aggravated by the composition of the academic staff. It limits the range of topics and perspectives in education. It reproduces exclusionary Western world views.<sup>3</sup> It also has the potential to discriminate against students from marginalized groups.

Hence the time has come for Belgian universities to decolonize their curriculum. Briefly, this calls for the enrichment of the curriculum with global perspectives and the inclusion of often ignored contributions from marginalised scholars in academia. This is particularly imperative for universities with an increasingly multicultural student population. The decolonization of academic spaces will have a positive impact upon the academic performances of students from marginalised groups.

The purpose of decolonization is the renewal not of the canon, but rather of how global perspectives are taught. Until now, non-Western knowledge has been largely absent from university curricula. This reflects the dominance of Western theories and perspectives.<sup>4</sup> The parochial knowledge to which students are exposed limits critical scholarship and reproduces stereotypical ways of thinking.<sup>5</sup> It is only by acknowledging this problem that we can take progressive and effective actions to remedy it. This will benefit the entire student body.

## Time to rethink knowledge

A great deal of misunderstanding exists with regards to what the decolonization of the curriculum entails. Decolonizing the curriculum is not merely about replacing white authors with black, foreign, or non-Western authors. Nor is it a matter of expelling white, male academics from the curriculum in their entirety. On the contrary, it is about confronting long-term preconceptions that constrain our understanding of politics and society, in order to broaden our intellectual vision and to offer a wider range of perspectives. An alternative curriculum would encourage critical thinking and trigger a debate leading to discussions on global topics that, although important in our society, are usually never taught in our education systems.

Decolonization is an act of resistance against structural inequalities maintained in place by power imbalances and knowledge systems. It involves reshaping and questioning power structures that determine what knowledge is, how it is produced and passed on. It makes us rethink who can be considered credible enough to produce knowledge. A decolonial approach to knowledge production and curriculum development enables us to evaluate critically where, how, why and by whom standards of knowledge are produced.<sup>6</sup>

Decolonizing the curriculum also addresses the exclusion of topics that critical voices target. Think about topics such as race and racism, discrimination, implicit bias, white supremacy, white privilege, equity, cultural diversity and power struggles, to name just a few. Within political science, for example, a great deal of emphasis is placed on political thought, history and discourses about power. Lecturers fail to place this emphasis within a decolonial framework. Often, a more critical examination of power is neglected due to the shallow definition of what is regarded as valuable and fundamental knowledge. Despite the steady progress towards gender mainstreaming in the political sciences, many of the aforementioned themes are discredited, like postcolonialism, critical race theories, notions of othering, white privilege and allyship, etc. Tackling these themes would stimulate the responsiveness of all students to the interconnected world.

University bodies also need to reflect more on the diversity of their student population. They should make sure that all students are able to see themselves reflected in the curriculum.<sup>7</sup> This will serve as a tool to advance the academic performance of marginalized groups. As such, the decolonization of the curriculum is part of a call for social justice and a structural way to address inequalities.

Based on these arguments, several universities have already reassessed their curriculum and reading lists. Across many countries, students have struggled for recognition of decolonial perspectives. A first movement was *Rhodes Must Fall* in South Africa. In this movement, students advocated for institutions to dismantle their statues of the imperialist Cecil Rhodes and other key landmarks related to the colonial era. A second movement is called *Why is My Curriculum White?* This is an initiative by students from the University College of London. They argue for a more inclusive curriculum.

The need to decolonize the curriculum is not tied to a geographical location, however. No matter where we find ourselves, decolonial thinking requires us to navigate beyond traditional borders of knowledge. It is important that we, as students and lecturers, take the lead in this debate by manning deep-rooted biases through critical self-reflection. Martinez-Acosta and Favero state that ‘we have now reached a point where true reflection and assessment of inclusive practices on our campuses must be carried out so that we fully serve the needs of all of our students.’<sup>8</sup>

## Decolonizing the curriculum: moving beyond borders!

Decolonizing the curriculum is not an uncomplicated process and may stir a great deal of controversy. Some critics denounce students’ demand for a multiplier of knowledge because they consider alternative perspectives to be subordinate to Western knowledge sets. Such uncertainty regarding the unknown (i.e. non-Western forms of knowledge) puts many off. It also asks lecturers to re-skill in curriculum design. As such, many academics have not yet taken this step on a voluntary basis.

Those who oppose the decolonization of the curriculum should keep in mind the words of Ntokozo Gwabe, co-founder of Rhodes Must Fall at Oxford:

*“A lot of the time when people talk about colonialism they think of it as a past event that happened. They don't think about it as something that manifests itself in everyday life at institutions like Oxford ”.*<sup>9</sup>



Now, this means to say that we need to build a curriculum that resists contemporary forms of coloniality. We are thus calling for a new and post-colonial era of higher education. Such an era necessitates a curriculum that attempts to counteract narrow-minded thinking and stimulates willingness to go beyond our borders of knowledge.

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- 1 'Non-Western' refers to knowledge that does not derive from the Western world. I am referring not so much to a geographical location but more to the predominant spheres of influence and power.
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# Decolonizing the University: From Happy Diversity To Uncomfortable Dialogues

by Sophie Withaecx

Diversity and decolonization have become focal points in higher education policies worldwide. Interest in diversity prolongs, and also replaces, a previous point of concern over equal opportunities in higher education initially focused on gender. As a general rule, the new diversity discourse encompasses not only gender but also other markers of differentiation such as ethnicity, disability, religion and sexuality. While the popularity of diversity and decolonization indicates a genuine intention to eradicate the effects of racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination, I argue below that the way in which these concepts are deployed in higher education may contribute to a reproduction of the status quo, rather than present a genuine challenge to the current gendered and racialized power hierarchies in higher education.

One indication of this can be found in concrete figures that report gender equality in universities: despite decades of gender equality plans and a higher influx and graduation rate of female students in comparison to males, there is a blatant underrepresentation of women in post-doctoral and tenured positions.<sup>1</sup> Although this cannot (always) be blamed on the ‘conspiracies’ of macho males deliberately aimed at excluding women, the mechanisms behind this structural sexism – such as implicit bias, stereotype threat, ‘glass ceilings’ and ‘sticky floors’ – have been known for decades but appear difficult to overcome. Moreover, the introduction of more drastic measures, such as quotas, is often vehemently opposed.

What about the representation of ethnic minorities? In comparison to other countries, the influx of students with ethnic minority background into Belgian higher education is relatively recent, which might explain their relatively low numbers.<sup>2</sup> A lack of registration data on students’ ethnic backgrounds makes it difficult to assess

the precise numbers of ethnic minority students who enroll and who finish their studies. Nevertheless, the increasing visibility of these students in higher education often engenders expectations that it will be just a matter of time before some of them will enroll in academic careers as PhDs and end up as post-doc researchers and professors. However, findings from abroad prove otherwise. A recent study<sup>3</sup> compared the representation of ethnic minorities in universities in Canada, the US, the UK and Australia and came to similar conclusions across these contexts: despite a considerable presence and even overrepresentation of ethnic minority students, as graduates they are underrepresented in stable and tenured positions, and overrepresented in precarious jobs such as caterers, cleaners or safety staff. The authors conclude that *'minority students end overwhelmingly as recipients of, and not participants in, knowledge creation'* in such countries.

So why this lack of change? While a 'deficit' paradigm has been identified that blames marginalized groups themselves – for example by pointing to women's lack of competitiveness, or the 'culture' of minorities perceived as incompatible with correct study attitudes –, others point to a more fundamental problem in the form of a deep-seated resistance to diversity that is ingrained in Western higher education. Based on her research among diversity workers in the UK and Australia, Sara Ahmed describes the resistance her respondents experienced as *'banging your head against a brick wall'*.<sup>4</sup> This resistance may be deep-seated: post-colonial and feminist scholars have found that *'the foundational structures of the Westernized university are epistemically racist and sexist'*,<sup>5</sup> as universities were first founded in close conjunction with the expansion of imperialism, the subjection of non-Western people and the eradication of their ways of producing knowledge. Universities therefore became spaces suitable only for specific kinds of knowledge and adapted to a particular type of 'knower' (disembodied, autonomous, rational) and therefore intrinsically inimical to 'deviant' forms of knowledge carried by types of persons seen as subjective, embodied and irrational (women, non-Western people). At least part of the 'brick wall' identified by Ahmed is thus constituted by invisible norms which define 'knowledge' and 'knower', and which make the university into a space where 'deviant' ways of being and knowing are not appreciated. The mere presence of women and ethnic minorities will therefore not be enough to bring about change; there is a need for more profound engagement with the historical legacies carried by universities and deeper understanding of how the processes of exclusion came to be intrinsic to them.

# Can diversity and decolonization save us?

Although diversity has been embraced as ‘a holy mantra across different sites’ which will make for ‘enriched multicultural societies’,<sup>6</sup> diversity policies have been criticized for their ‘non-performativity’: merely having a diversity policy in itself can actually work *against* diversity, as ‘ticking the boxes’ for having a diversity plan, officer and committees can create an image of the university as *already* diverse while actually leaving structural racism and sexism unaddressed. Such processes can be reinforced by the omnipresent popular visual representations of diversity as mosaics of colours and happy faces, in which differences become represented as non-threatening and devoid of problematic ‘unhappy’ inequalities.

With its roots in student activist movements – initiated by the South-African ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ movement and followed by similar actions in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands – the notion of ‘decolonizing the university’ may offer a more transformative paradigm for challenging inequalities. Post-colonial theorists like Quijano, Mignolo and Wynter have provided rich and complex definitions of concepts like (de)colonization and (de)coloniality, which are not always clearly distinguished in current discussions. For example, it is important to distinguish ‘colonialism’ from ‘coloniality (of power)’: the first term refers to the historically determined period of occupation and colonization of countries in the global South by Western countries, while the second is a more encompassing concept referring to ‘a strategy of control and domination’ that also keeps on operating *after* the achievement of the colonial period. Coloniality of power refers to the historical and epistemological processes that have been constitutive of Western modernity: the simultaneous and interrelated processes of imperialism, capitalism, the exploitation of non-Western people and their land, the development of racism as a legitimating discourse and the dismissal of non-Western ways of knowing and being as unscientific and irrational.

‘Decoloniality’ in this context implies the criticism and dismantling of these oppressive structures. As Mignolo argues, it is indispensable that this criticism is formulated from the ‘exteriority of the colonial difference’:<sup>7</sup> this means that people designated as ‘other’, and relegated to the margins of power and knowledge production, should be the ones centralized in any attempt to challenge this system. People who *know* and *experience* what it is to be ‘othered’ are able to generate concepts and forms of knowledge directly informed by this experience, and therefore are more likely to challenge the invisible norms that inform current ways of thinking about difference and diversity.

Therefore it is important to check *who* claims to be ‘decolonizing’, whose voices are speaking and are heard, and where in this process those ‘othered’ bodies are situated. ‘Decolonizing’ higher education should thus be about more than merely adding non-Western scholars to the curriculum or increasing the influx of students with migrant background. Crucial questions should be: How can we *retain* these students so that they can come to occupy stable and influential positions in the university? How do we avoid their becoming merely recipients of, and not producers, of knowledge?

## Uncomfortable dialogues and dangerous discourses

A first step towards decolonization is to depart from the ‘happy diversity’ imagery and to make room for those stories which are painful and likely to generate ‘moments of discomfort’.<sup>8</sup> Accounts of the experiences of students and staff regarding discrimination, exclusion, harassment and hate crimes should not only be taken seriously but should be actively collected and serve as ‘counter-stories’ to the desired image of the university as a happy and already diverse institution. Not only could such stories convey the knowledge necessary to address the barriers faced by marginalized groups, they could also form the basis of ‘cross-difference dialogues’ where the impact of both processes of privilege and marginalization may be openly discussed among people occupying very different positions in society. Such conversations will therefore not be ‘tolerant, sensitive, affirming, homogenizing dialogues’ but will rather be ‘dangerous discourses’, in the sense that they challenge dominant narratives and expose the working and impact of ongoing inequalities in spaces of higher education.

Of course, such dialogues do not imply that there are no happy stories at all to share: universities are also – and indeed should be – inspiring and empowering environments, a place where one can encounter exactly those theories that inspire critical thinking and enable personal and communal growth. But if we want it to function in this way for everyone, we should recognize the existence of internal resistance to equality and the way in which sexism and racism inevitably shape academic spaces. Going beyond painting pictures of ‘happy diversity’, universities should make room for those painful narratives that expose what goes wrong. Decolonization then becomes a process of listening to those uncomfortable narratives where racism and sexism are named and exposed, making room for complexity and reflexivity, centralizing the most marginalized people who are invisible in current university settings, and preparing for uncomfortable dialogues.

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# A Fatima Mernissi Chair Helps us Create a Pluriversity

by Iman Lechkar

Fatima Mernissi, a renowned Moroccan sociologist and one of the founders of Islamic Feminism, died in Morocco on 30 November 2015. Two Belgian-Moroccan alumnae of the Free University of Brussels (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, VUB), Saida Sakkali, Senior project coordinator King Baudouin Foundation and Yamila Idrissi, lawyer and former Belgian politician, recall the existential role Fatima Mernissi played in their lives and are committed to keep her legacy alive. A few days after Fatima Mernissi's passing, Saida Sakkali explained in a newspaper article the role Fatima Mernissi plays in the lives of Muslim women:

*'Her books opened a whole new world for us. She reassured us by writing that our Moroccan background and our European future are not mutually exclusive. She also urged us not to remain passive by stating that "Either you keep silent and get humiliated, or you get up and claim your position".'*<sup>1</sup>

Fatima Mernissi's work shrugs off the powerless and revisits power structures with the intention of transforming them. Her work should therefore not only be included in university programmes, but also a Fatima Mernissi Chair should be created in order to decolonize our academic institutes and to transform a university into a 'pluriversity', an institute whose people (professors, students, researchers and personnel), infrastructure and knowledge are characterized by diversity.

Since all of us young Muslim graduates trained in Belgium are products of Eurocentric knowledge production, we were not taught about Mernissi at the University. Therefore, after the publication of her op-ed in the newspaper, Saida Sakkali did not stand still. A few days later she approached the University hierarchy and told that she would like to talk about the creation of a Fatima Mernissi Chair or Reward at the VUB.





Soon afterwards, she was invited to a meeting. The enthusiasm of the Academic director prompted Saida Sakkali and Yamila Idrissi to write an official proposal for the creation of a Fatima Mernissi Chair. The proposal urged the university to play an important societal role by offering a space for non-Western scholars and knowledge. They argued that this was particularly important in Brussels, the capital city of Belgium and Europe where religions and cultures intersect. On 26 January 2017, the VUB Fatima Mernissi Chair was officially launched, with me, Iman Lechkar, a Moroccan Belgian anthropologist as the chair holder.

One year earlier, on 5 January 2016, a Fatima Mernissi chair had also been inaugurated in Rabat at the Mohammed V University. Another Fatima Mernissi Chair was inaugurated in Mexico on 11 November 2019 by the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), in order to foster South-South relations with Morocco.<sup>2</sup>

## A Muslim feminist and decolonial thinker

Fatima Mernissi was born in 1940 in Fes, Morocco, and was raised in a middle-class family. She studied political science at the Mohammed V University in the capital city of Rabat and continued at graduate school in Paris. She obtained her PhD in sociology at Brandeis University in the United States. Once she received her doctorate, she returned to Morocco and taught sociology at the Mohammed V University while also doing research at the Moroccan Scientific Research Institute, both in Rabat. Mernissi wrote many scholarly books on Islam, gender and power. *The Veil and the Male Elite – A Feminist Interpretation of Women’s Rights in Islam* (1987) was internationally recognized as a masterpiece.

Mernissi was committed to equality between men and women in the Arab and Muslim world. She was a vehement critic of patriarchy and male religious authority. She also denounced the unattained promise of democracy in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) regions by nationalist movements. She further condemned the wrecking consequences of colonialism and coloniality. As one of the best-known Arab Muslim feminists, Mernissi’s influence extends beyond a limited circle of intellectuals. In Morocco she was a valued public figure who transformed her house into a meeting place for artists, intellectuals, activists and policymakers, and discovered many ‘new talents’. Her feminist practice did not stem from party politics but from the way in which she embraced Islamic

philosophy where *Jadal* (dialectic or debate technique) is predominantly used. Abroad, Muslim women found refuge in her work to reinforce themselves, as much within their own Muslim community as in the wider Western society.

Fatima Mernissi's work debunks all normative and stereotypical views on Muslim women in both Islamic and Western contexts. As a Muslim female scholar, she also studied in the West, making frequent trips there. Elaborating on these experiences and insights, she shows that the idea of the powerless and submissive Muslim woman is a construct promoted by both Muslim and white Western men to consolidate male power. Mernissi provides us with more complex understandings of the role of the Muslim woman in power dynamics, both in the West and in the Muslim majority societies. By drawing on different his-/her stories, Mernissi offers frameworks and concepts for discussion, including intra-Islamic challenges and challenges related to Muslim women in Western societies.

## A decolonial praxis making *pluriversalist* universities possible

Because of her insightful, critical, rich and layered work, Fatima Mernissi's work should be included in all curricula in the human and social sciences. However, changing curricula content is not enough. The Fatima Mernissi Chair aims to bring about structural change and is aware that in order to decolonize universities far more needs to be done than merely changing their curricula. The Chair aims to achieve structural change by focusing on two pillars, academic and societal.

The academic pillar of the Mernissi Chair focuses on education and research by introducing new knowledge, research questions and research fields. It also includes an equality policy in order to transform the *university* into a *pluriversity*. Three academic achievements of the Chair include the temporary assignment of a female Muslim Chair holder, the funding of research on Muslim men in prison and the creation of the course 'Islam and Gender', which has an extensive reading list in which only the works of scholars of colour are included. The course is part of a larger Masters degree on Gender and Diversity. These modest achievements aim to '*disturb the totality from which the universal and the global are most often perceived*'.<sup>3</sup>



As the creation of a prayer room or offering halal food remain contentious issues, we realize that we are far from becoming a pluriversity where minority students can see the university, as Achille Mbembe puts it, as: ‘... my home’ and where one thinks ‘I am not a foreigner. I belong here’. Decolonization, Mbembe continues, should also involve changing ‘the systems of access and management and changing the buildings and the classrooms, as “a good university education is impossible without an extensive material infrastructure/architecture”’.<sup>4</sup>

The societal pillar of the Fatima Mernissi chair aims to unlock academic knowledge and make it accessible to different types of public. This pillar places the participation of different marginalized publics and the ‘democratization of access’ in a central position. Although university tuition fees are quite accessible in Belgium compared to many other European countries, the university remains a white space to which it is difficult for minorities to belong. To enhance access to underprivileged groups, the Chair is developing a programme in the city centre, far away from the inaccessible wealthy Eastern part of Brussels where the VUB is located, and is collaborating with a range of secondary schools.

With our yearly programmes we aim to create spaces where marginalized groups of the European metropolitan capital are able to express their aspirations and frustrations, and where they can compare their experiences to other struggles against dominant, colonial and imperial structures. The Chair also aims to attract privileged groups in order to connect them to minorities and their voices and ideas. According to Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, this type of decolonial praxis creates possibilities of living together in which the West is no longer the only reference. These are encounters where other modes of living are not categorized as reactionary, radical, underdeveloped or uncivilized.<sup>5</sup>

It is Fatima Mernissi’s decolonial ideas such as ‘forgotten queens’ and practices such as the ‘civic caravan’, that inspire us to develop yearly programmes exploring the (in)visible structures pushing women to the margins or the empowering effects of linking marginalized populations to artists and intellectuals using books, literature and slam poetry as glue between different groups.

It seems clear from the above that the Fatima Mernissi Chair at VUB challenges the dominance of Western knowledge. The Chair continues the work and legacy of Fatima Mernissi by investigating the complex relationship between power, gender and Islam. Essential to its work is the creation of spaces to foster conversations so that the dreams

and frustrations of marginalized groups can be raised openly. In this spirit, the Chair aims to transform the structure of the university so that the university can become a pluriversity where underprivileged groups not only form the subject of study but can also act as producers of knowledge and theory and act as co-creators of academic spaces.<sup>6</sup>

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# Creating Legal Migration Channels Alone is Not Sufficient to Minimise the Risk of Labour Exploitation

by Amy Weatherburn and Paul de Hert

Exploiting the labour of others is, for many, an issue consigned to history because it no longer occurs in our modern world. When quizzed on the existence of modern forms of slavery, the focus is on situations many thousands of kilometres away and not on the bakery at the end of your street or the construction site you pass on your daily commute. Labour exploitation takes place in the formal labour market and can even include Belgians, but it predominantly impacts migrant workers who are often undocumented and working in low-skilled, low-paid sectors.

For some, a solution to this societal issue is to create legal migration channels. However, we suggest that this may be too simplistic, as there is more to it than meets the eye. As a result, the legal regulation of labour market compliance is extremely complex and requires engagement with a broad spectrum of criminal, labour and social-penal provisions. Providing access to the labour market through legal migration channels is simply the starting point when seeking to ensure decent work for all workers.

Equal access to decent and safe working conditions for all workers, regardless of migration status, is enshrined in law (UN Convention on Rights of Migrant Workers). The existence of labour exploitation, however, shows that some workers are more vulnerable to unscrupulous employers than others. In particular, undocumented migrants who work in the informal labour market are often the target for those who wish to avoid paying wages, holiday pay and social security contributions or to provide safe and decent working conditions. One proposed solution to combating such exploitation is to increase the options for legal migration.<sup>1</sup> The proposal makes sense on paper: a

legal status opens the door to legal rights and legal enforcement mechanisms, and indeed encourages a fairer tax system.

Research into the labour exploitation of EU citizens in Belgium shows that reliance on legal migration channels alone is only part of the solution. More is needed, as illustrated by the following three examples. The findings from a recent study on human trafficking in the EU revealed that ‘nearly half (44%) of registered victims were citizens of the EU. [...] The top five EU countries of citizenship of the victims in 2015-2016 were Romania, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland and Bulgaria.’<sup>2</sup> Research into migrant workers’ perspectives on labour exploitation in the EU show that three-quarters of the third-country nationals had regular migration status at the time of exploitation.<sup>3</sup> In 2018, Fairwork Belgium – a civil society organization for undocumented workers – received 453 requests for assistance. The third most popular request referred to problems in a legal work situation.<sup>4</sup> The three examples above illustrate that more needs to be done at local level to ensure that the working conditions of all workers are decent, safe and in compliance with labour standards.

International labour standards must be reflected in national labour law. In Belgium, all workers, regardless of migration status, are entitled to the following rights: minimum wage (sector or general), right to safe working conditions and compensation for accidents at work, sick pay, holiday pay and observance of working hours (maximum 38 hours a week).<sup>5</sup>

Despite the legal and policy framework, labour exploitation requires further attention. Precise numbers of exploited workers are not available, but we do know that between 2013-2016, 328 victims of human trafficking in Belgium were exploited in the hospitality industry (hotels, restaurants, other catering facilities) and the construction sector.<sup>6</sup> Other sectors are affected, include agriculture, domestic work, nail salons, carwashes, bakeries and clothing recycling centres. In addition, an estimated 100,000 undocumented workers in Brussels are at the mercy of unscrupulous employers who fail to respect the regulations on declaring workers, payment of social security contributions and payment of wages (including minimum wage, holiday pay and sick pay) and working hours. Bogus self-employment is also a means by which employers can exploit individuals in order to secure a financial gain;<sup>7</sup> this fraudulent practice can impact EU and Belgian workers alike.



Regularization of migration status alone is not enough to ensure that workers' rights are respected. Thus we propose three additional solutions that could – in combination with legal migration channels – tackle exploitation in the labour market:

Collaborative monitoring of all aspects of the labour market would ensure decent working conditions for all workers, regardless of status. While the existing law provides a framework for such regulation, its implementation requires further consideration. Cooperation between public labour inspectorates and other third parties such as trade unions and civil society organisations, (e.g. Fairwork Belgium) is crucial. Collaboration between such actors ensures equality for all in the labour market, which could be enhanced further by making joint inspections the standard operating procedure. A collaborative approach to labour market regulation would further ensure equal recognition of workers' rights.

Enforcement of social penal code and access to justice would require mutual recognition amongst the different actors. In Belgium, for example, a significant change in operational practice between the labour inspectorate and the immigration office means that undocumented workers are now no longer automatically ordered to leave the territory when found to be working illegally; this means they have more opportunities to obtain redress for violations of their labour rights.<sup>9</sup> The adoption of such an approach provides labour inspectors and law enforcement with more time to investigate potential exploitation, enabling access to justice for those who are victims, even if they are in an irregular situation. Furthermore, where there has been no criminal activity, cooperation with trade unions and civil society can ensure compensation/remedy through civil procedures.

Public vigilance and a zero tolerance of exploitation by the general public as consumers and co-workers would ensure that labour exploitation is kept to a minimum. Currently, the emergence of high-risk sectors that are very much face-to-face with the public (e.g. nail salons) highlights the trend that exploitative working conditions are usually tolerated. In certain instances, jobs like these are considered too dangerous, dirty or demeaning for the native population. However, it is also significant that the emergence of the gig economy, which relies upon independent, flexible and temporary workers to provide services on-demand (often through online platforms and temporary employment agencies), places precarious workers side-by-side with colleagues who are perhaps in a more secure job situation. Only with a sense of solidarity and respect for the human dignity of all workers can a zero-tolerance approach to exploitation be truly achieved.

The need to ensure a fair and equitable labour market for all migrant workers is not just a fundamental human right but also key to the sustainability of the EU member states' national labour markets, where significant labour market shortages are forecast right across the European Union. Taking into account the global nature of the labour market, further efforts must be made to minimize labour exploitation. In the EU, the recently adopted Directive on transparent and predictable working conditions, together with the Resolution establishing the European Labour Authority, are significant developments following the proclamation of the EU's Pillar of Social Labour Rights. In the Brussels Capital Region, migrant workers represent a third of the local population. As a result, politicians are now focusing on their contribution to the labour market and socio-economic development of the region, as well as the obstacles that leave migrant workers unemployed and at risk of falling victim to unscrupulous employers on the black labour market.

In order to secure decent work for all, a multi-faceted solution must be embedded in any initiatives to tackle exploitation – a solution that includes, but is not limited to, the regularization of the status of migrants.

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# Yes, Mr Charles Michel, Apologizing for Colonial Atrocities is One of the Tools to Combat Underemployment Among Afro-descendants

by Ilke Adam and Billy Kalonji

*“There is clear evidence of racial discrimination in Belgium... The root causes of these present-day human rights violations lie in the lack of recognition of the true scope of the violence and injustice.”*

These are the stark conclusions of a study into racism experienced by people of African descent living in Belgium that was conducted in February 2019 by the UN Expert Group on People of African Descent. The UN experts made several recommendations for ending racial discrimination, including this one, *‘To issue an apology for the atrocities committed during colonization.’*

When this study came out, President Michel, you were still the Prime Minister of Belgium. During an interview on Flemish TV<sup>1</sup> you described this request for an apology as *“heel raar (very weird)”*. Perhaps you did not understand the connection between 21<sup>st</sup> century racial discrimination and issuing an apology for past atrocities committed in the colonial era. But in this you are probably not alone. In recent years, even white anti-racist activists have seen no need to condemn the traditional ‘Black Pete’

(Zwarte Piet), a black-faced persona in a traditional festivity for children in Belgium and the Netherlands. More recently however, in the follow-up of the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, the Belgian King Philippe and the European Commission seem to have understood the link between the colonial past and present-day racism. The Belgian King recognized the historical sources of racism when he expressed his deepest regrets for past colonial atrocities. The European Commission does also, for the very first time, in its new Anti-Racism Action Plan, and pleads for remembrance as part of the strategy to encourage inclusion. Thereby it followed-up on the recommendations of the European Parliament Resolution of 26 March 2019 on the Fundamental Rights of People of African Descent. This Resolution encourages EU institutions and member states to “officially acknowledge and mark the histories of people of African descent in Europe, including of past and ongoing injustices and crimes against humanity, such as slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, or those committed under European colonialism.” The EP Resolution follows the same path as the UN Delegation’s report in explaining the relationship between slavery, the colonial past and the present discrimination against people of African descent. It calls *inter alia* for past injustices to be addressed, in line with the steps already taken by several other EU member states.<sup>2</sup>

In your new post as President of the European Council, we would not expect you to have much time free for in-depth research into the topic of racism, so allow us to set out below for you a number of inequalities that Afro-descendants, or people of African heritage or descent, are facing. We also explain why the recommendations of the UN Expert Group are far from “weird”.

In 2017, with the help of other colleagues, we conducted a survey<sup>3</sup> among a representative sample of 805 Afro-descendants living in Belgium. This survey was the first of its kind. Although a considerable number of Afro-descendants permanently settled in Belgium, very little research has been carried out on this segment of the population.

One of our findings that caught the attention of the media was truly revealing: Afro-Belgians are often far more highly skilled than other Belgians, yet they are four times more likely to be unemployed. We were not surprised by this, but journalists and ministers alike were bowled over.

Why? None of them regarded people of African descent as being capable of being highly skilled, let alone capable of possessing higher skill sets than other Belgians. As always,

this perception simply mirrored a long-entrenched colonial stereotype of black people possessing lower intelligence.

The study also presented evidence that Afro-Belgians are as a rule far more interested in Belgian politics than other Belgians. Additionally, it revealed that more than half of them are employed in positions for which they are educationally over-qualified. Almost 8 out of 10 respondents reported that they had experienced racial discrimination, unequal treatment and even abuse as a direct consequence of either their skin colour or their country of birth. This kind of discrimination exercises a negative impact on many areas of life, including finding a job, finding a home, access to public spaces and interfacing with public authorities. The people surveyed told us about their earliest experiences of racism, often dating back to their primary school years. Insults like *'dirty nigger'*, *'wild animal'*, *'monkey'*, *'slave'*, *'go back to your country'* and *'I won't shake your hand, cos you are dirty'* have marked and marred their childhood memories.<sup>4</sup>

All recent labour market studies<sup>5</sup> provide evidence pointing to a clear racial hierarchy in the labour markets in Belgium and elsewhere in Europe. West Europeans have easier access to the job markets than Central and Eastern Europeans, who in turn have it easier than people of Arab or Asian descent, while black Afro-Belgians are at the bottom of the heap, even though they might have superior educational qualifications.

This racial hierarchy in the job market strongly reflects the racist attitudes of the past era in Belgian history which legitimised colonialism, an era that modern society has rejected. From the first-hand accounts of Afro-descendants detailing the types of insult hurled at them we learn that the long history of colonialism has carved deep grooves in our present-day culture, history, language and the way we regard ourselves and other people. Edward Saïd used the term 'cultural archive' to show that this knowledge is stored deep in our mind sets, making it almost impossible to eradicate.

To make matters worse, Mr President, very little time is currently allotted to teaching colonial history in schools. Over 90% of people of African descent in Belgium are calling for this to be changed in order to raise awareness that colonial stereotypes still exist.<sup>6</sup> New initiatives to further the teaching of colonial history in schools have now been proposed in the wake of the 2020 anti-racist protests in Belgium. Let's hope they will be implemented soon. Professor Derald Wing Sue of Columbia University, a world authority on multicultural psychology and racism, demonstrated in his own research that it is nearly impossible to avoid inheriting the racial prejudices of our forefathers.<sup>7</sup>

The focus groups and interviews of Afro-Belgians in the study of Demart et al.<sup>8</sup> reveal that it is useless to draw up classical policy recipes for anti-discrimination unless the colonial stereotypes are simultaneously eliminated.

Mr President, it is staggering to realize that Belgian children are still being taught in school that Africans live in huts. The truth is, as you well know, that the vast majority of Afro-Belgians are born in urban environments and belong to the African middle class. Added to that, there is a constant stream of heavily biased media images broadcast from Africa that focus on misery and malnourished swollen bellies. These images might be useful for awakening a compassionate response to get viewers to donate to humanitarian campaigns, but they do nothing whatsoever to banish colonial stereotypes. They are almost certainly putting up obstacles to Afro-Belgians who are trying to gain equal access to job opportunities. Given that colonial-era representations of Africans are still omnipresent in everyday life, be this in racial slurs, schoolbook lessons or media reporting, is it then so 'weird' that they also exert a negative impact in the labour market?

President Michel, as leader of the European Council, we hope that you now understand from our brief summary of the facts why apologising for colonial atrocities, teaching colonial history in schools and removing statues of King Leopold II are all actions that are far from 'weird' in the fight against racism. Indeed, they go hand in hand with our recommendations for fostering equal access to the labour market for Belgians of African descent. The 2020 anti-racist protests might also have helped your understanding, as the removal of the the statutes of King Leopold II and the teaching of colonial history in schools are clear revindications of the Belgian Network for Black Lives.

We would also like to urge you, as President of the European Council, to take further follow-up action on the Parliament Resolution of 26 March 2019 on the Fundamental Rights of People of African Descent and the Commission's proposals for new legislation, as proposed in its Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025.

Some modest first steps to address structural racism have first been taken by the government of the Brussels Region, which is where most Afro-Belgians live. More recently, because of the anti-racist protests of June 2020, the Flemish and Francophone ministers of education followed modestly. The new Brussels Government has undertaken to review the various symbols of colonialism that are visible in public spaces in Brussels. Following the Black Lives Matter protests, several cities also accept to remove the King Leopold II statues.

President Michel, we very much hope that you will encourage your former Belgian federal government colleagues to further follow this path and to address as a matter of urgency the recommendations of the UN expert group on people of African descent, as well as those proposed by Belgian public institutions such as the Federal Ministry for Employment, Unia and Actiris (see endnote 4). We admit that the list of the recommendations is long. You might need some help in prioritizing, and expertise on how to implement agreed actions. Please call upon the expertise to be found among the many highly skilled citizens of African descent living in Belgium and elsewhere in the EU. They should be given a seat at the decision-making tables. Do not just discuss about them, but with them.

Finally, we would like to stress the importance of timely implementation of all the recommendations listed above. An incredible amount of talent is lost in Belgium and Europe, by not recognizing it. It is time to address this!

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# Better Beginnings, Better Prospects?

## Rethinking Dispersal and Housing Policies for Refugees in Belgium

by Hala El Moussawi

Refugees who have been forced to leave their country are faced with the challenge of starting their lives all over again. Interviews with Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Belgium have shown that the search for housing represents the main challenge for them. The process they go through turns out to be complicated and paved with insecurity. Without a decent place to live, it is difficult to move forward with their lives. How can one root oneself, build social networks and find a job without a stable home?

Upon arrival in Belgium, refugees are dispersed across the country in asylum centres to wait for the result of their asylum claim. This dispersal is done based on the capacity of these facilities, without focusing on the impact of such placements on the lives of refugees. Once they have been granted refugee status, individuals and families are asked to leave their asylum centres and find private housing. The challenging search for housing forces many of them to move repeatedly, sometimes from one end of the country to the other. Some even face the threat of homelessness.

This insecurity has extremely negative effects on the wellbeing of refugees. A fixed domicile in a good location is a cornerstone for rebuilding their lives and rooting themselves in a new country.<sup>1</sup> It is therefore essential to provide more structural assistance in the housing search and to rethink the modalities of dispersal.

The story of Hany and Fida (pseudonyms) illustrates the type of problems refugee families confront during their first years in Belgium. Like many other Syrian families, Hany and Fida left their country because they feared persecution. They had also lost their home. Hany arrived on his own in Brussels in September 2015 when all the reception



facilities were overcrowded. He was immediately sent to a temporary asylum centre in the surroundings of Bruges, where he was supposed to stay for fifteen days. Instead, he stayed there for nine months.

He did not know anything about Belgium when he arrived. *'I trusted that they would put me in the right place,'* he said, *'but I did not expect to be sent far off into the countryside to live in poor conditions.'* Hany reports that the reception facility had only tents as accommodation, was overcrowded and cut off from the outside world. Despite these difficult living conditions, Hany started learning Dutch. He got to know the closest town, Bruges, made some friends and started making plans for a future life there with his family after leaving the asylum centre.

When Hany received a positive answer to his asylum claim, he had to look for private accommodation. At that moment, he realised that there was no structural assistance for this step. *'It was all left to luck,'* he said. Volunteers were coming daily to the centre and they helped Hany with his search, scouring websites and arranging visits. Just like many others, he received dozens of rejections from landlords, mainly because of his status and lack of job contract. As the deadline for leaving the centre was approaching, the centre's administration told Hany that he would be put on the street if he did not find a place. Hany then expanded the search area. He was no longer looking only in Bruges but in the whole of Belgium. *'I didn't care any more. I needed a roof over my head to be able to start the family reunification procedure,'* he explained.

Finally, he found a place in a village in the south-eastern part of Wallonia, 80 km south of Namur. But while he was waiting for his allocations from the local welfare office in order to pay the rent, the landlord decided to rent the place to someone else. Once again Hany was worried about being evicted. The social assistant at the welfare office helped him secure a temporary studio in the same area. She later also helped him find a house where he could bring his family once the family reunification procedure was completed. Resigned to starting all over again, Hany started French classes.

When the family arrived, the kids started school and the parents were learning French. But the conditions were challenging: the village was remote, without public transport, access to medical care was difficult and there was no opportunity to build social networks, especially with Arabic-speaking communities. *'We needed someone to converse with, and our French was still very bad. We also needed Halal meat, and there was none around us. We had to travel all the way to Charleroi or to Brussels, and those were expensive trips.'*

At that time, again by ‘a stroke of pure luck’, as explained by Hany, a fellow refugee he had met at the asylum centre put him in touch with an organisation that helps with the housing search for recognized refugees in Bruges and its surroundings. The organisation helped the family find an apartment in a town about 20km from Bruges. Hany and Fida first spent a couple of days making the apartment habitable, then the family moved in with the kids. A whole new phase in their life started now; the kids were moved to a Dutch-speaking school and the parents started Dutch classes. There was a glimmer of hope that they could start looking for work and settle down.

However, as it soon became hard for this family of six to live in the two-bedroom apartment, they decided to look for bigger accommodation, maybe a house. With the help of a non-profit social rental office, the family found a four-bedroom house with a garden six kilometres outside Bruges. After three years of struggle with housing, Hany said that he was finally ready to move forward. *‘This is when I finally rested and felt some stability. I was ready for the next step.’* The whole family was now meeting people and building networks in Bruges. One year later, the landlord decided to sell the house. Once again, the family was faced with a deadline for finding a new place to live, this time having exhausted all the assistance they could call upon.

The story of Hany and Fida highlights the instability many refugee families experience to find a secure place to live in, and the impact this has on their ability to start a new life. Neither Hany nor Fida were able to start working. Undoubtedly, many obstacles stood in their way, such as the recognition of previous degrees, adaptation to a new job market, learning the language, etc. But the challenge of finding a place to live played an important role as well. Because of the constant insecurity regarding their housing situation, they ended up moving many times and trying to learn two languages. In each place where they lived, they had to build up a new social network from scratch. All this delayed the search for a job. A better continuity in housing would have eased their inclusion in economic, cultural and societal spheres.

There is a serious lack of structural assistance for refugees to help them find a home in the housing market, hence that responsibility is left to volunteers or any friends that refugees might encounter. This gap is exacerbated by the structure of the Belgian housing market, as it is characterized by a major share of home ownership and a small share of social housing in the total housing stock. Waiting lists for social housing are very long, and many barriers are raised against vulnerable and precarious tenants who compete for a place in the private rental market. The struggle is aggravated for newly arrived refugees.

Their search for a rental flat or house can be more challenging because of discrimination, language barriers, and their unfamiliarity with the system and the rules.

To tackle this issue, it is important to raise the question of housing refugees to the top of the agenda as high priority. The state should provide a better structured and extended assistance system commanding greater resources. Another solution for smoothing the struggle for housing would be to invest more in transit accommodation, which covers the time between the stay in the asylum centre and finding a more permanent solution. Currently, there is already a wide network of local reception initiatives (LOI in Dutch) across Belgium. After leaving the asylum centre, most refugees are able to stay up to three months in a small-scale unit, sometimes longer in cases of medical vulnerability.<sup>2</sup> This is supposed to give them the time to look for a long-term housing solution. If the capacity of these local reception initiatives could be increased, the time spent in LOIs could be extended. This would then give refugees more time to find decent, stable accommodation and to start their lives in Belgium.

More attention should also be given to the geography of these reception structures. Upon arrival in Belgium, asylum seekers are distributed across the country's asylum centres. Many of these are situated in former military barracks in remote corners of the country. After leaving the centre, most end up in a LOI in another municipality, and this temporary accommodation can be located anywhere in Belgium. While the underlying logic of burden-sharing may make sense from a policy perspective, it does not match the long-term settlement needs of refugees.<sup>3</sup> It forces many of them to start their lives in locations with poor public transport connections, a lack of ethnic services (such as halal food), few co-ethnic groups and small chances of success in the labour market. Sending families to places without any consideration for their future prospects not only causes a great deal of distress to individuals, but also postpones the moment when they can start building their lives and livelihoods. Investing in LOIs in urban locations or well-connected municipalities would minimize the housing mobility of vulnerable people who are eager to settle down and rest after being displaced from their own home countries. In the long run, it would also enrich their social lives, improve their future work prospects and increase their chances of social mobility.

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# Diverse Care Teams: The key to Improving the Quality of Health Care in Brussels

by Ann Roex, Rita Vanobberghen and Hakki Demirkapu

As the Brussels population becomes super diverse, care providers face enormous challenges in order to ensure delivery of quality of care to all. It is vital that all partners involved (governments, care organisations, hospitals, medical schools and care providers) take up their role in improving the quality.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines ‘quality of care’ as

*“the extent to which health care services provided to individuals and patient populations improve desired health outcomes. In order to achieve this, health care must be safe, effective, timely, efficient, equitable and people-centred.”<sup>1</sup>*

The WHO shifts the focus of care from ‘treating diseases’ towards ‘managing the comprehensive needs of people and populations’. According to this new approach, it is not sufficient, for instance, to correct the sugar levels of all diabetic patients to normal; it also becomes essential to personalise patient treatment goals as well as management plans. This requires taking into account the individual patient’s medical status (other diseases also diagnosed), circumstances (e.g. living conditions), preferences (e.g. spiritual) and cultural background. While curative medicine still has room for improvement in this respect, even bigger challenges exist in the prevention of diseases. It is only possible to achieve higher levels of health and wellbeing in the population if governments, society and individuals were to work more closely together and each played their part. This is the reason why WHO Europe has launched ‘Health 2020’, a policy framework which focuses



on action across government and society for health and wellbeing. One of its key aims is to reduce health inequalities and strengthen public health in the European region.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, qualitative care remains elusive in Brussels. Health inequities are considerable in its super diverse population with one third of its inhabitants living in poverty.<sup>3</sup> The socio-economic gradient in health is strongly present and demonstrates current inequity of care. Even though the Belgian health system provides highly subsidised care, access to care is precarious for people living in poverty. In the Brussels region, almost half (46%) of people within the lowest quartile of income have postponed a visit to a doctor or dentist for financial reasons. Across Belgium, preventive programmes have the lowest reaction rate in Brussels.

Without purposefully intending to, care and prevention programmes often discriminate against groups within the population. Different physical, cultural and socio-economic characteristics of people can be a ground for suppression, especially when different discriminating aspects intersect.<sup>4</sup> For example, informative tools on diabetes, such as a leaflet or specialised website, provide dietary advice that is often written in language difficult to understand and based on an assumption that the patient has good financial resources and on a western type of diet. As a result, these tools cannot be used by ethnic minority groups with low levels of literacy and income or different cultural eating habits.

The specific environment encountered in Brussels raises the question as to how the health care givers can organise themselves to provide its population with more effective and accessible person-centred care and more successful preventive actions. Hospitals, institutions and care organisations are faced with two major challenges. Firstly, they need to ascertain that the medical workforce is able to provide diversity-sensitive care. In order to do so, professionals need to possess the necessary knowledge about dimensions of diversity, cultural/gender sensitivities and access to care, skills in communication and working with interpreters, as well as attitudes as empathy and respect for others' opinions and values. It has become common practice to include courses on diversity-sensitive competence in the curricula of medical and paramedical schools. Yet, transferring what is learned in the classroom towards the workplace is known to be very difficult and hindered by many interfering factors (e.g. low self-efficacy beliefs). This is also the case for diversity-sensitive competence. In other words, it is essential to offer caregivers ample training options and support during their professional work. The availability of such courses in continuous professional education remains scarce

and poorly coordinated in Brussels. Organisations such as ‘ Kenniscentrum vzw’, ‘Cultures & santé’, ‘Vivo’, ‘Cultuursensitieve zorg’ and ‘Pigmentzorg’ put considerable effort into providing the caregivers with information and tools to implement diversity-sensitive care. Nevertheless, these organisations are often unknown and insufficiently consulted by the general public. From a caregiver’s point of view, information is dispersed or overlapping, and also difficult to find in the complex and always changing organisation of care in Brussels. A central access point to all information, training modules and support tools for diversity-sensitive care could be really empowering to caregivers.

Secondly, major efforts are required to make care teams more diverse. When a team consists of people with different ethnic, socioeconomic, cultural and religious backgrounds, the risks that the health care they provide is discriminatory are lower. Cancer treatment is a typical example. For instance, it becomes much more likely that a young woman with breast cancer who had recently migrated from Northern Africa would receive health care of better quality if the multidisciplinary oncology team includes a caregiver with a migration background. Diversity in care organisations is also key to innovation and a lever for change. A diverse team can identify possible grounds for discrimination more easily and is able to find creative solutions. Many care providers in Brussels make daily efforts to engage with their work teams, but are we sure that these teams are fully inclusive? Are the (para)medical schools training caregivers with a diverse socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, language, nationality, gender or religion? The results of a recent study by Roggemans and Spruyt<sup>5</sup> shows that the students who succeed in passing the medical entrance exam across Flanders have very similar socioeconomic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In other words, considerable efforts are still required to empower students with diverse backgrounds to engage and succeed in (para) medical training and to participate in care teams.

The ‘Diversity 3.0. Framework’ issued by the American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC) guides medical educational institutions on how to advance inclusion and diversity in their student population.<sup>6</sup> They describe how a climate of inclusion is a prerequisite for the composition of diverse teams or schools. This is an environment in which every individual feels respected, and in which every member engages herself towards the team and the community. In such a context, caregivers are evaluated on their engagement in care delivery and not on their personal characteristics. Creating such a climate requires targeted action at various levels. Legislation and procedures can be implemented in the policy arena to ensure that students with different backgrounds will get access to medical schools (e.g. through non-discriminating entrance exams).

These schools can also contribute to a more inclusive education – for instance, by implementing Human Resource policies designed for diverse teaching teams, through the adoption of diversity-sensitive professional dress codes and by offering extra support for students with limited social networks. Finally, administrators, faculty, professional staff and students are able to contribute to an inclusive climate by committing to the new policies (e.g. guiding students towards extra support) and reorienting their services towards a more diverse student population (e.g. diversity-sensitive communication skills).

Brussels' super diverse population presents challenges for the organisation and delivery of health care. In order to attain an acceptable quality of care in all its dimensions, people at different levels of health care education and health care support must be motivated to take up this challenge. Creative, well thought-through and consistent actions are required to tackle the existing disparities in health care. Let's not forget that it is precisely the diversity in our teams that will be instrumental for delivering qualitative care to a super diverse population.

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# For Equal Access to Care, Awareness–Raising on Implicit Bias is Quintessential

by Dirk Lafaut and Marjolein Schepers

In many European welfare states, the rights of migrants to social security are eroding or under pressure. This is also the case in Belgium. The new Flemish government, for example, proposed in its 2019 governing agreement to restrict migrants' access to care and social support even further. Newcomers will only be able to access the Flemish Care Fund after ten years of residence, five of which must be uninterrupted. Asylum seekers will be exempt from child support grants in Flanders.

Migrants have different rights to social support and healthcare than citizens, and they are also prone to be treated differently. Individuals with similar entitlements receive different treatment. This also refers to personal assessments of care providers. Decisions of care providers and health professionals are based on formal entitlements, but also on moral criteria and public representations about who deserves care, such as stereotypes represented in public media. Health practitioners and social workers undeniably have personal biases. These result in discretionary practices towards individuals based on social categories, such as being a migrant.

Different treatment of migrants by health professionals has also been demonstrated in a historical context. The care system has always left room for discretionary decision-making, i.e. the freedom to decide what should be done in particular situations. While this discretion is crucial to decision-making in care, it causes barriers and inequalities in access to social support and healthcare. Hence, we need to raise more awareness of implicit bias and selectivity among care providers, researchers and policymakers.

## Rights versus access today

In Belgium undocumented migrants can obtain access to health care which is regulated through a federal legal framework of medical cards. These cards provide a 3-month permit to access the regular public healthcare services. They can be obtained after meetings with a physician and the public social welfare office (called *OCMW* in Dutch and *CPAS* in French) in the municipality of residence. The law on Urgent Medical Aid states that social workers from the *OCMW/CPAS* must conduct a social inquiry before granting a medical card. This inquiry should confirm the insolvency or indigence of the undocumented migrant. The federal Public Planning Service (PPS) Social Integration subsequently covers the healthcare costs of undocumented migrants with medical cards.

Legislation on access to medical services for undocumented migrants in Belgium is currently poorly implemented.<sup>1</sup> Although the law on Urgent Medical Aid provides equal health care rights to undocumented migrants and other Belgian residents, inequalities exist in practice. Both the utilization rate and the per-capita expenditure for undocumented migrants are far lower than those of other Belgian residents. Discretionary interpretations and decisions of clinicians and social welfare staff (*OCMW/CPAS*) largely determine whether urgent medical aid is granted to undocumented migrants. Children, for example, are granted care more readily, as their undocumented status is not considered to be their own responsibility. Furthermore, general perceptions of vulnerability, as well as the perceived charitability of illnesses, influence the willingness of officials to provide help. Most often a pregnant woman will be helped more adequately than a young man with knee problems. An HIV patient will obtain healthcare more easily than a diabetic patient with high blood pressure. Undocumented migrants also mention the importance of adopting a passive attitude and showing acceptance, politeness, kindness, patience, gratitude or submission in order to obtain access to healthcare. The longer that undocumented migrants have stayed in Belgium, the more likely they are to have access to healthcare.<sup>2</sup>

## Rights versus access in a historical perspective

Such instances of selectivity of care towards migrants have been common phenomena throughout history. This resonated in daily decision-making practices in eighteenth-century Flanders about support for migrants who were mostly moving short distances

between rural parishes. As the British historian Steven King put it, not every single mother was treated the same by welfare officials in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>3</sup> Instead, there was room for negotiation on poor relief applications. Public poor relief was the early modern precursor of national welfare, which evolved since the Middle Ages from earlier traditions of charity. It lasted until the implementation of national welfare after the Second World War. Poor relief comprised old-age pensions, subsidies for healthcare, unemployment benefits and other forms of what we would now call ‘social rights’. However, relief was not a right, and it left open discretion to authorities on its application. Outcomes of such negotiations were based on more personal aspects such as kinship and friendship, and also on notions of belonging to the community. For example, older migrants in eighteenth-century Flanders who were no longer able to work were often considered deserving of help; migrant women whose husbands had recently passed away were also generally considered deserving of support.

Selectivity towards individuals could be based on personal bias of decision-makers, but it was also employed instrumentally. Policymakers could change the criteria for migrants’ access to poor relief in function of the needs of the labour market. Brubaker, for example, argued that authorities extended the social rights of immigrants during periods of labour demand in twentieth-century Europe.<sup>4</sup> Eighteenth-century rural parishes in England and in Flanders alike on the other hand allowed their inhabitants to move somewhere else while still receiving relief from the parish. In this way, they tried to promote an efficient labour allocation and to limit dependence on poor relief by allowing the poor to move in search of better means of survival. Notions of whether or not someone belonged and deserved health care thus depended upon more general considerations of the economic utility of the individual. They also relied on more personal and moral criteria of indigence, belonging and kinship. These criteria were subject to change, were bound by space and time, and most of all, were subject to individual decision-making.<sup>5</sup>

There are striking parallels between the decision-making processes regarding (undocumented) migrants’ access to care today and in the past. Welfare resources are limited to a certain community (nowadays the nation state) and are redistributed to a limited number of people. These limits presuppose criteria on inclusion and exclusion from welfare. Although laws exist on criteria for access to welfare, there was – and still is – ample room for deviation in daily decision-making. Such deviations are not surprising from the perspective of social history. Earlier research into the inclusion of immigrants, for example in asylum procedures, has demonstrated the role of on-the-spot decision making. Preconceptions of the origins or background of a client or patient

form additional factors that complicate the decision-making of care providers in a way similar to other well-known biases based on gender or age. The informal mechanisms of including and excluding ‘outsiders’ in health care have remained relatively unchanged. Although the actual care might have evolved, the welfare system is still characterized by selectivity and instrumentalization. It is only the definition of ‘migrants’ that has dramatically changed, from short-distance to international travellers. A person who was considered a ‘migrant’ in 18th-century Flanders is a far cry from whoever is considered to be a ‘migrant’ nowadays.

## Transforming care practices

Practitioners need room for discretionary decision-making. However, this raises difficult ethical questions about what should be done to tackle disparities in care. Such disparities point to the broader patterns of inequality. One possible response to these inequalities directs attention towards individual healthcare providers. Professional competence training, for example, is designed to raise self-awareness of implicit bias and selectivity. Healthcare professionals could then be invited to re-orient their decision-making practices. They could change discriminatory care practices to develop an orientation toward migrants that is more ‘neutral’. Such training urges health professionals to eliminate prejudices about the type of individual deserving care, and to treat everybody equal before the law, regardless of their origin.

Such efforts are however limited, as they only target the individual encounters between professionals and migrants. Locating the source of healthcare disparities identified by discretionary practices of individual health professionals may well obscure the broader structural factors that shape inequalities in care. Moreover, such competence training only offers limited answers. It does not address situations in which care providers are faced with legal limitations on access to care. In such contexts, individual efforts to eliminate personal engagement and treat everybody as equal under the law could be considered as a form of complicity, encouraging health professionals and social workers to adopt attitudes of relativism and apathy.

In short, proper care for migrants requires self-awareness among care providers of their biases in their representation of ‘who deserves care’. This implies a permanent exercise of negotiation and reconsideration of one’s freedom and room for discretion in relation



to existing legislation. It also requires transforming care practices in an ethical way, in a context of constantly changing – and increasingly restrictive – policies and public representations about care provision for migrants. It is essential that care providers adopt a critical attitude towards authority as well as a personalised approach towards beneficiaries. Their individual efforts can obviously not be disconnected from more collective efforts (e.g. by medical professional associations) to defend health rights and equal access to healthcare for migrants.

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# The Fallacy of Migrants–Culture Preventing Access to Care in Later Life

by Saloua Berdai–Chaouni, Ann Claeys, Sylvia Hoens, Honghui Pan, An–Sofie Smetcoren

The ageing population of Europe is increasingly diverse. In Belgium, migrants are becoming a significant part of this population. However, up to the present day, access to healthcare services for this population has been hampered. Researchers and policy-makers often argue that the cause of older migrants' difficult access to care is 'cultural barriers'. However, it is time to consider the role that institutionalized inequality plays in explaining the care barriers for older migrants, and more specifically, the intersection of racism and ageism.

In the 1950s and 1960s, labour migrants arrived to fulfil the need for low-skilled workers in the mines and industry. At present, this group represents the first wave of ageing migrants in Belgian society and foreshadows an increasingly older population with a migration background, especially in the cities. In 2020 nearly half of Brussels' population aged 65+ has a migration background. Although this diversification of the ageing population had been predicted, neither policymakers nor migrant communities were prepared for this evolution. The migrant communities kept alive their 'dream' of returning one day to their country of origin. These communities, and along with them the Belgian society and policymakers, were – and to some extent still are – oblivious to this natural process of ageing with its particular challenges and opportunities. It was only around 2000 that some policymakers started questioning who are these older migrants and do they have special needs?

Research into the intersection of migration and ageing has only emerged since the start of the millennium and the topic of ageing of migrants is still under-researched today. Our current knowledge about this population in Western Europe is limited and apparently oblivious to their real and diverse needs.<sup>1</sup> One of the pitfalls of research and

policies regarding access to care by ageing migrants is the predominating attention paid to the culture of ageing migrants and how it shapes their life. This focus results in a one-sided identification of this ageing population with ‘their’ culture. In other words, older migrants are assimilated with ‘their’ culture and seen as the ‘Other’. Since ‘culture’ is generally not defined or operationalized in the relevant policy documents and research, it is unclear what this term exactly means. In addition, ‘culture’ seems to have different meanings and is commonly perceived as a feature solely of people with a migration background, not of people from the dominant group. In the Belgian context, this focus on culture often means that the older migrant population is reduced to non-European, Muslim, people with coloured skin and ageing ‘Others’.

This implies that individual factors other than cultural (such as life history, socio-economic position, gender, religion, etc.) are overlooked in shaping the ageing experience of migrants. Additionally, other societal mechanisms (like the collective image that we have about ‘ageing’ and ‘migrants’) are often overlooked as influencers of this ageing experience of migrants. The dominant societal framework for the intersection of ‘ageing’ and ‘migration’ is negative in the West. The ageing population is often seen as dependent on, not contributing to, society via labour, hence becoming a societal economic burden and overconsuming ‘our’ healthcare. Migrants are also considered as a burden to ‘our’ society while we ignore their added value; for example, the contribution of migrant labourers to the construction of post-WWII Belgium is rarely recognized. In other words, being an older migrant is still perceived as a double burden on society.

Older migrants are underserved in (health)care services, yet their cultural background is regularly put forward as the sole explanation for their limited access. This one-sided explanation confirms common myths about this population like, ‘*in their culture, they care for their ageing parents*’ or ‘*they turn back to their country of origin when they age*’. These myths prevent the awareness of practices of ‘othering’ as a possible underlying factor that can explain the lack of access to care for ageing migrants. The concept of ‘othering’ can be understood as an identification process through which boundaries are set between the ‘self’ and the ‘others’ based on categorizations often set up in situations of inequality. Ageing migrants are considered as double the burden of ‘others’ because of the combination of their migrant origin and their age. Let us look a bit closer at examples of ‘othering’ practices based on the ethnicity of older migrants. Several studies that include the stories of older migrants and their family caregivers point to the discrimination and racism experienced during their encounters with public services. As a family caregiver in one of our studies remarked: ‘*You should have seen the way how he (doctor) talked to*

*me and to my father. Without any respect, like we were animals... it hurts me that my father has to endure such a racism at this stage of his life...'*<sup>2</sup> Not just culture but racism too is experienced as an additional barrier to access to care.

The 'othering' of these groups influences how service providers engage with them.<sup>3</sup> Based on their skin colour, name, clothing and religious symbols (especially those associated with Islam), older adults are perceived as 'different' or 'Other' and are therefore approached differently by service providers. For example, care professionals categorize migrant care recipients based on their assumption on how 'similar' or how 'different' this person is perceived to be compared with themselves. Both assumptions lead to a homogenous image of this person that influences the attitude of providing care to them. Overemphasising 'otherness', for example, can lead to feelings of uncertainty by professional caregivers, fuelled by an essentialist view of this 'other' group, thus preventing them from seeing the 'person' with his or her individual care needs. One example is automatically giving 'Halal' food to an older migrant based on their Arabic-sounding name without even asking about his/her dietary wishes. This discrimination from provision of person-centred care can also be the result of the assumption of 'sameness' of older migrants. Another example is the fact that cultural and religious needs of older European migrants, like Italians, are often not considered because they are assumed to be like 'us', referring to the dominant group of Belgo-Belgians.

In addition to ethnicity-based othering, older migrants also seem to be subjected to age-based othering: ageism, i.e. the automatic negative image of older people as perceived by society. The ageist attitude toward ageing populations in the West is a seventh barrier to access services in addition to affordability, accessibility, availability, adequacy, acceptability and awareness.<sup>4</sup> Older migrants are also affected by this general societal attitude. General manifestations of ageist actions (like taking over the decision-making ability of older persons or bypassing older persons in their communication with caregivers) are accelerated by the language barrier faced by older migrants. Being dependent on close relatives for care and other decision-making can reduce the capability of older migrants to establish an independent relationship with care and social services. This leads to a feeling of loss of autonomy. However, this results from the fact that this first generation had already relied on their children for overcoming existing barriers in their contacts with services at a younger age. Because language courses for migrants were not provided at the time, and most services had no interpreters, this first generation of migrants had to rely on their young children to bridge the language barrier. This reliance on children is accepted and is convenient for most services, as this 'cheap' solution

apparently resolves to some extent any communication- and administration-related accessibility barriers within public services. However, this can introduce an invisible barrier of ageism.

It follows that the ‘othering’ of older migrants as a result of the intersection of ageism and racism presents a clearly overlooked barrier that hinders access to care services by older migrants. Although both migrant and non-migrant older adults experience ageism, which already hampers their access to services, racism is added to the explanatory cocktail against older migrants. This complex and invisible reality challenges the essentialist image of older migrants. Accessibility to services is not only defined by the presumed culture of older migrants’. For these older populations accessibility is also hampered by structural and organizational barriers that are influenced by the two forces of racism and ageism. Therefore, working towards providing accessible services for all older adults in our society can only be achieved in a societal context if society acknowledges and resists its ageist and racist structural mechanisms.

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# Foster Families Caring for Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Need to Be Supported

by Frank Van Holen and Johan Vanderfaeillie

Unaccompanied refugee minors are refugee children who have been separated from both parents and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so. From 2014 to 2018 no fewer than 5,517 asylum seekers in Belgium were declared as unaccompanied refugee minors. A major decision at arrival in Belgium regards the provision of a suitable living environment and appropriate care. Family foster care is increasingly put forward as the option of choice for these youngsters. Indeed, a narrative literature review showed that unaccompanied refugee minors placed in family foster care had better mental health outcomes and developed better than youngsters cared for in less supportive environments such as residential care, large refugee centers, or semi-autonomous or autonomous environments.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, these youngsters are very vulnerable. Behavioural problems, trauma symptoms and cultural differences pose particular challenges to foster families. Therefore foster families who are caring for unaccompanied refugee minors need to be supported.

## Challenges

In line with international research, a recent Flemish study showed that unaccompanied refugee minors placed in family foster care have more behavioural problems and more trauma symptoms than Flemish-Dutch youngsters.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the level of resilience (the capacity to adapt positively in the context of significant risk or adversity) is lower when compared to Flemish-Dutch youngsters. This study also stressed the importance of social contact for these youngsters. Social contact with people regardless of their culture (either their own, another non-Belgian or Belgian culture) and regardless of



their age (youngster or adult) is positively associated with mitigated *trauma symptoms*. Furthermore, social contact with autochthonous (Belgian) people is positively associated with fewer *behavioural problems*. However, it remains unclear whether social contact shields minors from trauma and behavioural problems or whether trauma symptoms and behavioural problems themselves lead to reduced social contact.

Although a placement in a foster family is associated with positive outcomes for many unaccompanied refugee minors, the breakdown of any such placement (premature, unplanned ending of placements due to negative reasons such as behavioural problems, running away, parenting problems) is a matter of concern. It was found that 14% of the placements of unaccompanied refugee minors in foster care broke down during the first year of placement.<sup>3</sup> Three factors are associated with placement breakdown. Youngsters who experience traumatic events during their stay in Belgium are at greater risk of placement breakdown, while youngsters who have social contacts with peers of the same culture and with Belgian peers have a smaller likelihood of placement breakdown.

Regarding foster families, a distinction is often made between foster families with the same or a different cultural background than that of the unaccompanied refugee minor. However, results of international research regarding the preferability of culturally matched placements (in foster families with the same cultural background) above cross-cultural placements (in foster families with a different cultural background) are inconclusive.<sup>4</sup> In addition, two Flemish studies show that the cultural background of the foster family is not a decisive factor affecting either the well-being of the unaccompanied refugee minor<sup>5</sup> or the risk of breakdown during the first year of placement.<sup>6</sup>

Foster parents need support in order to fulfil their promising role in the care of unaccompanied refugee minors. Important differences exist between foster families depending on their cultural backgrounds. Foster families from the same culture are not always able to offer a high-quality child-rearing environment.<sup>7</sup> Many of them also have a migration background, have gone through a stressful flight with traumatic experiences and face additional challenges such as financial problems, culture shock, learning the language, finding employment and racism in their post migration country. Foster parents with a different cultural background than that of the unaccompanied refugee minor (autochthonous foster parents) need to receive specific support in order to be able to provide appropriate care. They stress the importance of proper preparation of the unaccompanied refugee minor for family foster care, who should be given information on options for reunification, certainty about the future and specialized psychological

support related to their trauma histories. Foster carers themselves need to be briefed by experienced foster care workers, with openness to and information about culture, religion and language.<sup>8</sup>

## Towards solutions

As unaccompanied refugee minors are at risk due to their trauma symptoms and behavioural problems, screening for and assessment of their mental health is recommended, and also provision of therapeutic treatment where needed. Furthermore, as resilience is not guaranteed, counselling that encourages resilience may be needed too. These sessions should aim to establish positive relationships with peers and adults, independence, autonomy and self-efficacy, and a sense of belonging. Moreover, special attention should be given to traumatic events experienced while being in Belgium. Intensive and structured collaboration between the professional services involved in the care of this target group (e.g. schools, psychological services, youth care facilities, social services) is key to meeting the needs of unaccompanied refugee minors in a more than adequate manner. As well as specialized support, social contact seems to be an important protective factor with regard to trauma symptoms and behavioural problems, and placement breakdown too. Facilitating contacts with peers and adults as well as people from the same culture as the autochthonous community is of major importance. Social contact promotes integration, mitigates trauma and behavioural problems and promotes placement stability. Therefore, activities that encourage social contact (such as schooling and leisure activities) are highly recommended.

When unaccompanied refugee minors are placed in foster care families, thorough assessment of the quality of the child-rearing environment of the foster family is recommended. Foster care agencies must ensure that the parenting environment is of sufficient quality and, if not, support should be given to fill any gaps (e.g. parenting support, social housing, adequate medical care) in order to improve the quality of the environment offered by the foster family in need of help to meet predetermined standards. Foster care agencies must ensure that foster parents with a different cultural background than that of the fostered child should be well prepared, trained, supervised and assisted to fulfill the challenging commitment of foster care.

If foster care is going to fulfil its intended role when receiving the assignment from the reception center for unaccompanied refugee minors, there is a pressing need for adapted care, specialized services and support in various areas, assisting both the unaccompanied refugee minors and their foster families.

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NEAM

Two pieces of black graffiti on a grey concrete wall. The graffiti is stylized and appears to be the name 'NEAM' written twice in a cursive, calligraphic style.



# Unaccompanied Minor Newcomers: a Village to Raise a Child, One Trustee to Lead the Way

by Liesbet De Backer

Unaccompanied minors arriving in Brussels face huge challenges. Acquiring residence status, finding accommodation, setting up a life project and learning at least one new language are just a few of the many tasks ahead of them. Such complex and multi-layered challenges require a coordinated approach, but the organizations accommodating these youngsters testify to the opposite. They point out structural weaknesses and inconsistencies in the present support system that cause immense difficulties for these new arrivals and negatively affect their further trajectories. These organizations agree on one point: they all explicitly condemn the ambiguities and inconsistencies in the current policy for welcoming young newcomers. The stories from the youngsters themselves confirm this, revealing the leading role played by coincidence in the current system: while some youngsters are lucky, many others are not

Mustafa A arrives in Belgium before the age of 12. He is immediately assigned to a guardian and, due to his young age, is accommodated under the authority of Youthcare. During the first months of his stay he immerses himself fully in the new language: he follows introductory classes for non-native speakers in a school that accommodates high numbers of newcomers, so grouping him with youngsters of similar literacy levels. Mustafa makes a running start: after a year he is ready for mainstream education. The transition proves to be challenging, but the new school receives the necessary support from a follow-up coach assigned by his first school. Before long, Mustafa starts finding his way about and manages to make friends with a couple of classmates. In the residential setting he calls home he is part of a small group with a high assistant-to-youngster ratio. Mustafa believes his individual needs are recognized and met.



Mustafa's guardian stays in close contact with his pupil, while still managing to coordinate his trajectory. The guardian helps to shape Mustafa's aspirations, his social assistant's approach and his family's expectations into a coherent future project. By the time Mustafa turns 16, he starts longing for greater autonomy. At his own pace, he begins to assume more responsibilities for the practical set-up of his independent life. Gradually he incorporates into his own network the professional networks linked to his social assistant, guardian, school, etc. Approaching the age of 18, Mustafa has worked out how to manage and follow his own path. Meanwhile the actors who had been central to Mustafa's life have increasingly positioned themselves on the sidelines. 'I'm always surrounded by warm people. That makes me a 100% happy,' he comments.

Mustafa B is 15 when he arrives in a centre for observation and orientation. This centre accommodates large numbers of youngsters, therefore guidance is often limited to logistics and chaos control. Mustafa feels intimidated by these circumstances and melts into the crowd. After this first phase, he is transferred to a large-scale centre in the south of the country. He would have preferred to be learning Dutch because many members of his community are living in Flanders. Mustafa does not thrive in this situation. He experiences sleep difficulties and suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder. Neither the centre nor his school have the means to provide the much-needed psychological help. He does have a guardian but has only met him once or twice. Mustafa's language development is stagnating. In the centre he only talks to a couple of peers in the local dialect of his home region. Nevertheless, he gets transferred to an independent living unit. Worries over the precarity of the situation of his family back home prevent him from attending school. By combining several illegal jobs, Mustafa manages to send his family some money. But due to his repeated attempts to find housing in the Brussels private property market, he continues to miss classes. Available housing options are depressing, but he sees no alternative. He gets caught in a vicious circle through digging financial holes then taking on badly paid jobs to settle his debts. When I ask who supports him the most in his young life, he answers: 'My mother, but I can't tell whether or not she is currently alive'.

Although Mustafas A and B are clearly extremes at either end of a continuum, this narrative is not a plea for polarized or dichotomous thinking. What is important to point out is that all nuanced cases falling between these two extremes are also heavily driven by coincidence. As such, these stories of coincidence-driven and dispersed trajectories are symptoms of an underlying structural reality.



For unaccompanied minor newcomers, and even for the actors supporting them, the accommodation and support system set in place is a maze. From the moment they arrive in Belgium until the moment they turn 18, many unaccompanied minors move from one authority to another. Arrival trajectories are not only highly complex, lived reality is far from the imaginary ideal dreamed up by bureaucrats. Due to lack of space in youth care accommodation centres, many unaccompanied minor newcomers do not receive the specialized assistance they need. It does not help matters that there appear to be significant variations in the quality of care and support afforded to unaccompanied minors, and the advice issued by a range of organizations is often conflicting. Lastly, this situation seems to be more visible in Brussels than in the rest of the country. Many of the actors in the Brussels area portray Brussels as an atypical and particularly challenging context for this target group, especially in terms of administrative accessibility, literacy and access to adequate support. At the moment, Brussels is a patchwork of Flemish and Wallonian integration models linked to different approaches. In Belgium the vulnerable status of unaccompanied minor newcomers thus seems to be aggravated by the complex institutional puzzle that faces them.

In practice, how do the inconsistencies of the Belgian support system negatively impact the arrival and further trajectories of unaccompanied minor newcomers? First-hand accounts from these youngsters reveal that moving from one residential setting to the next is not just about changing houses. Residential moves result in breaches of all kinds: creating gaps in a support system and linked approaches, breaking ties and fragmenting a personal network. By the time these youngsters reach the age of 18, such fragmented trajectories usually result in fragmented networks. Yet these networks are vital to make the precarious transition from dependence to independence in order to live as an adult. When you compare their trajectories to those of youngsters born in Belgium and fully supported in their development for 18 years (both by personal networks and governmental policies), it is easy to see that the inadequacies of the current system will mark unaccompanied minor newcomers for life.

We should be capable of doing a better job. Pilot projects such as Minor Link and Steunfiguren by Minor Ndako and Parrainage by Mentor Escalé in Brussels reveal that the guaranteed presence of just one support figure can make a huge difference in the life of a youngster, providing comprehensive, systematic and transparent guidance on a constant basis. This could remedy a youngster's complex reality that seems so subject to the laws of chance. All that is needed is one person with a thorough knowledge of the institutional puzzle and of the rights of the target group. This person could assume a

central role in the life of the minor and by providing information, orientation and follow-up could steer him through the bureaucratic maze of Belgium in general, and Brussels in particular.

To this end, one option would be to diversify and standardize the responsibilities of the guardian. With more resources, fewer pupils per guardian, and a checklist that can serve as a guideline for preparing pupils for adulthood, guardians could provide not only legal but also social support to minors. Another option would be to split up the current job description of the guardian. As their job requires specific knowledge and skills, guardians would dedicate their time to the legal representation of their minors, while the domain of societal assistance would be taken up by a so-called buddy. This support figure would be given a formal role in the youngster's life, and – if the minor asked for this – would direct him towards appropriately helpful actors in the field.

In its current legislature, the Flemish government already provides buddies to newcomers for 40 hours per person. While this measure is a step in the right direction, in my opinion a properly customized support can only be guaranteed if the intensity and the timeframe of the support were to be defined by the circumstances and the needs of the minor, rather than vice versa.

It costs money to customize support. But research in the field of social work has shown that the costs of preventive measures are lower than the financial burden linked to several years of full-time specialized care. All youngsters need a steady guide in our institutionally complex city (and country as a whole). While we might not have the power to substantially simplify Belgium's political and administrative structures right away, we are fully empowered to supply the resources necessary to navigate this maze.

# Until the Lion Has a Voice, the Tales of the Hunt Will Only Be Those of the Hunter

by Elisabeth Bekers and Ilke Froyen

From the New Oxford Dictionary definition of the word ‘canon’ as a ‘list of literary works considered to be permanently established as being of the highest quality’, one could easily infer that literature is above and beyond politics. However, the permanence of any such list is to be taken with a large pinch of salt. Throughout literary history, authors and works have come in and out of fashion. These fluctuations have as much to do with trends in literary style as with the broader sociocultural and political contexts in which the texts emerge and the canon is selected. In Salman Rushdie’s words, ‘works of art, even works of entertainment, do not come into being in a social and political vacuum; and [ ... ] the way they operate in a society cannot be separated from politics, from history’.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the production of literature and the formation of the canon are subjected to past and present social discriminations.

Feminists, for example, have sought to redress the long-time absence of works authored by women from the canon, while postcolonial critics have taken issue with the ongoing marginalization of writers from the (former) colonies. In her 1929 essay ‘A Room of One’s Own’, Virginia Woolf famously complained that Shakespeare’s equally gifted imaginary sister Judith never would have been given the opportunity to nurture her writing talent. Even women who against these odds did manage to create literature have not always received due recognition. Despite Woolf’s tribute, in the same essay, to the literary genius of Aphra Behn (1649-1689), this female dramatist was still missing from the well-known *Norton Anthology of English Literature* when the authors of this article were students. Three decades later, Norton readers are luckier. Behn is no longer excluded; neither is Olaudah Equiano, whose 1789 slave narrative was the first book-length autobiography by an African in English. In the late twentieth century, feminist, gay, civil rights, decolonising and other democratisation movements have contributed

much to the diversification of the literary canon. Especially writers with backgrounds of colonisation and histories of relocation have received increasing acknowledgment. This is reflected in the greater variety of English-language authors who have won the Nobel Prize for Literature since 1985, including the Nigerian (Yoruba) dramatist Wole Soyinka, the African American novelist Toni Morrison and the Japanese-born British author Kazuo Ishiguro. But changes are slow. As recently as 2019, Black British writer Bernardine Evaristo became only the first woman of colour to receive the Man Booker Prize, an achievement that was somewhat overshadowed by her having to share the red carpet with white Canadian author Margaret Atwood.

The expansion of the literary canon is not only significant in terms of the aesthetic innovations that are introduced; it also has a profound political impact, for ‘until the lion has a voice, the tales of the hunt will be only those of the hunter’ (Eritrean proverb). It therefore is imperative to broaden the literary field with authors whose writing moves beyond age-old, hegemonic perceptions and practices. Literature can help to open people’s minds and hearts to a widening range of voices, views, histories and tales. With its unique ability to deploy a myriad of genres, styles and forms, literature is able to provide not simply ‘fifty shades of grey’ but an infinite range of hues, moods and atmospheres. Literature can grant visibility, speech and agency to previously marginalised population groups, even to the point of reinserting them into histories from which they were – or still are – being erased. It can restore to readers a sense of the past that is not affected by a historical amnesia regarding its darkest pages. Literature can also give readers access to worlds they will never physically enter. It can expose them to perspectives and ideas they will never come across in their daily lives or read in the postings of their like-minded social media groups. Not surprisingly, theory-of-mind research has shown that reading literary fiction enhances one’s understanding of the mental states of others and that avid readers are more likely to develop a greater capacity for empathy.<sup>2</sup>

Teachers and other promoters of literature in today’s increasingly pluricultural and multilingual society therefore have the indispensable role of broadening readers’ horizons by encouraging them to explore literature produced in an expanding variety of contexts. At university it is important that students of English Literary Studies should be taught not only the works of long-established white male icons of literary history. Alongside Chaucer and Shakespeare, they ought to read the Brontë sisters, whose masterful accounts of impossible love in the desolate wuthering heights of Yorkshire or in mid-nineteenth-century cosmopolitan Brussels were omitted from F.R. Leavis’s *The Great Tradition* (1948). Their attention should also be drawn to literature written in

English by historical and contemporary authors from beyond Britain's shores. Students should learn, for example, how the late-eighteenth-century African Equiano inserts himself into the British canon by drawing on the literary techniques of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) to narrate his journey from enslavement to freedom and abolitionist activism. Or how, in the course of the twentieth century, as Rushdie proclaims, "the Empire writes back"<sup>3</sup> against the (former) colonial centre and shifts attention to the experiences and perspectives of the literary descendants of Man Friday, Robinson Crusoe's colonial servant.<sup>4</sup> But these writers ought not to be treated as mere sociological informants. At the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, for example, students are made aware that contemporary black women are not only introducing innovatory themes into the British literary scene, but are also experimenting with an array of literary techniques (narrative reversal, deconstructive humour, linguistic experimentation, generic hybridisation, metafiction etc.). At least in literary terms, it can be said that there is some 'Black in the Union Jack',<sup>5</sup> a case in point being Evaristo's multi-voiced poetic novel *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019). But the Man Booker Prize's tardiness in honouring its first woman writer of colour confirms that the ongoing efforts at decolonising the canon, including the university's literary curriculum, should not be relaxed.

In their efforts to develop a more inclusive literary canon, educators are joined by literary event organizers including Passa Porta. The international house of literature in Brussels encourages readers across and beyond the capital to discover new writing and to reflect on issues of solidarity, equality and liberty. It does so in collaboration with a wide range of guest authors and writers in residence, from literary icons to budding new talent to refugee writers. A more tongue-in-cheek initiative is their presentation of an alternative Nobel Prize for literature, one week before the official award in Stockholm. The alternative prize recognises the work of authors who could have – and perhaps should have – won the Nobel Prize but, for one reason or another, missed out on it. In 2019, for example, a wide variety of writers and readers paid homage to Virginia Woolf. Her great-niece Virginia Nicholson accepted the prize from the hands of Sulaiman Addonia. In his eulogy, this Brussels-based British-Eritrean author explained how Woolf had come into his life via book smugglers during his time in Saudi Arabia before he fled to London as an unaccompanied minor refugee. He recalls how he read 'to find the incomprehensible, the insufferable acceptable somewhere, and literature was that place.' For him, 'writing was also about giving a refuge and a safe place inside us to all our characters, even those deemed unacceptable because they challenge the norms of our societies.'<sup>6</sup> Through such personal stories, whether of the authors themselves or their fictional characters, readers are invited to read and understand the everchanging world from various points of view.

As Passa Porta's programming illustrates, in the twenty-first century the traditional dominance of the white male canon can no longer be maintained.

Contrary to the dictionary definition, a 'canon' list is hardly a fixed entity. It is the ever-changing result of a continuing dialogue with the literature of the past: new perspectives encourage reappraisals of historical authors and revisions of the canon. It is also an ongoing engagement with the literature of the present. The growing recognition of different kinds of work widens the customary scope of the canon; it also generates new selection criteria and new conversations, which may well bypass the classic canon, while direct exchanges between newly emergent literary innovators may generate new paradigms. As in literary history, these challenges from the margins of the Empire of Literature will have a ripple effect. The questions asked today will undoubtedly lead to future inclusions. In turn, these new additions will stimulate further questioning and innovations. Put briefly, the canon is under permanent construction.

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# ‘Don’t They Jump on the Seats?’

## Questioning the Underrepresentation of Artists with Migrant Roots in the Cultural Labour Market of Brussels

by Eva Swyngedouw

MIGRATION, EQUALITY AND RACISM | PART 2 - EQUALITY

Artists with migrant roots are underrepresented in the working population of the cultural labour market in Brussels. Our research<sup>1</sup> shows that although 35% of all residents are foreigners and over 70% are of migrant descent, foreigners constitute only 17% of the workforce in the city’s performance arts sector.<sup>2</sup> This ‘creative mismatch’ is all the more surprising, given the fact that these cultural ‘outsiders’ harbour tremendous potential to infuse the cultural sector with creativity and disruptive innovation. For example, plays where the majority of the people on- and off stage are of migrant background, such as ‘Malcolm X’ and ‘Drarrie in de Nacht’ (KVS, the Flemish city theatre in Brussels ) and ‘Fruit estrange(r)’ and ‘De Bruxelles à La Mecque’ (Ras-El-Hanout theatre troupe), bring innovative cultural practices to the scene. In general, these shows have been received with praise by both the public and the media. Various journals found ‘Malcolm X’, for example, to be a ‘milestone’ in the history of the KVS.

*‘We turned around and saw the most captivating image of the evening: the whole room of the KVS-Bol, filled to the brim, was dancing and clapping. And that room looked far from white. (...) At that moment, everyone realised: “A piece of theatre and city history is being written here, or rather: played”’.*

(Knack, 19.10.2016)<sup>3</sup>

Although the artistic projects by artists of migrant descent are often enthusiastically received, few plays of this kind are performed in Brussels. As I am about to show, I contend that these artists have more difficulties to enter the Brussels' cultural labour market than do native artists<sup>4</sup> because the various structural and personal hurdles they encounter throughout their careers do not confront native artists to the same degree. Gaining a better understanding of these obstacles and barriers is key to coming up with concrete solutions for making the Brussels creative labour market – and incidentally any other market – more inclusive.

In general, we see that on a structural level the established cultural scene still resists staging plays by artists with a migrant background. As one artistic director, convinced that plays performed by the Ras-El-Hanout troupe should not be put on in large theatres, remarked:

*'You have a very big movement of artists (...) originating from the Maghrebi community – who are mainly occupied with making more accessible theatre. Folk theatre, comedy, slam (...). Ras-El-Hanout for example (...). But that is a completely different circuit (...). It is a different artistic quality'.*

(Artistic Director, 17.06.2016)

In this regard, the cultural establishment often categorizes arts from artists with a migrant background as belonging to the socio-cultural circuit instead of the cultural circuit with a big 'C'. Ras-el-Hanout, for instance, is funded by the regional governmental services Actiris and Equal-Brussel, although these funds are predominantly intended to promote equal opportunities for minorities in Brussels in the labour market and society at large, not groups of artists. In addition, producers and actors of migrant descent have a history of being rejected by theatre venues on the grounds that their audiences might not be well-behaved or their plays 'do not fit' the venue.

One actor told us:

*'I found myself in a discussion with a theatre director where she said to me "Yes, but what kind of audience do you have? Don't they jump on the seats?"'*

(Stand-up Comedian and Actor, 20.04.2016)

Artists with migrant roots also have to overcome various personal obstacles throughout their career. Firstly, they report a lack of family support for their cultural endeavours. Many of these artists have grown up in poverty and their parents want to protect them from the precarious financial situation many artists live in today. Therefore, family members often expect them to choose a job with better employment prospects such as a doctor or engineer.

These artists also often lack the artistic networks that provide jobs. Because many of them are self-taught they do not have access to networks that are often formed already at arts school. An actor and singer reports:

*'For me the first obstacle is the network. (...) When you have not been to school and you do not know the people it's very difficult to break into the network. (...) They have certain a priori conceptions of you (...) like "he has not been to school, so he does not have the codes, so he is ... maybe an opportunist or something like that.'"*

(Actor and singer, 08.05.2017)

The above quote points out as well that artists of migrant background who did not manage to go to arts school often do not know the prevailing artistic standards of what is considered artistic quality. Most of them had to learn these norms 'on the job'. Due to this, they generally already lag behind artists who have received a formal artistic education, and some of them will go one step further and choose to resist or completely reject these cultural norms. Instead they will use different cultural reference points and artistic standards from outside the established arts scene, such as street/urban arts, hip hop, street dance, stand-up comedy, etc. But these artistic forms are not regarded by the cultural establishment as meeting expected quality standards. As a result, such plays are often greeted with contempt. A dramaturge describes his experience:

*'It is all about "What is art, what isn't art?"  
We have different codes. (...) For example, we made a piece (...) and  
that was so deep-down Street. And suddenly theatre critics said: "Yes it  
reminded me of Ice-T who performed a rap song".  
It makes you think, like, "you know you've seen Ice-T perform only once  
on MTV and that is your frame of reference."  
It's all about frames of reference'.*

(Dramaturge, 29.06.2017)

Artists of migrant descent participate in these urban cultural forms of expression because they set the standard in these genres. An actor explains:

*'When I was 18 or 19 I discovered rap,  
which was a revelation because at the time I didn't see a lot of black  
people in the media, whether it was on television or in the newspapers, I  
felt like we didn't exist. And there was something so strong about rap, it  
was black people (...) talking about society in a way we weren't used to  
hearing about and that disturbed white reality a bit, and for me it was (...)  
revolutionary because it talked about me'.*

(Actor and singer, 08.05.2017)

This quote also shows the importance of role models. In the established cultural scene, artists with migrant roots experience a lack of role models that are 'like them'. As a consequence, they feel as if they do not belong. They feel insecure because they are not being validated for who they are, so they drop out early and look for a job elsewhere. Lastly, the interviewees report experiencing various degrees of racism, like not being hired for certain roles or being mistaken for a non-creative worker such as the security guard or the cleaning lady. Moreover, actors get hired in stereotypical roles or get typecast.

An actress complains:

*'Everything that's always proposed in the casting is always the same profile, it's always either 'Aisha' who gets off the plane and wants her papers or it's a 50-year-old mama who's a nurse or a prostitute, that's really the three roles that always came back when I read a script'.*

(Actress, 15.05.2017)

To sum up, we find that the existing artistic worlds are still exclusive and predominantly white bastions. We know that survival in the cultural labour market is already very difficult for native artists, let alone for artists with migrant roots who have to overcome the above-mentioned extra hurdles (see *Rinschberg et al.* 2018). How can we solve this conundrum? The findings of our study point to several actions that could be done to make the cultural sector a better reflection of Brussels society.

First, it is important to make employment in the artistic sector stable and secure and to eradicate the precarious working conditions that most artists have to work in on a daily basis. For example, the artist status could be made more accessible by reducing the requisite number of hours worked. As a result, artists of all backgrounds would be under less pressure to find a more secure job elsewhere. Second, the distinctions made by policymakers between the cultural and the sociocultural scenes need to be re-examined, since these different categories already contain a value judgment of their own about culture. Third, it is vital to increase the number of artists of migrant descent working in the cultural labour markets so that aspiring artists can recognize themselves in the successful actor on stage or stage designer behind the scenes, rendering discrimination based on ethnicity obsolete in the long run.<sup>5</sup> This could be done in several ways: establishing quotas, or setting up diversity action plans for instance. Hiring procedures could also be made more transparent so that cultural institutions do not perpetually tap into the existing 'old boys' network'. Furthermore, artists with migrant roots could gain experience in a paid internship programme, which could also facilitate their access to the regular cultural labour market.

By increasing the numbers of artists of migrant background working in the cultural sector, a much-needed mentality change is about to take place on the subject of standards of artistic quality, a change that will offer opportunities for more openness towards otherness. Overall, KVS and Ras-El-Hanout are leading the way in making the

cultural labour market of Brussels a more inclusive and diverse space. In this way they will gradually transform the prevailing cultural norms and practices. The mainstream cultural sector just needs to follow their example.

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  - 3 *Knack* (19 Oct. 2016). [https://focus.knack.be/entertainment/podium/het-swingende-malcolm-x-is-eeen-mijl-paal-in-de-geschiedenis-van-de-kvs-en-van-brussel/article-review-766657.html?cookie\\_check=1572947633](https://focus.knack.be/entertainment/podium/het-swingende-malcolm-x-is-eeen-mijl-paal-in-de-geschiedenis-van-de-kvs-en-van-brussel/article-review-766657.html?cookie_check=1572947633)
  - 4 This research is based on 35 biographical interviews done in the context of a 4-year-long Innoviris Anticipate project.
  - 5 Pande, R. & Ford, D. (2012). *Gender Quotas and Female Leadership*. Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/9120>









# Martial Arts for the Personal Development of Deprived Youngsters?

## Maybe if We Coach the Coaches!

by Marc Theeboom

A growing number of policymakers hold high expectations of sport, considering this domain as going far beyond just a healthy leisure activity. The Council of Europe, for example, sees sport as a tool for addressing the major societal challenges facing the EU, including migration, social exclusion, radicalisation, violent extremism and unemployment.<sup>1</sup> Even the United Nations have repeatedly referred to sport as a cost-effective and flexible tool for promoting peace and development objectives.<sup>2</sup>

These expectations are often referred to as ‘sport-for-development’. But can we really expect that sport will have a significant positive impact on the lives of individuals that goes beyond the sports field and also affects their life situation or even lead to more tolerant communities and peaceful nations? An impact of this kind is also difficult to measure. Neither should we expect that simply the practice of sport will lead to such promising outcomes, given that most sports coaches are trained to teach specific sporting skills only, not to create general learning experiences. Coaches would require training in how to use sport as a developmental tool.

It is striking to see how strong the public belief is in the social value of sport. Apart from being a good way to improve one’s health, many people are convinced that the practice of a sport is an effective tool for helping people in their personal and social development. Since many sports are highly accessible and not requiring expensive investment, they are often used to attract and help young people living in marginalised situations who are facing various challenges in their daily lives. For example, their challenges might be growing up in poor superdiverse neighbourhoods, being victims of intolerance and

discrimination or leaving school at an early age. Many people view sport as an ideal way to learn how to communicate better with disadvantaged young people and improve their sense of teamwork by teaching them to take on responsibility, to help others, to plan their lives and not give up easily.

Strangely enough, the 'harder' martial arts such as boxing, kick-boxing and thai boxing, together with Brazilian jujitsu, are increasingly being used in programmes designed to help young people in their personal development. The attraction of these sports is often seen as an important asset for reaching specific youth groups. It is also believed that the practice of martial arts will help young people to develop self-esteem, overcome fear and control their emotions when they find themselves in stressful situations. The discipline is supposed to help them think more strategically and increase their capacity to anticipate actions and learn how to respect others. In short, these experiences are regarded as inspirational for young people for helping them to face up to challenges in their daily lives. Even though, paradoxically, the practice of martial arts may be employed as a means to encourage tolerance in others, it will come as no surprise that not everybody believes that there is an added value in teaching martial arts, especially not to those in problematic situations. A few examples from Belgium will illustrate this point.

In September 2013, the mayor of Aalst, a medium-sized city in Belgium, decided to cancel the social project 'Combat Sambo'. Sambo is a Russian variant of judo in which kicks and punches are allowed. The project was being run by the municipal sports department which gave sambo lessons to around 60 young people between 14 and 22 years old from 12 different nationalities. This sport was used as a channel to reach young people who normally would not have attended organised leisure activities of their own accord. The sambo lessons were designed to help these young people in their personal development. Unfortunately, the city council raised objections to the use of martial arts for working with vulnerable young people. The councillors feared that these young people, mostly from an immigrant background, would use the techniques they had learned outside the gym to violent ends and to commit crimes. The sports official who was leading the project brought this story to the attention of the media and was subsequently fired.

Another example occurred in autumn 2016 when the management of the Hasselt prison planned to introduce boxing sessions to prisoners as a therapeutic side activity. However, the prison guards resolutely rejected these plans on the grounds that these sessions could increase aggressive behaviour among the prisoners. They even threatened to strike if the boxing sessions went ahead, and in the end the project was cancelled for the prisoners.



However, seeing that all the equipment was in place to start, the decision was taken to organise the boxing sessions for the guards instead. Afterwards, the guards were very positive about the added value of this activity and regretted their initial refusal with regard to prisoner participation.

A final example: the Brussels Boxing Academy is a club that attracts many young people from deprived areas in Brussels and is known for using boxing as an educational tool. In 2015 it made media headlines because an accomplice of the Paris terrorist attacker had previously trained there. The club was forced to close for a while due to the public assumption that boxing had somehow exerted a negative influence on this former boxing trainee.

Despite negative perceptions of martial arts, in recent years there has been an increase in these educational martial arts classes, as many people are convinced the contrary is true. Proponents defend the idea that the practice of martial arts can contribute to the personal development of vulnerable young people. International organisations such as 'Fight for Peace' for example, combine martial arts with educational and personal development of young people in communities affected by crime, violence and social exclusion. With local partners in 25 countries they are working to change the lives of young people in deprived communities through the practice of martial arts. Projects are also organised in major conflict areas such as the Middle East, Central Africa, Latin America, and elsewhere. This activity often incorporates objectives on working to achieve greater tolerance between various groups and communities. Whether or not these projects are effective in their implementation has yet to be seen.

But before addressing the issue of effectiveness, it is worth looking at the source of the firm public belief in the added social value of martial arts and of sport in general. What is the underlying logic here?

It seems to spring from the basic assumption that when young people practise a sport regularly, they will get better at it. The improvement is not only on the technical level, but also the discipline proves helpful, for example, in teaching the participants to work better as a team or to respect their coach and the rules. Participants also learn the merits of perseverance and how to cope with winning and losing. Then it is also assumed that the participants will make use of the same skills in their daily lives and that this will help them develop more confidence and higher self-esteem. It is claimed that practising a sport will help the participants to find their place in the communities they live in,

encourage them to become more actively involved in their communities and at the same time set an example to others. In other words, sport will turn them into better citizens. They will become better integrated into their communities, and that will all eventually contribute towards better (or at least, more cohesive) communities.

This logic seems simple and straightforward. But is it correct?

If practising sport is supposed to contribute to greater tolerance, why do we see so much racism and violence on and off the field? Why is homophobia still found everywhere in sporting circles? How should we determine the social value of sport? By comparing athletes with non-athletes? Supposing we find a difference in behaviour, how can we then be sure that this difference is due to practising sport and not to something else? Or do we think that some people with certain characteristics tend to be more interested in sport and stay involved, while others stop? Can we really detect cause and effect? In other words, it seems that we are dealing here with the age-old dilemma of the chicken and the egg.

Scientists remain highly sceptical of ‘sport-for-development’, despite the high expectations held by policymakers, despite the promises made by all those programmes using sport (or martial arts) as an educational or community-building tool for socially deprived groups. What they want to see is hard evidence. But the negative perceptions of martial arts also need to be based on evidence.

Some have argued that sport should not be used as a tool to help individuals overcome their difficulties. Instead it should be used to try to change the organisation and structure of society leading to situations of inequality in the first place.<sup>3</sup> Knowing that this is easier said than done, other experts prefer to focus on what is needed for effectively increasing the potential of sport to help individuals.<sup>4</sup> Their starting point is trying to get a better understanding of what actually happens when sports are played, as this is often not clear. Once we understand how sport is actually organised, there might be a better chance of determining its impact. That said, the umbrella term ‘sport’ covers a huge domain. Different sports come in many shapes and formats. The sports experience will surely depend on factors such as the motivation, condition and level of the participants, the rules that are used, the type of guidance, ...

It would be naïve to think that personal assets such as communication skills, teamwork, sense of responsibility and problem-solving ability are automatically acquired through



the practice of sport. Our own research has shown that, among other things, practising a sport can only lead to the acquisition of these skill sets if the sporting activity is explicitly organised in an experiential learning context, where participants are introduced to specific situations to which they are expected to respond. Later on they are encouraged to reflect on their personal learning experiences and how to utilise what they have learned outside of sport.

It cannot be denied that martial arts offer splendid opportunities for providing these learning experiences. But it is clear that if the right kind of coaching and mentoring is not provided, then nothing is actually learned. A major problem is that most sports coaches are not trained to work on the personal and social development of their trainees.<sup>5</sup> Their principal job is to teach technical sports skills. Although they are expected to help participants improve their technical sporting skills, this does not automatically lead to increased personal development in general. It follows, then, that the deliberate creation of learning experiences through the practice of sport will require specific expertise. Unfortunately, most existing courses for sports teachers and trainers do not offer this.

Many educational sports projects have come under severe pressure because of high expectations. Where there are claims of added social value for the practice of sport (or martial arts), there should also be people with specific expertise at hand with the capacity to determine and also effectively deliver the expected outcomes. At some point, policymakers and other sponsors are likely to ask for hard evidence that will have to go beyond the point of citing a handful of individual success stories.

It would surely help to be more realistic about the potential of sport-for-development, and to be clearer about what outcomes can really be expected. It would also help to ask the right questions, such as: What does ‘development’ actually mean? How can it be measured? And how should sport be organised to become an effective tool for experiential learning? Looking for some coherent answers here would be a sensible first step.

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# We're All Migrants Here: Citizenship and Urban Social Infrastructure

by Bas van Heur, Karel Arnaut and Bruno Meeus

« - Ce serait une ville peuplée uniquement d'étrangers.

- Mais c'est impossible ! S'ils habitent la même ville, ils seront concitoyens et nullement étrangers les uns aux autres ».<sup>1</sup>

[“Then the city would be inhabited solely by foreigners.

“That's not possible! If they are living in the same city they would be co-citizens and in no way strangers to each other.”]

Imagine the city as a place that is open and accessible to all. Irrespective of your nationality, your migration trajectory and legal status, this city provides free or at least affordable access to basic services such as health care, education, housing, mobility and culture. With ‘being from elsewhere’ increasingly becoming the norm – in Brussels, for instance, only 15% of its residents have Belgian roots – in order for such a city to flourish we need to get rid of the categorical distinction between migrants and ‘native’ citizens and open up urban services and infrastructures to everyone.

## A politics of presence

Although for most of her history Europe has been a continent of interlinked cities and towns, over the last two centuries the rise of the modern state has subordinated the logic of city life to that of the nation. The reality of city life constantly disrupts this national

image. Urban dwellers develop and maintain identities and practices that transcend the borders of the nation-state.<sup>2</sup> To cater to these practices and thus to contribute to the development and prosperity of our cities, we need to rethink our notion of citizenship and the rights it entails. National citizenship is acquired either through birth within the nation-state and/or descent from parents who are already citizens or through a more or less lengthy process of naturalization. By definition this excludes a considerable part of the urban population from enjoying the social, economic and political rights that come with formal national citizenship.

Urban citizenship relies on a different logic – what we would call a logic of presence. This entails awarding citizenship rights to everyone registered as resident in the city. This approach, although more radical and contested, may also award citizenship rights to those dwelling in the city but without an official residence or residence permit (such as homeless people or undocumented migrants). In this inclusive city, people gain citizenship rights when entering and living in the city, then lose these urban rights when leaving the city. The underlying idea of equal treatment of different (migrant) groups is in line with the New Urban Agenda of UN-Habitat, the UN’s New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and the recently endorsed Global Compact for Migration.<sup>3</sup> In this urban political community, there is no basis or reason for a distinction between ‘natives’ and citizens with a migration background. Such ‘autochthony’ is deeply exclusive and discriminating<sup>4</sup> and breaks up the kind of conviviality, collaboration and solidarity on which our ‘city for all’ thrives.

But principles are only as good as the acts they produce. Good practices fortunately do exist. Municipal ID cards have been introduced by cities such as New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Vienna, Madrid, and Barcelona. These cards allow undocumented migrants to open a bank account, register their children for school, borrow books from a public library, or simply gain access to public buildings with controlled entry.<sup>5</sup> The expansion of voting rights to the entire urban population is a logical next (but more contested) step in the creation of this urban political community. Historically, the acquisition of the right to vote has been the result of social struggle, slowly leading to the incorporation of women and working-class people (i.e. those without property holding rights) into the democratic process. But in our contemporary cities, a different trend is also visible with a substantial part of the urban populace deprived of the right to vote and decide on the future of what is also their city. In Brussels, for example, EU citizens with a residence permit are allowed to vote and run as candidate in local and EU elections (but not in regional and federal elections) while non-EU citizens are only allowed to vote in

local elections on condition of having resided legally in Belgium for at least five years. Those without a residence permit cannot vote at all. Fighting for the political enfranchisement of these citizens is a logical next step towards a more inclusive and cohesive urban community.

## The social infrastructure of cities

Municipal ID cards and the extension of voting rights to all urban dwellers are but a starting point for creating cities for all. A more substantive and comprehensive implementation of urban citizenship rights requires a rethinking of such rights, namely as rights steeped in (equal) access to an urban ‘social infrastructure’<sup>6</sup> that provides a range of foundational urban services. This social infrastructure should be free of charge or at least highly affordable, and should cover basic needs in domains such as health care, education, housing, mobility and culture. This in turn would reduce the reliance of urban citizens on wage labour and allow them to participate as full citizens of the urban community. Aside from the closely related debate on universal basic income, a social infrastructural approach adopts a more collective perspective through a focus on the key public services that should be made accessible to all. This argument runs counter to the decades-long reduction of public services as a result of neoliberal policies; instead, it proposes a radical expansion of public services that would be accessible to all inhabitants irrespective of their national citizenship status. The state would continue to play an important role as provider of these social infrastructures, but this should not be understood as a ‘return’ to a centrally organized system. Due to the differentiation of lifestyles and the enormous social diversity, especially in cities, there cannot be a one-size-fits-all solution. Instead, social infrastructures are best achieved at the local level, in close cooperation with the actual ‘users’ such as grassroots organisations of migrants, neighbourhood associations, housing activists or workers’ unions.

In this scenario, it is also the government that needs to become more accessible. Municipal administrations, for instance, could provide language assistance in the languages actually spoken by those living in the city. Inspired by the example of New York, in 2018 Pascal Smet (then Minister of Mobility and Public Works in the Brussels regional government) suggested that municipal employees wear a badge indicating their language skills in order to enable and facilitate communication in languages other than the official Dutch and French. Health care would also profit from openness to language superdiversity as language barriers tend to be compounded by legal and administrative hurdles with various migrant groups

excluded from anything but the most basic health care due to their legal status, fear of deportation or limited financial means. At present, it is not governments playing the most important role in this but NGOs, churches and networks of voluntary doctors. Education is another domain that can operate as a social infrastructure. Good practices exist, such as the programmes for promoting the enrolment and integration of refugees in universities. Ranging from the assessment of previous educational certificates to language support, specialized training and mentoring schemes, these initiatives go some way towards making education as accessible as possible. One of the most challenging domains is most certainly housing. Cities are both the predominant sites of migrant arrivals and the places with the highest pressures on the housing market. The influx of migrants creates de facto competition between different social groups as the 'newcomers' aggravate already severe problems of housing access. Achieving housing for all requires a profound political change and the pursuit of a mixed policy of expansion of social housing, together with support of related initiatives such as community land trusts and ensuring affordable rental housing on the private market.

Imagining the city as a place that is open and accessible to all might sound utopian but, as we have explained, working towards this utopia is above all a question of starting from a different premise: the politics of presence. Given that we are all migrants here, access to vital city resources needs to be more equally distributed. Making this happen in the current political climate will involve a lot of hard political and civic labour, but it will create a shared responsibility for the future of the city. With 'being from elsewhere' increasingly becoming the norm, it is the only realistic future we have.

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# No One is Illegal. Niemand is illegaal! Personne n'est illegal?

by Ronald Crouzé, Pieter Meurs, Minne Huysmans

We all start our day with our own unique rituals, habits, coffee or tea. We do not talk too much about these habits, but we silently agree that we all have our own particular way of easing ourselves into each new day. From the moment we open our front door and step outside, we connect the intimate and private space of our living space with the public space of the city we live in. We all share the public space, but we do not share the same reality while walking in it. The way we move through the day is not only defined by who we are or want to be, but also by how we are defined by others.

Our front doors are all located in the city of Brussels. By ours, I mean the signatories to this chapter. From different districts we head to our VUB headquarters in south east Ixelles. There are thousands of people simultaneously mingling and engaging in the same new day. It often seems like organised chaos. Day after day: traffic jams of bikes, pedestrians, busses and trams, all heading for their destinations as they briefly cross each other. So much to see, but the three of us often see the same signs as we move through our day: NO ONE IS ILLEGAL. This boldly formulated statement – sometimes in Dutch or French: NIEMAND IS ILLEGAAL, PERSONNE N'EST ILLEGAL – printed on small black and white stickers can be found on many street corners in Brussels, decorating traffic lights, electrical boxes, walls, bikes, pubs, toilet doors and light poles. The 'NO ONE IS ILLEGAL' stickers are small and discreet in the urban landscape, yet the message is so clear and strong it doesn't even use an exclamation mark or full stop to amplify its message. It seems like a statement that does not need an explanation. Or does it?

We'd like to argue it does. The simple message it conveys is the putting aside of mere legal considerations in order to think first and foremost about the human aspects of belonging to a society. We believe Hannah Arendt's conception of citizenship can be very insightful for explaining this statement. She shows us that citizenship is not about legal status, but rather the way in which we act and create together as human beings. According to Arendt, citizenship refers to the possibility of every human being actively participating and shaping society.<sup>1</sup>

Today, access to the social and political world is regulated by a formal, and thus legal conception, of citizenship. This has a long-lasting tradition dating back to the ancient Romans and Greeks. They were the first to reflect on the question of who belongs to a place or community, and therefore who is entitled to civil rights, and who isn't. This is still what citizenship is about today: the differences made between so-called 'original residents' and newcomers, between insiders and outsiders, between those who are or are not allowed to participate and between legal and illegal residents. Such a rhetoric of opposites has, especially over the last decade of increased migration, strongly intensified today's public debate: opinions vary from 'we should defend everyone's human rights' to 'it is not "our" responsibility if they suffer', from 'these people are refugees' to 'they come here to profit from our system', from 'they are a threat to 'our' culture' to 'they enrich our culture', and from 'we should open our borders' to 'Schengen should be reconsidered'. In European political discourse and policy, this intensification translates into the creation of physical borders in Hungary, Croatia and Slovenia, the criminalisation of migrants and humanitarian aid in Italy, the tensions between Turkey and Europe over aid for refugees, or the rigid criteria for inclusion and integration in Flanders, the Netherlands and Denmark.

The sticker (or rather its timely statement) challenges this apparently clear demarcation between legal and illegal, or between insider and outsider, and shows us another dimension of citizenship in at least two ways. First of all, what the sticker 'NIEMAND IS ILLEGAAL' forces us to do is to put aside the legal conditions and also think about the human aspects of citizenship, norms and values. Moving in from outside is tough, becoming an insider even tougher. The question of who can take part and who can't is increasingly answered by an ideal of fitting in, by adhering to a specific set of so-called 'Western' (whatever that means) norms and values. This creates a situation in which the newcomer is both insider and outsider: insider insofar as a newcomer is granted the formal or legal status of residency, and outsider insofar as the newcomer does not adhere to an ideal set of norms and



values, nor to a certain ideal identity and language. Hence one can legally become an insider and have access to rights and services, but may find it hard to belong in a more emotional and culturally meaningful way because of personal experiences of exclusion by the mainstream population and because of cultural differences. Becoming both a legal insider and an insider who truly belongs here seems to be very strictly regulated: visibly by laws, and invisibly by norms and values that are hard to grasp.

Secondly, PERSONNE N'EST ILLÉGAL challenges the idea of citizenship as a legal condition for accessing and participating in the socio-political world. It questions the banality of 'our' legal differentiations of people: 'we' create the rules, 'we' regulate the access and 'we' tell you how one can become a citizen of this land. The sticker's statement shows us the voice of the other, of the outsider. And that voice is important: the perspectives of newcomers on citizenship are rarely asked for in public debates on citizenship. Rather than be passive recipients of a citizenship status, newcomers themselves are able to define citizenship through practices and in relationships with other people and communities.<sup>2</sup> The presence of transmigrants in the Brussels' Maximilian Park is a good example here. As a consequence of this presence, the park was transformed into a space in which people – newcomers and local residents – organise themselves and engage with each other. Although the transmigrants do not enjoy the formal rights to live there, they do take part in shaping that space. Moreover, their presence is in itself a political act. This is precisely the way in which Arendt conceives citizenship: as a space that we create together by our actions and in which every human being may actively participate and shape the socio-political world.

Newcomers help us to understand that citizenship is a dynamic and continuous process in which we all are engaged. They also show us the potential for a redefinition of citizenship. Democracy has always been the result of dialogue, interaction and participation between people and groups with different backgrounds. This implies that what it means to be a citizen is not defined by the state alone. Rather, it is the citizens themselves who define the state. On our daily trip across the city, we cross each other's paths and can be sure that in so doing we are all defining the space we share. It all goes together with our daily habits, goals, rituals, coffee or tea.

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# Ethnic Diversity in Brussels Politics: The Next Level

by Karen Celis<sup>1</sup>

After the May 2019 election, the level of ethnic minority representatives elected to the Brussels Parliament rose from about one fifth to one third. Together with the 44% proportion of women, the ethnic diversification of the Brussels Parliament results in a highly visible ‘push-back’ of the typical politician (white and male) who has historically dominated Belgium’s political institutions, and who is generally overrepresented especially where political power resides. For many, the increase in ethnic minority and women representatives looks like a ‘natural evolution’, a spontaneous synchronisation of the Brussels Parliament with Brussels’ population demographics. It is a recognition of innovative leadership qualities and potential amongst women and ethnic minorities in Brussels. The increase of ‘other’ (read: non-white, non-male) representatives is not, however, all that spontaneous. Politics is all about power, and the rule of thumb here is that those who have power tend to hold onto it. Rather than evolving naturally, diversification is both fought for and resisted.

The power struggle for inclusion and recognition is, from a democratic perspective, well worth the investment of social capital, energy and material resources. The symbolic importance of political diversification is significant. It sends out the message that ethnic minorities in Brussels matter and that later on in life they too can ‘make it’ to the top. Such a message is specifically relevant to the younger generation. The presence of minorities in the Brussels Parliament is an important and visible enactment of their full political citizenship. It also says something about the fairness and justice of the Brussels political system, parties and establishment.

The presence of non-elites, i.e. members of groups other than those who are considered to be the traditional elite, can also engender a deeper democratic transformation. It is expected to establish a tighter connection between political institutions and government, on the one hand, and the political needs, dreams and wishes of diverse populations on the other. Changing cultures and institutions to that end is a slow, laborious and risky



business, which non-elites might well achieve through changing politics from the inside out. Some of the newly elected representatives will stay in politics, and become part of the political elites – some have already achieved this. When included in the party leadership and parliamentary party groups, ethnic minorities may participate in the drafting of the party’s electoral programmes and bills, in negotiating government coalitions, agreements and mandates, and in decision-making on party politics, policies and strategies for future recruitment and selection.

Here again, such an evolution towards a better connection with the diversity of citizens as a result of greater diversity among politicians might well not come about as naturally and spontaneously as one might expect. Not all ethnic minority representatives are willing to represent ‘their communities’. Some of them might consider such an expectation somewhat stigmatizing and may well resist the very idea of having to take up the extra task of representing ‘their group’ due to their socio-demographic characteristics. Others may even reject outright the very idea of their belonging to an ethnic community. Even if ethnic minority politicians are willing to represent their ethnic minority’s issues and interests, they might not find themselves in the position to do so due to a lack of support from their parties and political colleagues, and even due to blunt resistance. In short, while it is possible for the diversification of the content of politics to change, together with its personnel, there are no guarantees.

Those in favour of improving the connection between the political institutions and diverse citizenry should not count on individual representatives alone, and in Brussels they do not have to. The Brussels governmental agreement contains five promising institutional innovations that can be mobilized to further increase ethnic diversity in Brussels’ politics. It supports: (i) additional meetings of the Council of Ministers with civil society to discuss Brussels’ issues and topics; (ii) new forms of citizen participation to examine the future complex challenges that reflect Brussels’ diversity; (iii) initiatives for joint decision-making in the Brussels Parliament such as joint parliamentary committees composed of elected representatives and citizens, and reforms that increase petitions as a more attractive means for citizens to take legislative initiatives; (iv) participative and collaborative budgets covering, among other things, the funding of social cohesion initiatives and city planning; (v) local governments and regional institutions in their reform efforts to enable citizens initiatives and citizen-government collaboration.

These are five key opportunities that can, jointly or in parallel with the numerical strength of the ethnic minority representatives, be mobilized to tighten the connection

between Brussels' diverse citizenry and politics. Brussels' rich and highly diverse civil society can be 'pulled into' a political conversation and co-creation with legislators and members of government to develop policies on ethnic minority issues and interests. It would turn decision-making into a deliberation with the ones concerned that sets out to establish fair and just outcomes for all citizens of Brussels, including the least well-off and marginalized. The increase in ethnic minority representatives and these institutional innovations together generate an unseen window of opportunity for the Brussels Parliament and Government to close the gap between politics and Brussels' diverse citizens. It is also an unseen opportunity for addressing the issue of the drastic decrease in levels of trust and legitimacy that affects the formal institutions of our representative democracies, including those of Brussels. Again, this will not happen by magic. Ethnic minorities – within and beyond the formal institutions – can now seize this opportunity to use the institutional innovations for their benefit. Yet, most importantly, as a result of the five promises of the Brussels governmental agreement, the proper representation of ethnic minorities has now become an obligation falling back onto them. Rather than putting this responsibility onto the ethnic minorities' own shoulders, it is now the institution's formal obligation to bring the diversification of Brussels politics up to the next level.

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1 This essay draws from Celis, K. & Childs, S. (2020). *Feminist Democratic Representation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

# Empowering Cities to Make Immigrant Integration Happen

by Deniz Ay

Immigration is largely an urban phenomenon. Although the popular representation of international immigrants often corresponds to images from camp-settings, about 60% percent of the refugees live in cities worldwide.<sup>1</sup> One in every five international migrants lives in one of just 20 global cities, and for 18 of these cities, international migrants represent around 20% of their total population.<sup>2</sup> Immigrants arriving in large numbers, often in waves, is no longer unusual, yet global instability is growing due to several push factors ranging from armed conflicts to the climate crisis. If cities act as a node for the vast majority of immigrants, the quest for integration is inherently local and it starts inside cities.<sup>3</sup> The question is: what role can cities play in reversing the narrative that turns an immigration background into a source of structural inequality? Answers to this question could help build up resilient societies that embrace diversity.

The majority of international migrants ending up in cities have been following either family members and community networks established by earlier migratory waves, or their dreams of better access to the social and economic opportunities associated with cities. Generations of immigrant communities have established ethnic enclaves in every cosmopolitan city. These established networks provide the social infrastructure and the immediate support that newcomers need to initiate the long process of integration. Receiving communities may also develop emergency responses, as they did for the massive influx of refugees to Western Europe in 2015. These self-organized voluntary measures helped to mitigate the crisis by addressing the short-term primary needs of newcomers such as food and shelter. But these ad-hoc community responses often fade away once the crisis has peaked.

When the short-term emergency response ends, immigrant integration emerges as a lingering challenge for cities. Access to decent housing, education and language training, and also to employment opportunities, are the most pressing challenges for integration. We can think of integration as the process of minimizing the social distance

between newcomers and established residents, and eliminating the differences in access to economic and political opportunities. Integration has three practical components: social, economic and political. Social integration is the mutual process of social bonding between the immigrant and the receiving communities. Social integration involves bilateral dialogue, understanding and respect, which make it a two-way process that involves both the newcomers and their hosts. Economic integration includes the incorporation of newcomers into the economic system, whether as employers or employees, thereby contributing to the wealth shared by the whole society, including the newcomers and the established inhabitants. Finally, political integration opens the door for immigrants to gain access to representation and participation in the political system.

In a real democracy, neither the place of birth nor the origin of a jobseeker's parents should be used to determine that applicant's employability, access to basic services, or their means of political participation and representation. These three aspects of immigrant integration are therefore also key determinants of a democratic city, where all residents have equal access to jobs, education, and basic services. With this formula we can move beyond the limited and technical interpretation of "immigrant integration" towards a more inclusive and practical approach that aims to minimize the social, economic and political barriers for new residents. As a natural consequence of this broader understanding of integration, any development towards better integration strategies would benefit all the denizens of a city, not just its immigrants. For instance, all newcomers with access to language and professional training for entering the labour market will soon start paying taxes to contribute to the city. Entrepreneurial immigrants create jobs and help to revitalize local economies and decaying neighborhoods, often by starting small businesses. To ensure the benefits of refugees and immigrants to their receiving communities, many cities in the USA have adopted comprehensive welcoming programmes and strategic plans with bipartisan support in order to achieve successful social, economic and political integration. These integration policies include providing access to education programmes for children and adults, developing capacity in immigrant and refugee leaders, and facilitating community building among receiving communities and the newcomers.

The city is organized on a scale that is efficient and effective to make integration happen. It is easier to develop integration policies addressing the specific local context on the scale of a city than to do the same at national level, its mainstream alternative. Despite the relevance of housing access to achieving social and economic integration, national housing policies fail to address the particular needs of newcomers. Also, cities differ

significantly in terms of their local housing markets or capacities to provide decent accommodation to these newcomers. Therefore national housing policies essentially have only limited capacity to address the immigrants' housing problems on the ground. Cities are able to address affordable and accessible housing by utilizing the knowledge of market conditions and developing targeted solutions as local as neighbourhood level. For instance, community housing is a tool used in several cities in Canada and Australia as a part of local affordable housing policies targeting immigrants. Policy innovations to combine housing and immigrant integration also include self-building housing projects implemented in Italy.<sup>4</sup>

Immediate access to language training, which is essential for all aspects of integration, is also easier to provide at city level. A successful example of such an initiative is run by "Hispi" in Düsseldorf, Germany. As a local non-governmental organization, Hispi<sup>5</sup> recruits volunteers to assist immigrants in language acquisition since 2015. It is supported with donations from individuals and cooperatives, also partnerships with local businesses and the local government. Learning the language through direct social interaction with peers also initiates the building of a social network between the immigrants and newcomers. Cities have the flexibility to mobilize local capacities and coordinate volunteers to start the language training quickly rather than waiting for the state bureaucracy to provide access and allocate resources.

Monitoring and evaluating the integration policies are more feasible at city level because it is easier to collect data and feedback on policy performance at local level than at national level. This will improve capability to develop better strategies and local partnerships between the city governments and other local institutions such as universities, community-based organizations and non-governmental organizations focusing on immigration. A city-level agenda for integration is in stark contrast to the sluggish centralized policies guided by the state bureaucracy. National governments' integration policies start by classifying immigrants according to their legal status: asylum seekers, refugees, illegal immigrants, aliens, etc. A decentralized city-based approach to integration enables a departure from legal boundaries to what services people are entitled, and embraces a needs-based approach to supporting those in need.

Empowering cities to activate their promising potential to make immigrant integration happen will benefit their entire populations. These mechanisms may include transfers of financial and administrative powers from national/federal governments to the local level and distribute political and technical support via coalitions/platforms

between the cities themselves, namely the city networks. The potential of cities to speed up immigrant integration is already mobilized through the activities of various city networks. City networks operate under transnational institutions like the Intercultural Cities (ICC) programme of the Council of Europe, as a collective effort by several city governments, like Eurocities, and non-governmental organizations like Welcoming America in the USA. These city networks aim to empower cities through facilitating knowledge exchanges on integration practice and professional community-building for practitioners. One tangible outcome of these networks is the mobilization of innovative and progressive strategies for integration. These developments help city governments to think and act in partnership with their civil society, public and private sectors, going beyond their national governments' political and legislative boundaries. As progressive gestures these city networks also have the potential to affect their national/federal governments' policy frameworks, either by allowing greater autonomy to local governments to form immigration policy or by providing administrative support for implementing bottom-up integration strategies.

City networks also have symbolic functions such as legitimizing local integration efforts and positioning cities as welcoming places for immigrants.<sup>6</sup> Activities of these city networks are funded through grants from various sources, including governments, supranational organizations, non-governmental organizations and corporate actors. Empowering these networks is a simple step towards helping cities to work together to create cooperation in order to develop and spread innovative local integration strategies. Learning and knowledge exchanges will also foster collaborations and solidarity between cities, which can trigger mechanisms reaching beyond their national boundaries to start building a global coalition for immigrant integration.

Empowering cities to lead the immigrant integration programmes will benefit the whole of society because successful city-level programmes can create tangible social, economic and political benefits for all. It is also possible to increase the role of cities in integration if the receiving communities demand and provide support to their cities' commitment to effective integration strategies. This political stance can become more widespread with the policymakers' and civil society's commitment to inform the general public about the "public benefits" of well-thought-out integration strategies. Often the barrier is not the lack of financial resources but rather the lack of popular support and political demand from those with socioeconomic privileges who block diversity policies that benefit both the established residents and the newcomers. In a city, political and practical mobilization is inherently easier compared to the national scale, given the closer proximity of the



official governing bodies to their electorates. This city-level approach to immigrant integration ultimately challenges the conventional idea of citizenship as membership of a nation. And with this political opening, a new progressive interpretation of citizenship, i.e. ‘*cityzenship*’, based on inhabitation and informed by human rights emerges as a more inclusive alternative that matches the contemporary global political conditions and the growing mobility of people.<sup>7</sup>

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- 1 Muggah, R., & Abdenur, A. (2018). *Refugees and the City: The Twenty-First-Century Front Line*. Waterloo, ON, Canada: Centre for International Governance Innovation.
  - 2 IOM (2015). World Migration Report. Migrants and cities: New partnerships to manage mobility. Geneva, Switzerland: IOM. [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/wmr2015\\_en.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/wmr2015_en.pdf)
  - 3 De Graauw, E., & Vermeulen, F. (2016). Cities and the politics of immigrant integration: a comparison of Berlin, Amsterdam, New York City, and San Francisco. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 42(6): 989-1012.
  - 4 Semprebon, M., & Haddock, V. S. (2016). Innovative housing practices involving immigrants: the case of self-building in Italy. *Journal of Housing*, 31(3): 439-455.
  - 5 Hispi das Lernhaus: <https://www.hispi.de/ueber-hispi/>
  - 6 Caponio, T. (2019). City Networks and the Multilevel governance of migration. Policy discourses and actions. Policy Discourses and Actions (January 2019). *Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies Research Paper No. RSCAS*, 8.
  - 7 Oomen, B. (2019). *Cities of refuge: Rights, culture and the creation of cosmopolitan citizenship*.

# Tolerance Towards LGBT Can Be Developed from within Religions

by Filip Van Droogenbroeck, Bram Spruyt, Jessy Siongers

Belgium is often considered a liberal country when compared with other European countries when it comes to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) issues.

Same-sex couples gained the right in Belgium to marry or register in civil union in 2003, and the right to adopt children in 2006. Public support for granting the right to same-sex marriage is higher in Belgium than the EU average. Since 2012, criminal assaults have met severer penalties when discrimination is proven to be a motivating element. Moreover, combatting negative attitudes towards homosexuals is included in the declared goals of secondary education.

All this, however, does not preclude that, even in Belgium, LGBTs continue to be faced with prejudice, hatred and violence. The latter is thought to be one of the key elements that contribute to the higher prevalence of school bullying, substance abuse, suicidal thoughts and/or problematic behaviour among LGBT youth. In this regard, religion seems to play an important role, even though major religious traditions all have a message of universal compassion and tolerance, research has revealed a higher prevalence of prejudice against minority groups (racial, ethnic and sexual) among people of faith in comparison to non-religious people.

Classic modernization and secularization theory predicted that religiosity would soon become something of the past but it is clear that migration processes created a society where religion will continue to play an important role. Drawing upon our own empirical research, we aim to show how tolerance can be developed from within religions and that such a strategy does not require the abolition of the religious identity in order to be compatible with secular values such as LGBT rights.

Although Belgium is historically a Catholic country, church attendance has dropped sharply since the sixties. That pattern applies to most countries in Western Europe.

However, Catholic beliefs still exert an important influence on political values and cultural conservatism. In addition, a growing proportion of the Belgian population is of Moroccan or Turkish origin who generally strongly support the Islamic faith. A liberal attitude towards LGBT rights creates a tension with adherents of conservative interpretations of Abrahamic religions (including Christianity and Islam), which encourages a group norm on heteronormativity that proscribes homosexuality. Therefore, it will become crucial to find ways to promote tolerant and respectful attitudes towards LGBTs (and also other minority groups) among religious people in a way that does not stigmatize or misrecognize religious convictions.

This clear paradox between the message of universal compassion inherent in all religions and the (on average) higher prevalence of anti-gay sentiment among religious people, highlights the complexity of the relationship between religion and prejudice towards homosexuals. To understand this paradox, it is worth examining *how* religion is used in academic research.

Whether you measure religion from the aspect of people's religious affiliation (eg. Christian or Muslim), religiosity (eg. subjective importance of religion), or religious practices (frequency of attendance at religious services), there emerges a clear positive relationship with anti-gay prejudice, regardless of the religious denomination. Early on, however, it was realised that this approach oversimplifies the quantification of religiosity as it cannot reflect all the different ways in which religion is experienced. In this context, Batson, Schoenrade and Ventis proposed the existence of a type of religious orientation which they called *quest orientation*, which is theoretically associated with tolerance.<sup>1</sup> The concept of *quest orientation* is designed to be more in-tune with the idea of having a mature religion incorporating a critical, open-ended approach to existential questions. Having a religious quest orientation involves a willingness to entertain doubts, to be self-critical and to confront complex problems, such as ethical responsibility, without reducing their complexity.

In our research, we investigated the relationship between religious identity, self-rated religiosity, religious quest orientation, authoritarianism and negative attitudes towards homosexuals among 2834 Christian and Muslim young people aged 14-23 in Flanders.<sup>2</sup> Our comparison of the relationships between different aspects of religiosity for two different religious faiths allowed us to gain a better understanding of the relationship between religiosity and prejudice against homosexuals. We found that young Muslims

reported more prejudice against homosexuality than young Christians, even though the factors that presuppose prejudice among Christians – gender, low educational tracks, high self-rated religiosity, authoritarianism and quest orientation – are equally found among Muslims. Of all the religious indicators *only* a religious quest orientation was found to lead to less anti-gay sentiment in both religious groups.

Our findings have important implications for contemporary societies. According to classic secularisation thinking, religion will soon lose its importance and its meaning for the public and political debate due to advancing modernisation. In his paper “Religion in the Public Sphere”, Habermas states that supporters of the secularist view are convinced “that in the long run, religious views will inevitably melt under the sun of scientific criticism and that religious communities will not be able to withstand the pressures of some unstoppable cultural and social modernisation”.<sup>3</sup>

Adherents of the secularisation thesis anticipate that Muslim minorities in European countries will undergo the same secularisation processes and will eventually find themselves absorbed in the secular way of life. This line of reasoning suffers from two major problems: firstly, it denies the fact that the secularisation process is mainly a West European phenomenon, therefore exceptional in the rest of the world. In the USA, for example, there is a lower degree of secularisation even though the same modernisation tendencies exist. In countries such as Morocco and Turkey, increasing modernisation does not appear to decrease religiosity. In addition, research in the Netherlands has shown that second generation Muslims with higher levels of education do not report a lower degree of self-rated religiosity or religious practice than second-generation Muslims with lower education levels. In other words, it is naïve to assert that religion will disappear with increasing modernisation. Religion is here to stay.

Neither does this line of thinking respect the identity of the religious individual. Indeed, from the perspective of secularisation, religious individuals are expected to become secular, abandoning their prior religious convictions as the latter are considered to be incompatible with secularist ideals. Furthermore, the lack of respect is often shown towards minority groups for whom religion is very important. Belonging to a religious community gives immigrants refuge, respect and access to the resources they need for dealing with post-immigration problems.

The key question, then, remains how Western societies, nowadays incorporating a growing population of young Muslims, are able to promote a tolerant and respectful attitude towards homosexuals in a way that neither stigmatises nor misrecognises religious convictions.

According to Habermas, there is a need for a post-secular perspective that accepts that religious communities will not disappear as a result of modernisation. In a post-secular world, secularist and religious traditions will need to tolerate and take each other seriously. This post-secular perspective examines how religious traditions can be respected without sacrificing the accomplishments of secularisation. This requires a shared and complementary learning process. On the secular side, it is necessary to acquire a post-metaphysical thinking which refrains from issuing both ontological statements and overweening presumptions of scientific knowledge (for instance, “There is no life after death”). Such an attitude acknowledges the relativity of the metaphysical assumptions of naturalists.<sup>4</sup> As long as secularists stick to their convictions that religious traditions are archaic and anachronistic remnants of pre-modern societies characterised by cruelty and irrationality, there is no space for mutual understanding. On the religious side, Habermas holds there is a need to develop reflexive religion. This does not mean that religious individuals need to negate their religious beliefs, but rather to recognise that freedom of religion exists. They should accept that there is room for reasonable and courteous debate on religious beliefs/philosophies of life.

All too often, previous discussions have remained on a philosophical plane that lacks a concrete anchor for them to work in practice. Religious quest orientation may prove to be the necessary missing link. Our research indicates that a religious quest orientation is positively related to the acceptance of homosexuality by *both* Christian and Muslim youth, even after taking into account self-reported religiosity, authoritarianism and other mediating factors. Young people with a religious quest orientation seem to be more in-tune with the universal compassionate message of their religious traditions, which can mitigate the influence of the objections raised by the more conservative interpretations of their religion with regard to homosexuality. A religious quest orientation gives hope for the development of tolerance from within the religion which does not require the abolition of the religious identity in order to be compatible with secular values. Since it can apply to both Muslim and Christian youth, it opens up hope for the future. Hence ways must be found for cultivating a religious quest orientation among religious young people, and probably also among agnostics as well. Our findings illustrate that

intolerance toward gays/lesbians is not necessarily related to being religious *per se* but with how religion is experienced.

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- 1 Batson, C. D., Schoenrade, P., & Ventis, W. L. (1993). *Religion and the individual: A social-psychological perspective*. New York: Oxford University Press.
  - 2 Van Droogenbroeck, F., Spruyt, B., Siongers, J., & Keppens, G. (2016). Religious Quest Orientation and Anti-Gay Sentiment: Nuancing the Relationship Between Religiosity and Negative Attitudes Toward Homosexuality Among Young Muslims and Christians in Flanders. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 55(4): 787-799.
  - 3 Habermas, J. (2006). Religion in the Public Sphere. *European Journal of Philosophy*, 14(1): 1-25.
  - 4 For example, Habermas states that the naturalist background of secularism is still the object of an ongoing and open-ended philosophical debate. The radical form of naturalism reduces the whole of reality to a physical reality and devalues all categories of statements that cannot be reduced to controlled observations, nomological propositions or causal explanations.



# Europe Needs to Change its Understanding of Secularism to Accommodate Diversity

by Shilpi Pandey and Stefaan Smis

In various European states, we have recently witnessed how heated debates about the wearing or banning of the *burqa* (full-face veil) or *hijab* (headscarf) have divided society. Often the discussion was fueled by opposing views on how to interpret the freedom of religion that has been recognized by various human rights instruments including the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention on Human Rights). The debate has outstripped socio-political circles and is now continued in legal arenas before national courts and tribunals. Even the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has in various cases been called to give its opinion on the matter. In a series of landmark judgments, the Strasbourg Court has ruled that banning the hijab or burqa in public spaces does not violate the freedom of religion.<sup>1</sup> While freedom of religion is an essential human right, it is not framed as an absolute right under Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights. It is therefore subject to certain limitations as long as they are prescribed by law and deemed necessary in a democratic society. The ECHR has accepted the ban on the *burqa or hijab* as valid in the spirit of 'living together' in a democratic secular society. Hence it is evident that a specific understanding of secularism in modern European societies has become the guiding principle for defining the place of religion and religious identities. This raises the question, whether this version of secularism is capable of accommodating diversity in a more diverse Europe.

It is widely accepted that the adoption of secularism in Europe was successful in diffusing tension between Catholics and Protestants and was later able to also accommodate people from Christian faith and those who had distanced themselves from these churches or religions. However, in our current European societies that are increasingly characterized by new forms of diversity based on certain religions requiring non-Christian believers

to act according to certain prescripts in all situations and places, the stance of European secularism is under scrutiny. One can, therefore, ask whether it still serves as the cement that allows for the accommodation of diversity or whether, on the contrary, it has become a barrier, putting obstacles in the path of our ambitions to form a diverse society where everyone feels at home. Is there today a need to rethink secularism? We are not pleading for the rejection of secularism but rather defending the view that there is a need to reflect on what kind of diversity we are willing to espouse in Europe. This kind of diversity will dictate whether and/or how secularism needs to be reinterpreted. We strongly believe there is a need to make secularism more neutral so that it may also accommodate the new forms of diversity in Europe.

The origin of secularism in Europe can be traced back to the times when Protestantism started to pose a challenge to Catholicism. One could argue that the concept was invented by the Protestant movement to reduce the power of the Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup> By considering religion as a strictly personal matter for the individual and by removing the influence of the Catholic Church on the state through clear segregation between church and state, the Protestant movements created an instrument limiting the influence of the Catholic Church in public affairs and, in so doing, managed to create a space for their own influence. This specifically historical understanding of secularism has been an important factor in defining the nature of European societies.<sup>3</sup> Over the years, the church-state divide has also become one of the main features defining the limits of religious freedoms in many European states. While secularism requires states to be non-religious and neutral in their religious identity, the same requirement has also been extended to the practice of religion by individuals in the sense that religion has become confined to the private sphere. In other words, through the process of secularization, religion has become 'domesticated' and reduced to an exclusively private affair to be practiced either in the home or in specially built places of worship. This specific nature of the religious construction of secularism supports a single perspective on how religion should be present in a society while obliging all religions to remain within the private sphere.

Interestingly, a closer look at the history of secularism clearly shows that secularism itself is, in reality, a non-neutral concept and has a specific religious and historical understanding in Europe. While this stance for 'neutrality' would have been sufficient for a largely homogenous European society, a similar stance for religious neutrality presents serious challenges to the governance and protection of the increasingly diverse and multicultural population of today's Europe. Due to this specific understanding, largely suited to a homogenous Christian society, secularism faces several challenges

when applied to modern European multicultural and pluralistic societies. That understanding of secularism is in itself unable to respect or nurture diversity because it results in further isolation and exclusion of certain minorities from the public sphere. Several European societies have, however, moved from being largely homogenous to being extensively heterogeneous and multicultural. While the majority population does have a religiously 'neutral' identity in the European context, it nevertheless presents a challenge for certain (new) minorities whose religion imposes on them a way of life governed by certain prescripts – some of them being visually emblematic – irrespective of the private-public divide. For example, growing a beard and wearing a turban are essential for men practising Sikhism. Other religions such as Islam, Buddhism or Judaism require their followers to grow or shave their hair, to wear certain items or apparel, to be selective in what they eat or drink, to fast during a certain period of the year, to pray at certain moments of the day or to behave according to certain standards. You cannot be a follower of these religions if you do not obey these rules. However, to fit within the secular identity of our European societies all religious identities must limit themselves to the private sphere. Secularism and its imposed 'neutralities', therefore, oblige such minority religions to adopt a neutral stance in public spheres even though their religion requires them to live according to religious rules irrespective of their situation. This forces them to adhere to one identity set over another, yet doing this compromises their freedom of religion. As there is only one unique manner in which a state can identify itself as a secular state, it excludes religion to an extent where the latter remains a purely isolated private affair. The consequence is that many European democracies have been pursuing strategies of cultural assimilation through policies of harmonization of 'other' identities (not belonging to the secular traditions) with the notion of European identity.

In the light of the increasingly multicultural nature of European societies, these assimilation strategies will constantly present new challenges based on claims of violations of freedom of religion. Therefore this is an important issue which needs careful deliberation and a positive discourse on the meaning of secularism in multicultural European societies. It is both relevant and necessary to find methods of accommodating wide religious and cultural diversity, because our increasingly diverse societies await solutions that are able to handle diversity without compromising freedom of religion.

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- 1 The three main judgments in this regard have been *SAS v France* (App. no. 43835/11), *Belkacemi and Oussar v Belgium* (App. no. 37798/13) and *Dakir v Belgium* (App. No. 37798/13).
  - 2 See De Roover, J. (2015). *Europe, India, and the limits of secularism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 60-63.
  - 3 Casanova, J. (2006). Rethinking Secularization: A Global Comparative Perspective. *The Hedgehog Review* 8(1/2): 7.

**RACISM,  
IDENTITY &  
BELONGING**



# Brussels is Tarred with Racism

by **Géraldine André, Safaa Charafi, Laura Westerveen and Dounia Bourabain**

Hosting the European Institutions, Brussels is often considered the capital of the European Union. With almost 180 nationalities and 100 languages spoken, Brussels is also one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world. After Dubai, the EU capital has the highest percentage of residents born outside the country. According to the World Migration Report of the International Organization for Migration, more than 62% of the residents of Brussels are foreign-born, originating mainly from North Africa and Turkey. Among Belgian cities, Brussels is the most diverse city, closely followed by the city of Antwerp. Over the past one and a half centuries, the demographics of the city have been considerably shaped by migration flows, resulting in a high degree of (among others) ethnic, racial, linguistic, cultural, social and religious diversity. Undeniably, Brussels is characterized by a highly mobile and international population, which further accentuates the challenges of creating an equal and just society with respect to its ethnic minorities.

Although Brussels is characterized by a greatly diverse population, data on the discrimination of people with a migration background are abundant. They show that inhabitants with a migration background do not benefit from the same opportunities and chances as people of Belgian origin. Is this enough to consider Brussels a racist city? When we talk about racism, the first thing that comes to mind is the visible and deliberate behaviour of individuals discriminating against others because of their skin colour, their religion, their origins, and so on. But individuals are not the only ones who produce or enact racist behaviours. There are also more implicit and hidden kinds of racism, such as the one produced by institutional bodies. Indeed, organizations and institutions of a country or a city can be structured in such a way that they (re)produce this discrimination against minorities. In the case of Brussels, ethnic minorities are confronted with systemic discrimination that affects their neighbourhood, their choice of streams and educational routes and their possibilities to enroll in a good school. Ultimately, the extent of such institutional racism has a major impact on the career pathways of minority students and thus on their future living standards. Actually, their range of possibilities is constrained by the way in which the city is structured and the school system and labour



markets organized. By looking at urban segregation and the structure of the education system and labour market in Brussels, it becomes clear that Brussels, under its veil of superdiversity, is tarred with racism.

Even though communes and neighbourhoods are not homogeneous and the dynamics of urban segregation are not static, Brussels is a highly polarized city. The peripheries of the capital are composed of the most socio-economically favoured and most European neighbourhoods. The central and north-western districts of Brussels are where non-Europeans and people with a migration background are concentrated. These districts also accumulate different difficulties and disadvantages: low incomes, insecurity in the job market and in individual households. In Brussels, urban segregation particularly affects the youngest generation: children and young people (0-19 years) are strongly represented in disadvantaged neighborhoods. There is a significant imbalance between the communes in terms of available school places: socio-economically deprived areas are the least equipped with school infrastructures. Organized in this way, the city distributes public goods and services in an unequal way amongst its inhabitants and from their youngest age!

The Belgian system of education (organized by the different language communities, each having their own schools in Brussels) is especially unequal. Educational inequalities are mainly the result of a school system organized as a quasi-market, based on the free school choice by families and public funding according to the number of pupils enrolled in the school. Consequently, schools are in competition and develop strategies to attract pupils according to different characteristics (academic, demographic, etc.). This organization results in a strong differentiation between 'good schools' and 'bad schools' and an unequal distribution of pupils. In the competition between schools, pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged families and pupils with a migration background are the ones who often end up in more disadvantaged schools. If one takes into account the nationality of the pupils, foreign students are in the least favourable schools. Among the foreign students, students from Turkey, Ex-Yugoslavia and Eastern European countries are in the least advantaged schools. Students from the Congo, Ex-URSS and Morocco occupy intermediate positions, but are still in less advantaged schools. As there are many inhabitants in Brussels, the effects of the school market are magnified. In primary education, pupils living in the most European neighbourhoods are also those who attend the most European schools. In neighbourhoods that are relatively less European, the enrolment in 'good schools' is more observed among Belgian and European families than among non-European families.

The educational field in Belgium is also characterized by an early school guidance system between different tracks, ranging from the most academic tracks (general tracks) to the least advantaged school tracks (vocational tracks). Stereotypes about students with a migration background affect their school orientation and educational pathway. In Brussels, there is an overrepresentation of pupils with a migration background in the least advantaged tracks of secondary education. For example, 80% of the parents of pupils in technical and vocational education are born abroad, whereas this is the case for only 40% of the mothers and fathers of students in the general track.

The systemic discrimination encountered by people with a migration background does not stop at the end of their schooling. Quite the opposite: since the end of the 1990s, research has highlighted the systematic difficulties that jobseekers with a foreign origin face on the Brussels job market. People with a migration background have a harder time finding a job compared to jobseekers of Belgian or European origin. Yet discrimination in the Brussels job market does not affect all jobseekers with a migration background equally. People with a non-European origin are overrepresented among the unemployed population. By contrast, people of European (but non-Belgian) origin are much less likely to be part of this unemployed population. The overrepresentation in unemployment concerns mostly people of Sub-Saharan, North African and Turkish origins. The overrepresentation of people of non-European origin in unemployment can be observed among young jobseekers as well, albeit to a lesser extent. Nevertheless, the unemployment rate among young people of non-European origin remains high, especially among young people of North African and Turkish origin. This issue is also affected by gender, since women of African, Maghrebi, and Turkish origins are more likely to be unemployed than their male counterparts. In addition to the gaps in employment rate, people with a migration background are overrepresented in low-paid, temporary and part-time jobs. They are also more likely to be overqualified for the work that they do and earn substantially less than people of Belgian origin.

While Brussels' diverse population has clearly left its mark on the city, ethnic minorities are thus still confronted with systemic discrimination in the European capital. This institutional racism manifests itself in various forms of structural exclusion in, for example, the educational or professional context. One of the key issues for Brussels is how to secure more equality between its diverse inhabitants, especially in education, the job market and the housing market. Recognizing the existence of institutional forms of racism within Brussels institutions and organizations is an important first step towards tackling this issue. As the super-diverse capital of Europe, Brussels is in a unique position

to take up the fight against racial discrimination and work towards more equality for all its inhabitants.

Brussels, it is time to step up your game in the fight against systemic discrimination!

# The Emancipation of Animals Will Not Be Built on Racism

by Mariska Jung

The practice of ritual slaughter of animals according to Jewish and Islamic rites has been at the centre of many fierce public and political debates in Belgium in recent years. Consequently, the regional governments of Flanders and Wallonia implemented a law banning ritual slaughter without prior stunning. The law came into full effect in both regions in January and September 2019 respectively. The Brussels Capital Region is still enmeshed in discussions on a possible restriction of the practice. In this contribution I contend that the politicization of ritual slaughter does not occur in a political vacuum. Instead, the wider backdrop of the European Muslim Question should be taken into account if one wants to understand why ritual slaughter should be *currently* such a hot topic. This means moving the current political debate beyond its presentation as a one-dimensional tension between animal welfare versus religious freedom.

In his book 'Recalling the Caliphate: Decolonization and World Order' Salman Sayyid writes: *'The interrogation of Islam has become one of the most pressing questions of our time. The Muslim Question (...) refers to a series of interrogations and speculations in which Islam and/or Muslims exist as a difficulty that needs to be addressed. Thus, the Muslim Question is a mode of enquiry that opens a space for interventions: cultural, governmental and epistemological.'*<sup>1</sup> Since the turn of the millennium, and like many European countries, Belgium has in its own way posed the Muslim Question. In this country, the visibility of mosques and Islamic clothing have become the vehicles through which this question is most often expressed. In 2010 Belgium was the first European country to have passed a bill in the Federal Parliament that prohibited the wearing in *all* public spaces of face-covering clothing. Such a ban mostly affects Muslim women wearing a face veil. Despite the fact that the bill was never implemented due to the premature dissolution of the parliament, it has had a significant impact on the framing of the Muslim Question. For example, the various proposals leading up to this bill were drafted in a context of post 9/11 debates on Islam, terrorism, 'failed' multiculturalism and rising right-wing Flemish nationalism. This resulted in the implementation of a partial ban on face-covering clothing a year later.

Next to face-veiling, Belgian politicians and local administrators have restricted Muslim women's ability to wear a headscarf in a variety of public spaces, such as in the workplace, on the labour market and in schools. The headscarf has captured much of the political and public attention in public debates on Muslims during the past two decades. Many instances were highly mediatized, such as the election of the first veiled woman in the Brussels Parliament in 2009. The salient political and media debates on issues pertaining to Islam or Muslims have led to the development of a climate in which anything Islamic is at risk of being met with apprehension or suspicion from the start. The ways in which Belgium addresses Islam has led the country to represent Islam first and foremost, in Sayyid's words, as 'a difficulty that needs to be addressed'.

The societal positioning of Islam as something inherently suspicious may contribute to the racialization of Muslims in Belgium. However, the position that Islamophobia is a form of racism is generally met with severe criticism. The argument against understanding Islamophobia as racism usually goes as follows: 'Islam is a religion and not a race so Muslims cannot be experiencing racism. At most, they may be confronted with religion-based discrimination. Furthermore, the days when physical characteristics such as skin colour or the size of one's head were taken as indicative for one's racial inferiority are far behind us. Such biological racism no longer holds, thus racism is no longer a problem in Western countries.' Renowned critical race scholar David T. Goldberg calls this idea of having moved beyond racism the 'politics of post-race'. In a post-racial political context, racism is narrowly defined as biological racism and it is claimed that such racism is no longer an organizing principle of today's societies. Like many other scholars, Goldberg takes issue with the claim of having overcome racism. Race has never been solely about physical characteristics. Interpretations of the physical characteristics of groups of people have always been intertwined with negative ideas about their culture, customs, practices, religion, language and perceptions of gender, as is famously shown by Ann Stoler in her work on the colonial Dutch East Indies. Establishing a racial hierarchy and classifying groups of people accordingly has thus always been connected to interpretations of their religious or other spiritual systems. European colonizers racially classified the 'new' communities they encountered. This classification emerged on the basis of the knowledge of the European settlers instead of the knowledge of the communities themselves. This means that 'others' were being categorized according to European standards with Europeanness at the top of such a hierarchy. In other words, race and religion are intimately connected, and racism against Muslims cannot be *a priori* dismissed because 'Islam is not a race'. What needs to be further studied, then, is how exactly does racialization of Muslims occur in contemporary Belgium. When, how and

by whom are Muslims being collectivized, essentialized and represented as inferior to Western and Belgian standards?

The politicization of ritual slaughter is not new. Animal ethics have historically functioned in the establishment of racial hierarchies and oppression. For example, the historical studies of legal scholar Maneesha Deckha reveal that the British Empire sought to ‘civilize’ its colonized peoples through the establishment of various policies, including those designed to stop and prevent cruelty towards animals in the colonies. Deckha reminds us that while the colonized peoples were considered to be in need of ‘rehabilitation’, the British themselves did not think of their own animal practices such as meat consumption or hunting as corroding their humanity. In other words, what constitutes as ‘cruelty towards animals’ was defined with a pro-British bias. The colonized peoples were measured against this standard and on the basis thereof were put into a box of the racial classification system. In this system, being equal to or surpassing the box of white Christian British people was never possible. Presenting ritual slaughter as a problem and depicting it as an extremely cruel and bloody practice was also part of the Nazi propaganda in the 1930s and 1940s. I thus argue that these past realities warrant at the very minimum a careful and conscious reflection on the ways in which the politicization of ritual slaughter today figures in the wider political climate and the articulation of the Muslim Question. It remains to be studied in what exact ways debates on ritual slaughter function in the racialization of Muslims in Belgium today.<sup>2</sup>

As a complicated matter that involves many different political ideologies, ethics and historically grown power relations, the issue of ritual slaughter is not easily ‘solved’. What is needed is sensitivity to the Belgian social and political context in which this practice becomes politicized as well as to the historical background from which discussions on the matter evolve. This implies that the debate on ritual slaughter cannot be reduced to a straightforward opposition between religious freedom and animal welfare. It is much more complex. When the debate is simplified and the topic isolated from its historical and socio-political context, we run the risk that a progressive cause such as animal welfare turns into a vehicle for racism and oppression. On the contrary, in the interest of collective liberation and justice, I maintain that the emancipation of animals should not be built on racism.<sup>3</sup>

1 Sayyid, S. (2014). *Recalling the Caliphate. Decolonisation and World Order*. London: Hurst & Company, p. 3.

2 See: Jung, M. *Animals, race and religion in post-racial Europe*, PhD in progress.

3 The wording of this stance is loosely based on the acclaimed poem and song by Gil Scott-Heron titled ‘The Revolution Will Not Be Televised’. This phrase became an important slogan for the Black Power movement in the 1960s of the USA.



# Anti-Gypsyism: When a ‘Specific’ Form of Racism is Considered ‘Reasonable’

by Serena D’Agostino

‘This is *their way of life*, and they’re not looking for help from anyone. We can offer *them* all sorts of assistance, but *we* can’t force *them* to take it.’<sup>1</sup> This is a statement made by Alain Kestemont, alderman for prevention and urban safety of the municipality of Anderlecht in Brussels. He was commenting on the recent municipal decisions to clear up some so-called ‘Roma camps’ due to the precarious and unhygienic conditions of the sites. Kestemont belongs to a Belgian political party (DéFI), which describes itself as ‘the party of social liberalism’ that embraces ‘progressive values’.<sup>2</sup>

Kestemont’s declaration could be framed as one of the many examples of widespread political discourses that contribute to fostering anti-Gypsyism. Anti-Gypsyism is a complex phenomenon that exists all around the world. It concerns the historically rooted anti-Roma sentiment that translates into violent acts of discrimination against Roma people and their marginalization. Like any other kind of racism, anti-Gypsyism builds on long-established forms of oppression carried out and maintained by the most powerful and privileged classes. It manifests itself in many ways and at different political and societal levels.

Anti-Gypsyism is generally defined as a ‘specific’ form of racism. The term specific is nonetheless often misconstrued or abused. Politicians, the media, policymakers, as well as ordinary citizens use it to define the Roma as people with ‘specific’ culture and ‘specific’ behaviours – where ‘specific’ has a typically negative connotation. Over the centuries, this attitude has contributed to the reinforcement and diffusion of Roma stereotypes and anti-Roma rhetoric. The latter builds on the idea that the Roma’s way of life and culture, as well as their so-called inclination to act badly and to cause inconvenience, rightfully entitles us – the non-Roma – to act against them – the Roma

– and/or to treat them differently. Thus it is not ‘we’ who marginalize them, but ‘they’ who violate our rights and fail in their duties. This ‘no-one-to-blame-but-oneself’ logic has determined what Huub van Baar somewhat provocatively frames as ‘reasonable anti-Gypsyism’<sup>3</sup>: given the misbehaviours of the Roma, we are reasonably allowed to reprimand and exclude them.

‘Reasonable anti-Gypsyism’ reveals itself as considering and treating the Roma as ‘the other’ with primitive cultural practices, weird manners, low intelligence and/or criminal propensity. It is rooted in mainstream culture and is spread by individuals, mass media, politics and institutions. It can be translated into policies and laws, and this always leads to dangerous consequences. Several illustrations can be drawn from our past and recent history. For instance, in a bombing in Oberwart (Austria) in 1995, four Roma were killed. Until the non-Roma perpetrator of the attack was arrested two years later, the authorities thought that it had been a self-inflicted accident. We can also think of the Roma murders by neo-Nazi groups in Hungary in 2008 and 2009, or the expulsion of Romanian and Bulgarian Roma people from France in 2010. Another example: the overt threats to the Roma living in the so-called *campi nomadi* (literally, ‘nomad camps’) in Italy issued by Matteo Salvini, the former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior – who has recurrently and blatantly made statements such as: ‘But is it normal for a gypsy woman in Milan to say: “Salvini should be shot in the head?” Be good, dirty gypsy (*zingaraccia*), be good, for the BULLDOZER is arriving soon.’<sup>4</sup>

Europe is steeped in blaming and stereotyping the Roma. Over the years, myths surrounding the Roma have been internalized by the majority populations to the point that people are now believing they are true. Hence, many of these myths have become plausible. Public opinion that declares ‘after all, the Roma deserve to be treated differently’ steadily reinforces and legitimates a reasonable anti-Gypsyism. Such myths and stereotypes have different origins.

Politics is at the core of the proliferation of anti-Roma sentiment. Although in Europe anti-Gypsyism has traditionally been considered a right-wing phenomenon, it goes far beyond right-wing extremism. Anti-Gypsyism is an ideology of oppression that is spread and practised by all kinds of people: moderate politicians, citizens, the police, policymakers, and even some progressive media channels. A ‘reasonable anti-Gypsyism’ is today omnipresent throughout Europe and widely shared and accepted across political divisions, representatives and votes of any party<sup>5</sup> – as Kestemont’s statement shows. Anti-Gypsyism is the norm rather than the exception. This affects the Roma in

general and addresses some groups more or less explicitly. Regarding Roma women, for instance, both politics and the media have significantly fueled the stereotyped image of the thieving, begging, illiterate, hypersexualized or even prostituted Gypsy. In 2007, a judicial case occurred in Romania against the former President Traian Băsescu, who referred to a Roma female journalist as ‘filthy Gypsy’ and ‘birdie’ – *păsărică* in Romanian, a pejorative term with demeaning and sexual connotations.

Current European policies aim to combat discrimination against the Roma by fostering their socio-economic integration, mainly through education, employment, health and housing. Further steps in this direction are surely needed. Yet, poor living conditions, segregated school systems (e.g. in Bulgaria) and unequal treatment in health structures should be understood as the effects of discriminatory behaviours and treatment, rather than their causes. Just think of the segregated maternity wards for Roma women in public hospitals and the many cases of forced sterilization recorded even recently in certain Central and Eastern European countries such as Slovakia.

Anti-Roma prejudice and stereotypes can also be diffused and consolidated through policy documents. Vaguely phrased and/or unclear policies are likely to foster stigmatization of the Roma. By way of example, in its 2018 ‘Diversity Barometer’ (*Baromètre de la Diversité: Enseignement*) the Belgian Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities, UNIA, repeatedly emphasizes how the ‘cultural diversity’ of the Roma and/or *Gens du voyage* affects their children’s education. Yet UNIA’s Barometer takes understanding of such a ‘cultural diversity’ for granted and does not provide the reader with any clarification of what it actually means. Given the damaging effects of the racial culturalization of the Roma over the centuries, the lack of accuracy and/or clarity in the way policies are formulated contributes to diffusing the preconception that Roma are *by culture* not inclined to scholarization, education or work.

A few years ago, in a tiny picturesque village of Southern Italy, a brawl broke out between newcomers from Romania and young natives. In the aftermath of the fight, signs were posted on the walls of the village bearing the slogan ‘VIA I ROM!’ (‘Roma out!’). A huge misunderstanding evidently took place. The local population was unaware that not all Romanians are Roma and that barely 16%<sup>6</sup> of the European Roma actually come from Romania. This incident adds to the long list of mistakes, misinterpretations and myths about the Roma that have been bandied about in European societies since the Middle Ages – such as the frequently recounted legend that ‘Gypsies steal children’.

In 2000, Kathryn D. Carlisle – the then local monitor for the *European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC)* in Italy – aimed to debunk this myth in her piece *Stealing Children: Institutionalising Romani Children in Italy*. She shows that, for at least the past two hundred years, non-Romani state, church and charity authorities have been stealing Romani children from Romani families and remanding them into institutional care. On the other hand, the legend of Roma as kidnappers persists in Italy and in many other European countries such as Greece – where the story of the kidnapped ‘blonde angel Maria’ (deemed too blonde to be a Roma child) went viral in 2013. To date, there are no acknowledged cases in which Roma have been proved to have been involved in kidnapping.

These examples show that anti-Gypsyism is constantly fueled by prejudice and ignorance at all political and societal levels. Although it is framed as a ‘specific’ form of racism, anti-Gypsyism is not specific in nature. Like all racisms, anti-Gypsyism is about hate, oppression and marginalization. It is about unequal access to, and unjust dynamics of, power. As such, it can never be ‘reasonable’.

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- 1 Own italics. Source: Hope, A. (2019). Anderlecht clears Roma camp; Molenbeek lets theirs remain. *The Brussels Times*, 2 August 2019; available at <https://www.brusselstimes.com/brussels/62433/anderlecht-clears-roma-camp-molenbeek-lets-theirs-remain/> (Accessed 3 November 2019).
  - 2 DéFI's official website, at <https://defi.eu/nos-idees/> (Accessed 6 March 2020).
  - 3 van Baar, H. (2014). The Emergence of a Reasonable Anti-Gypsyism in Europe. In T. Agarín (ed.), *When Stereotype Meets Prejudice: Antiziganism in European Societies*. Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag.
  - 4 Matteo Salvini's official Twitter account, 1 August 2019, own translation.
  - 5 Cf. 'Antigypsyism: a Reference Paper' (version June 2017) by the Alliance against Antigypsyism; available at <http://www.antigypsyism.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Antigypsyism-reference-paper-16.06.2017.pdf> (Accessed 3 November 2020).
  - 6 This percentage builds on the latest estimates on the Roma population (2 July 2012) prepared by the Support Team of the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe (CoE) for Roma Issues; available at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/roma> (Accessed 24 March 2018).

# Discrimination from the Majority Society Affects the Identities of Ethnic Minorities

by Yijia Huang

Since the terrorist attacks in Brussels in 2016, Muslim Belgians have been facing increasing discrimination from members of the majority population in ways both implicit and explicit. Muslims are usually misrepresented in the media, which to some extent encourages Islamophobia. Furthermore, Muslims are more often than not negatively portrayed by populist parties in order to win elections. Even when Muslims are not immigrants but born and raised in the host society, they still encounter discrimination and stigmatization.

Discrimination towards ethnic and religious minorities, particularly Muslims, is widespread in Belgium. According to Eurobarometer surveys,<sup>1</sup> discrimination based on ethnic origin is the most widespread type of discrimination in both Belgium and EU.<sup>2</sup> The percentage of Belgians' perception or experience of discrimination is relatively higher than that in other EU member states. Besides, in the years 2008 and 2012, discrimination based on religion was the second most common form of discrimination in Belgium,<sup>3</sup> while the average percentage for the EU is much lower.<sup>4</sup> As shown by these statistics, the problem of racial and religious discrimination is serious. It is worthy of our attention and the problem needs to be solved. At least, people's mindsets should be changed to reduce prejudice, stigma and discrimination which all have impacts on a person's identity. If you are discriminated against and stigmatized in the country of your birth, would you then still 'feel Belgian'?

This contribution argues that discrimination against second or later generation Muslim Belgians contributes to the strengthening of their ethnic identity and the weakening of their national identity. In reaction to discrimination, they construct a unique identity

which is a combination of ethnic (Moroccan/Turkish/other), national (Belgian) and religious (Muslim) identities.

What is identity? Identity is a complex concept. It is multi-faceted and fluid. The word 'multi-faceted' refers to the interrelated and dependent relationships among various identities, such as national identity, ethnic identity and religious identity. 'Fluid' implies that identity is not a finished product, and it is in constant change under the impact of different factors, such as where you are (social context) and with whom you are (interpersonal relationship). For example, as a Belgian Muslim you might feel Belgian when in Morocco or in France and Moroccan when interacting with Belgians with no migrant origin. Additionally, identity does not remain stable, and your identity might change over the years. Identity is constructed and re-constructed through interactions with others and with society at large. Under these circumstances, the identities of ethnic and religious minority Belgians will be constructed differently in a friendly (inclusive) or an unfriendly (exclusive) society. If you listen to or read a continuous negative discourse about Muslims in the media, you might feel less Belgian than if the discourse is neutral or welcoming. That is to say, their identities are affected by the way they are treated by members of the native population. Put simply, the frequently quoted term 'identity' is one's sense of belonging to a certain group, and it is built on the distinction between 'us' and 'others'. One's own identity is decided not only by how he/she looks at himself/herself (self-recognition), but also by what others think of him/her (the perceptions of others). In this case, the hostile environment in which discrimination takes place plays a significant role in forming and reforming the identities of Belgians with ethnic and Muslim backgrounds.

The reactive ethnicity theory first brought up by Alejandro Portes and Ruben Rumbaut predicts that when minorities face perceived threats, exclusion or discrimination, they will form a 'reactive ethnicity' as a reaction to the unfriendly environment (in the country of residence) where they live and grow up. It highlights 'the role of hostile context of reception in accounting for the rise rather than the erosion of ethnicity'.<sup>5</sup> Moroccan Belgians might thus feel more Moroccan than Belgian, and this is not necessarily a continuing loyalty to the home country of their parents or grandparents. Research in Germany confirms the reactive ethnicity theory. By conducting interviews in Germany and observing the daily life of the participants (Turkish-German youths), Çelik suggested that reactive ethnicity emerges as the second generations perceive or experience discrimination.<sup>6</sup> A more recent study by Daniel Herda also provides evidence for the theory of reactive ethnicity. By using survey data from 208 Muslim Americans



in Michigan, Herda found out that direct experiences of discrimination result in weaker identification with America and stronger identification with Islam. He further pointed out that anticipated discrimination is enough to lead to the aforementioned consequences, and personal experiences are not required. For South and Southeast Asian Muslim Americans, ‘anticipated discrimination predicts more negative attitudes toward America and weakened American identification’<sup>7</sup> because of their more distinctive racial and cultural features than other groups.

When terminologies are improperly applied to refer to second and later generation Belgians, there may be unwanted consequences of excluding and discriminating them. Hence, I propose that terms like ‘immigrant’ should be avoided to use and that other terms like ‘integrate’ and ‘integration’ should be used cautiously when researchers discuss the second, third or later generations, even though they are widely and frequently applied in previous or current academic studies. People born and raised in Belgium have Belgian nationality and are Belgian citizens. Therefore, it seems rather unfair and prejudiced to call such people ‘immigrants’. It is also problematic to require second or later generations to integrate into Belgium which is their own country. Why should native-born ethnic Belgians integrate into Belgium? This notion of integration often confronts rejection from second or later generations. In her book, Dominique Schnapper<sup>8</sup> states first of all that the term ‘integration’ gets criticized because it reflects the idea of the majority population imposed upon the ethnic minorities. It implies that ethnic minorities’ cultures and identities are unacceptable, and that they should conform to the established norms.<sup>9</sup> However, she holds the opinion that it is unavoidable for researchers to use the term ‘integration’ when the research focus is on the relations between the ethnic minorities and the majorities, but she also demonstrates that the connotation of the word needs to be clarified. It may be true that minorities are brought up by parents who are under the influence of Moroccan (or Turkish, or other ethnic) and Islamic culture, and they themselves are under the influence of both Belgian and Moroccan culture; but they can be Moroccan in terms of ethnicity, they can be Belgian in terms of nationality, and at the same time they can be Muslims in terms of religious identity. These various identities are not necessarily in conflict. The different identities can coexist, and they are inclusive, not exclusive.

It is questionable that second or later generation ethnic Belgians are often blamed for not feeling really Belgian. Belgians with ethnic and Muslim backgrounds are usually treated as if they were outsiders or foreigners. For instance, they will be asked in their own country by their fellow countrymen ‘Where are you from?’. If their answer is

'I'm Belgian', the hurtful question will subsequently follow, 'How about your origin?'. Maybe it is out of kindness or curiosity to treat them differently, but the special attention paid to them may turn out to be a kind of racial or religious discrimination. The government and the mainstream population would like the second generations to 'integrate' better and feel more Belgian. This way of thinking and practice may push them far away. In practical terms, the best way is to accept difference and embrace uniqueness, and to allow minorities to maintain their unique identity composed of ethnic (Moroccan/Turkish/other), national (Belgian) and religious (Islamic) characteristics.

The tolerance and open-mindedness from the majority Belgians will make Belgium more diverse and vibrant, which is also beneficial for harmonious identity construction. In a tolerant society where there is less or no discrimination and everyone feels at home, their attachment to the country will accordingly be enhanced. Such cultural, ethnic and religious distinctiveness should be regarded as an asset instead of a burden for Belgium. By being part of Belgian society, Belgians with ethnic backgrounds enrich the life and experiences of all Belgian people to a greater extent. To a certain degree, it is not the second or third-generation Belgians who should take the initiative and make a change, but the members of the majority society. As a matter of fact, the second or later generation Belgians are an essential and inseparable component of Belgian society, which makes Belgium more diversified. All in all, in view of a more harmonious environment, the best way is to embrace and include the ethnic minorities, not to exclude them.

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- 1 The surveys were conducted on the same topic respectively in the years 2008, 2012 and 2015.
  - 2 Statistics from Eurobarometer surveys: year 2008: BE: 71%, EU: 62%; year 2012: BE: 68%, EU: 56%; year 2015: BE: 74%, EU: 64%.
  - 3 As for Belgium, the number in 2008 was 53%; the number in 2012 was 60%.
  - 4 As for the EU, the number in 2008 was 42%; the number in 2012 was 39%.
  - 5 Portes, A., & Rumbaut, R. G. (2001). *Legacies: The story of the immigrant second generation*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ of California Press, p. 148.
  - 6 Çelik, Ç. (2015). 'Having a German passport will not make me German': reactive ethnicity and oppositional identity among disadvantaged male Turkish second-generation youth in Germany. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38(9): 1646-1662.
  - 7 Herda, D. (2018). Reactive ethnicity and anticipated discrimination among American Muslims in Southeastern Michigan. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 38(3): 372.
  - 8 In the book *Qu'est-ce que l'intégration*, Dominique Schnapper elaborated on the history and controversy of the term 'integration'. Schnapper, D. (2007). *Qu'est-ce que l'intégration?* Paris: Éditions Gallimard.
  - 9 The original text is in French: 'Parler d'intégration peut sembler impliquer que les comportements doivent se conformer à des normes déjà établies'.

# Ethnic Studies Major(s) and Archiving Initiatives as Crucial Tools of Liberation

by Tundé Adefioye

We need to continue to do the work to stop centering white European intellectual production, by anchoring our understanding of Black studies as a degree course, not just as some kind of intellectual exercise. Since the Black studies major comes out of struggles of liberation in the US, it has to continue to be imbedded in this sense of urgency. Many Black scholars, including Fred Moten, have said numerous times that Black studies criticize ‘western civilization’. If this is true, then it is logical that Stuart Hall’s scholarship should have spearheaded the first Black Studies Department in the UK at Birmingham City University. Hall was not only an observer and scholar of the uprisings in the 1970s and 1980s against the racist oppression in the UK, but also a participant and organizer of actions to liberate people of colour. Kehinde Andrews, one of the professors at Birmingham City University, writes that ‘Black studies is also vital because it aims to change not only the face but also the nature of universities. Any approach rooted in the experience of Black populations will rapidly understand the serious issues of discrimination and exclusion faced across the globe. We therefore cannot be content to gain access to academia. We have to ensure that Black studies can be used to connect the university to the struggles to improve conditions in wider society’.<sup>1</sup>

What is clear is that spaces like the Africa Museum in Tervuren are not sufficient, nor safe spaces for all, especially not for many people of colour who want to participate in the act of memorialization. It might be a beginning for some, but others have shown their disdain. During the re-opening of the Africa Museum, activists gathered and planted bloodied papier-mâché hands in the museum grounds, because ‘... they are not content with the new museum, which they believe is not decolonized enough.’<sup>2</sup> This action would also need to be included in a course within the Ethnic studies major being proposed to be created.

In *Lose Your Mother*, Saidiya Hartman writes:

*'Remembering slavery' became a potent means of silencing the past in the very guise of preserving it, since it effectively curbed all discussion of African slavery and its entailments – class exploitation, gender inequality, ethnic clashes, and regional conflict. The sorcery of the state, like the sorcery of marabouts and herbalists, was also intended to wash away the past...and to pacify the heirs of slaves, except that now this process was described as memorializing rather than forgetting.<sup>3</sup>*

This is in essence what the so-called Africa Museum is – a place of forgetting. A place akin to Disneyland where families can walk through spaces that present very colonized perspectives on what a people and a place are. In a capitalist, imperialist and colonizing country such as Belgium such spaces have the right to exist, but the budget they have should be cut tremendously. Most important in cutting that budget would be the redistribution of the resources to initiatives and individuals who are active in archiving the realities of people of colour in Belgium. To name just a few: think of Black History Month (Belgium), MVSLIM, Unie Van Turkse Verenigingen. The other part of the budget gleaned from the Africa Museum could be used to introduce an Ethnic Studies degree course into at least one university. Any takers...VUB perhaps?

When observing a country like Belgium, the question arises why one of its universities is not offering a Black studies degree, or at least an Ethnic studies major covering the reality of Black people, Moroccans, Turks and other individuals of colour in Belgium, also focusing on their struggles for equity and indeed liberation. This last point is why some scholars in the US have proposed that 'Ethnic Studies' be named 'Liberation Studies'. Not only would this map the work of organizations like the Arab European League, Bamko-Cran, Baas Over Eigen Hoofd, Black Speaks Back and others, but it would also provide deeper analysis of the work of artists and writers like Chika Unigwe, Rachida Lamrabet, Luanda Casella, Seckou Ouologuem, NoMoBs and an array of many others. By engaging in this practice, it would ensure that the extremely important work of new 'meaning-making process', as Gloria Wekker calls it, is being done through documentation and archiving. People of colour currently living within the borders of Belgium would have a chance to see their stories and histories memorialized, and future generations would have archives that could potentially act as a foundation for their own life trajectory by

seeing themselves mirrored in the stories we tell of ourselves. Many young individuals are continuing to blaze the path to this new meaning-making. Take for example the young people of colour behind the popular cult radio show Lowkey Radio. According to one of its founding members, Christopher Kiaku:

*'It started when we recognized there was a void. The type of music we wanted to hear was not being played on radio platforms operated by the VRT. We had already a history together, starting the hyped rap collective Young Nation, which originated from our time as the only Black kids in a high school in Dilbeek.'*

The work of The Black Archives in Amsterdam shows us that, through dedication, individuals can create an initiative that does the work of memorializing the current realities and past of people of colour. So much so that the Black Archives were invited to collaborate by a major museum in Amsterdam. More importantly, it was visited by none other than Angela Davis, who has also acknowledged the crucial work that they do. During a speech after her visit to The Black Archives, Angela Davis said:

*'It is important to recognize that, as we move forward in our collective struggles against racism, heteropatriarchy, capitalism, that we delve more deeply into our histories and discover new more illuminating connections that help us to understand the significance of forging new solidarities across oceans and across national borders, across lines of division. ...This of course requires us to create a robust historical memory. An historical memory that calls upon us to take note of as many past promises of global solidarity as possible. Promises ... especially among people who have suffered the injustices and violence's of slavery and colonialism. Those who were described as... the insulted, the hurt, the dispossessed...'<sup>4</sup>*

Another way of encapsulating this is that we need to create an ec(h)o-system of archiving, one that would be made and managed by a major institution. Not only that, smaller initiatives need to be encouraged, stimulated and maintained through these acts of memorializing. By doing this we would strengthen the base of our historical memories,

which serve not only to inform future generations to give them greater understanding of themselves, but also to illuminate global solidarities. This could reveal how we understand our collective desires to resolve pressing issues such as the global climate crisis, inequality and other oppressive systems in which some of us still find ourselves.

In her most recent book, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, Saidiya Hartman asserts:

*'Every historian of the multitude, the dispossessed, the subaltern, and the enslaved is forced to grapple with the power and authority of the archive and the limits it sets on...whose perspective matters, and who is endowed with the gravity and authority of historical actor...The endeavor is to recover the insurgent ground of these lives; to exhume open rebellion from the case file, to untether waywardness, refusal...and to illuminate the radical imagination and everyday anarchy of ordinary colored girls, which has not only been overlooked, but is nearly unimaginable'*<sup>5</sup>

Although Hartman writes this as a professor at Columbia University, one could extend this as a call to action to exhume the lives of different actors in current and past Belgian and European societies, to ordinary individuals, self-organizing initiatives, volunteer organizations, and so on. This exhumation and recovery of stories and people's heritage need to be done on different levels, and various actors need to play a role. In fact, we must see this as a necessary and bold step towards truly growing our understanding of the Flemish canon and what we know to be the Western canon in general. This type of speculation would not only allow us to imagine the lives of ordinary people but would also allow us to dig deeper and shed new light on how we have understood and continue to understand ourselves. This will provide a way of gazing into a future that we might not have illustrated for our collective society.

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# Tackling Racism in Brussels: Yes We Can!

by Dounia Bourabain, Laura Westerveen, Safaa Charafi and Géraldine André

When we talk about racism, we usually discuss its presence in different domains of life. It is of course a necessary first step towards describing and exposing the existence of discrimination and racism. Yet we often do not go beyond that. Frequently, the question of how we can tackle racism is neglected. The fact that cities such as Brussels are 'superdiverse' does not automatically solve racism. Thus, the next step would be to think about, discuss and carry out strategies to dismantle racism in all areas of life, at both individual and structural level.

To tackle racism, we need to dig into the roots of racism itself. Racism can be explained through the individual biases and prejudices individuals hold over 'others', those who are not considered to be part of their group. These biases and prejudices are created through automatic processes in our brains that categorize all the impulses it receives on a daily basis. In order to get a grip on the complex world we live in, the brain makes 'files' through the process of pigeonholing, by connecting types of people to a few simplified characteristics. To give an example, seeing a veiled woman might trigger stereotypical images of cultural backwardness. These files are regularly influenced by the messages your brain processes every day. The main channels through which these messages are transmitted are parents, education, (social) media, and so forth. Although most people use the excuse that we cannot stop our brain from stereotyping, we actually can do something to change our behaviour. We can change the files in our brain if we actively work on becoming more aware of racism in society. The question is what can we do to change our awareness and tackle racism in our neighbourhood, school, hobby organizations or local youth club?

Bring people together is the answer! Most public spaces in Brussels are still strongly segregated along ethnic lines. Segregation exists in housing, schools, workplaces and also in entertainment spaces such as hobby associations. Segregation hinders (ethnic) groups from meeting each other, which gives us no chance to change our opinions about

other people. What we need is positive intergroup contact in our everyday interactions. Is it that simple, you might wonder. There are certain criteria that need to be taken into account if we really want these contacts to create less prejudice. The first criterion is to have a common goal for all participants of the interaction. This can easily be made possible in classrooms where students work together or in workplaces where group efforts are encouraged. A second criterion is that every person has an equal status within the interaction. This means that there should not be a dominant leader in the group who would try to control the conversation. A third criterion is intergroup cooperation, meaning that everyone in the group should be allowed to have a role in achieving the main goal. Finally, being supported by authorities or the law provides more grounds for enhancing the interaction between people of different ethnic backgrounds. Looking at these criteria, we can imagine that it is possible to reduce prejudice and therefore racism in the long run. How exactly can we do this in Brussels? In public spaces the criteria for positive intergroup contact can easily be applied. For the younger generation, we can for example target hobby associations where members work together towards a main goal – such as learning a new sport – as equal members of a team. This shows that intergroup encounters can be supported within existing institutions.

Racism has an impact on both our everyday encounters and our societal institutions such as the education system and the economy. It cannot be tackled at the level of individual interactions alone, but should be addressed at structural level as well. The existence of institutional racism needs to be recognized. This form of racism originates from the design of our societal institutions. In contrast with individual racism, institutional racism does not refer to individual prejudices of people, but rather to the ways in which institutional policies and practices bring about inequalities between minorities and majorities. For example, when minority students systematically find themselves in disadvantaged schools or in lower tracks of education, we can call this ‘institutional racism’. This reflects not necessarily – or only – an individual teacher’s prejudices towards a single student, but also the way in which the institutions are organized. While the right to equal treatment is anchored in our laws to a large extent, the fact that minorities have not participated on an equal basis in the construction of our institutions is often not acknowledged. To ensure the equal participation of all groups in social interaction, we need to recognize that institutionalized norms and values defined by the majority can put minorities (intentionally or indirectly) at a disadvantage in society. Take for instance the standard rule of certain employers that the wearing of a headscarf on the work floor is not allowed. This standard leads to a structural exclusion from employment of any woman wearing a headscarf. Only if we acknowledge this can



we begin to think about how to change our institutions in order to tackle racism at the structural level.

Tackling racism at the structural level also implies the implementation of redistributive policy measures. Institutional racism essentially leads to an unequal distribution of power and resources between minority and majority groups. Changing this requires us to adapt our institutional policies and practices to an approach favouring a more equal distribution. Much of the current anti-discrimination legislation focuses on guaranteeing the equal treatment of minority groups. While this is important, it is not enough to reach full equality, as borne out in the persistent inequalities that minority groups are confronted with. Because of the structural nature of racism, we need to combine anti-discrimination measures aimed at countering individual racism with the development of 'race-conscious' equality policies. These are policies that tackle inequalities through recognising ethnic or racial minorities (for instance when defining the target group of a policy). This includes positive actions. Positive actions are policy measures that promote equality by preventing or compensating for the disadvantages experienced by racialized and other disadvantaged groups. These can range from strategies of active recruitment outside the traditional networks to measures promoting equal representation in decision-making procedures.

In Brussels, as both city and region, there still exist structural inequalities between majority and minority groups in education, employment, housing and other important societal domains. In 2017, the Brussels-Capital Region adopted new anti-discrimination legislation. This legislation enables the use of situation testing and mystery calls, which are field experiments in which the existence of racism is tested for, based on real-life observations. In so doing, Brussels goes beyond the anti-discrimination laws and regulations of the other regions. Despite this legislation, we argue that concrete positive actions still need to be implemented in favour of different actors and domains. For example, the practice of early tracking in both the francophone and Flemish education systems in Belgium seems to have a disadvantageous impact on pupils with a migration background, whereas it could be adapted to a system in which tracking only happens at a later age. Another example is the area of employment. The government should strive for a better representation of the population mix in public positions by actively seeking out minority applicants and supporting them throughout the application procedure. These are just two among many examples that we could put forward.

Brussels is a superdiverse city and region, but it is still marked by racism and consequent inequalities. Given that racism operates at several different, but interrelated, levels, we propose a two-track strategy to counter racism. On the individual level, fostering intergroup contact could help reduce prejudice and overcome racist stereotypes about the 'other'. To facilitate intergroup contact in Brussels, spaces are needed for positive encounters on an equal basis. On the structural level, the recognition of institutional racism and the implementation of positive actions could promote more equality between majority and minority groups in fields such as education and employment. So the idea that racism is "unavoidable" and "unsolvable" should no longer be an excuse. To take away, racism can be eradicated and we can do something about it. Yes we can!



# Discrimination Tests: A Potential Stepping Stone for Human Rights

by Pieter-Paul Verhaeghe

Discrimination refers to the adverse treatment of people because of their racial or ethnic origin, gender, age, disability or another ‘protected’ ground. In modern societies there should be no place for this kind of inequality because it is clearly at odds with elementary human rights. However, racism is still a structural problem in Brussels, in Belgium and in many other countries.<sup>1</sup> It is also hard for victims to prove or even know that they are being discriminated against. On the one hand, a job candidate of Moroccan descent might not be able to get a job interview, which would lead him to think he was not sufficiently capable to do the job, although in fact he was discriminated against. On the other hand, he might also be turned down and think he had been discriminated against, although it was for professional reasons he was not invited to the interview. In other words, discrimination can be both under- and over-assumed by people. That is why we need instruments to provide ‘clear and convincing evidence’ of discrimination. In my view, discrimination tests are very suitable for achieving this aim.

Discrimination tests – also known as ‘*tests de situation*’ in French, ‘*praktijktesten*’ in Dutch or ‘*audit studies*’ in American English – have been used for decades by scholars and activists. Discrimination tests are a field experimental technique, in which pairs of candidates apply for a job vacancy or rental advertisement, for example. Both candidates are similar in all relevant characteristics, except with respect to the discrimination ground under scrutiny (e.g. a candidate with a Moroccan-sounding name paired with a candidate with a Belgian-sounding name). Afterwards, the treatment of both candidates by the employer or landlord is compared and any significant adverse treatment is considered to be due to discrimination.

I believe in the power of discrimination tests for several reasons. The results of discrimination tests fuel the public debate on discrimination. Public debate means that policymakers are forced to speak out about the matter, and maybe also to actually do something. Moreover, confronted with the hard findings about discrimination, people

might start to reflect about their own behaviour. From social-psychological studies we know that much discriminatory behaviour often happens unconsciously and without intention to discriminate. Public debate might, therefore, encourage employers or landlords, for example, to think about their actions and whether or not they are being (unconsciously) discriminatory. In other words, discrimination tests could be used as educational tools to raise awareness about our (implicit) biases.

Discrimination tests can also be used for legal procedures, such as lawsuits or mediation. In Belgium many official complaints about discrimination are dismissed because of lack of evidence; in consequence the anti-discrimination legislation often remains a dead letter. Each of these dismissed complaints represents a human story of rejection, frustration and anger. If they had had the hard evidence from discrimination tests in their hands, victims or civil rights organizations would have been able to make a better case when suing perpetrators. If we organized discrimination tests on the labour or housing market in a proactive way, the anti-discrimination laws would have more flesh on their bones and the complainants would get the service to which they are entitled. American research suggests that in cities where legal discrimination tests were performed by fair housing agencies (and where prejudiced real estate agents were subsequently fined), there was a significant decrease in discrimination in the housing market.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, there is scientific evidence that, even without sanctions, discrimination tests could be effective in some way against discrimination. In a quasi-experiment we performed in 2015 in the Belgian city of Ghent, we found that real estate agents who knew that they might be monitored through discrimination tests (but not how or when) subsequently discriminated much less. The net discrimination rate for getting an invitation to visit a rental dwelling dropped significantly from 26% to 10% in the time span of only a few months. The explanation is that the discrimination controls made realtors reflect on their often unconscious reactions, leading to less bias in their selection as a consequence. Moreover, that reduction appeared to be a long-term change when it was combined with legal tests too.<sup>3</sup> The case-study of Ghent corroborates the previous arguments that discrimination tests could best be used as both educational and legal instruments.

The implementation of discrimination tests in 2015 in Ghent did not go unnoticed. These tests became a controversial topic and an ideological symbol for both left-wing and right-wing parties in Belgium, useful for scoring points among their supporters. As the administrator of many of the tests, I could personally experience how fiercely that ideological struggle was often conducted. The responses varied from compliments and

letters of support to suspicions expressed in social media and research proposals that were blocked for political reasons.

Notwithstanding this polarization, over the past years we have witnessed a shift in the public debate on discrimination tests. The government of the Brussels Capital Region was the first in Belgium to adopt legal discrimination tests in its anti-discrimination legislation with respect to the labour and housing markets, and to reserve the necessary budget to implement the tests. Brussels was soon followed by the Belgian government, but there the tests were only made possible on paper, but not in practice. A major breakthrough was made in 2018-2019: several local governments explicitly mentioned the introduction of discrimination tests in the local labour and housing markets in their policy plans for the forthcoming six years. It is important to note that this concerned cities governed by various political coalitions, such as Mechelen, Leuven, Kortrijk and Antwerp (in addition to Ghent, which had already introduced these tests back in 2015). In this way, the discrimination tests shifted from being a political symbol to what they are today: neither the “holy grail to solve racism” nor the “stick to punish employers and landlords”, but an important measuring instrument to establish discrimination in an objective manner, comparable to the use of speed cameras and alcohol tests on the roads. The use of discrimination tests has become ever less a political choice, and increasingly a sign of good governance.

This was possible because three types of actor met around the instrument of discrimination tests in Belgium: civil society organizations, academic institutions and politicians. The civil society organizations never stopped advocating the use of legal discrimination tests, with academics performing research to improve the quality of these tests. Last but not least, some politicians made the tests a priority during political negotiations. Together they formed a powerful coalition of those willing to use them which could counter all arguments from their opponents.

Although the tone in the debate about discrimination tests has certainly made a U turn, the broader hegemonic discourse about equality and racism has not been shifted yet. So, triumph would be misplaced at this moment. Discrimination tests could be used by policymakers for many reasons. In the city of Ghent, it was considered as both a preventive and legal instrument against discrimination. Moreover, the tests were part of a broader policy and discourse against discrimination, exclusion and poverty. Discrimination tests could, however, be misused too. They could, for example, serve as legitimation for a policy that could further aggravate the position of precarious groups

in our society. In this vein, politicians might defend their policy with the argument ‘that we are not as bad as they claim, since we are performing discrimination tests’. It is too early to make a final balance, but time will tell whether the discrimination tests should be seen as a stepping-stone for human rights, or rather as a token gesture for a policy where human rights are being increasingly phased out.

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# Unity in Diversity: The Brussels Identity Glues Everyone Together

by Petrus te Braak, Laora Mastari, H el ene Lembl e and Gil Keppens

Shared identities carry a great importance with regard to social cohesion: they offer us the feeling that we belong to a bigger whole, such as a group or culture. Decades of research have shown that such a feeling of connectedness to a bigger whole is key to our psychological well-being. This is true for people with and without a migration background. Yet research has especially emphasized its significance for people with a migration background, i.e. both first – and second – generation migrants. They have the possibility to construct their identity based on a feeling of connectedness to both the dominant group/culture of the country they inhabit and the ethnic culture of their country of origin. For a long time, migration and integration policies have held the view that maintaining both cultures is incompatible for identity construction. We now know that perceiving identities as unilayered is a serious misconception. Although differences do occur in the degree of connectedness to the ethnic or dominant culture, they do not rule each other out.

Interestingly, recent data show that young people living in Brussels, both those with and without a migration background, above all feel very connected to Brussels. The connection they feel with Brussels is deeper than their connections with Belgium, Flanders, Wallonia or any other country. We believe this has everything to do with the demographic composition of Brussels. After Dubai, Brussels is the second most superdiverse city in the world. From an ethnographical point of view, this means that there is no clear dominant ethnic group. In Brussels everyone is a ‘minority’, everyone is ‘the other.’ No majority or dominant group can force an identity on another, and therefore, a shared ‘umbrella identity’ is at everyone’s disposal. Everyone, regardless of one’s ethnic roots, can identify with Brussels.

The capital of Belgium, centered between Flanders and Wallonia, is home to a very young population of ‘Zinnekes’. This is the nickname given to citizens who are

distinguished by a diversity of ethnic, cultural, social, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. Historically, the term ‘Zinneke’ was given to street dogs that were thrown in the river Zenne, which is the only Belgian river that crosses all three regions of Brussels, Flanders and Wallonia. ‘Zinneke’ was used to label people in a somewhat pejorative sense by calling them a bastard with no clear, pure or plain origin. Zinnekes are opposed to ‘Ketjes’, the label of people whose ancestors were all born in Brussels. In the current modern context, the connotation of this label has adapted to the reality of a new superdiverse Brussels. In this new context, ‘Zinneke’ is no longer an insult, but rather a label that is worn with pride. A good example for this is the biennial Zinneke Parade that celebrates the diversity of Brusselians. Nowadays, Zinneke is a genuine Brussels symbol that stands for a Brussels identity marked by diversity and inclusion. This Brussels identity is carried with a certain pride by an extremely broad group of individuals, due to its non-exclusive connotation. It is precisely this inclusiveness that is an important factor in the construction of a collective identity, giving you a sense of belonging to a larger entity or group.

In two recent surveys<sup>1</sup> it became clear that Brussels indeed offers an identity with which many people can identify themselves. For Brusselians, the different layers available to be identified with are Belgium, Brussels, Flanders, Wallonia, and/or their country or countries of origin. Brusselians were asked how they identified themselves with the following question: ‘Indicate how attached you are to the following cities, villages, regions, and countries’. Young Brusselians with a migration background identify themselves in the first place with Brussels and feel only a subordinate attachment to Belgium, while their country of origin comes in third place. Among older Brusselians, a similar ranking holds for people with and without a migration background. However, in contrast to the young Brussels population with a migration background, the older generation’s identification with Belgium ranked above their identification with Brussels, while their country of origin again takes third place. It is remarkable, however, that Brusselians, both young and old, both with and without a migration background, only weakly identify with Wallonia and/or Flanders.

The tendency of young people with a migration background to identify primarily with Brussels illustrates that this city grants a sense of belonging that neither Belgium nor their country of origin seems to offer. How can this be explained? A lot of people with a migration background have a connection to their country of origin in the sense that they cling to some parts of the culture (such as listening to music, watching TV channels, eating typical food, ...) and maybe, every once in a while, make a return trip to reunite



with friends and/or family. While this connection is still apparent, it can be difficult for them to construct an identity based only on this connection. Often, citizens of their country of origin perceive them as different and, in turn, they may feel different. In addition, only a small part of their lives takes place in their country of origin, while they work, study, live etc in Brussels. Therefore, as a shared living environment for different groups, Brussels is much more tangible. But then why won't they identify with Belgium as a whole, Flanders or Wallonia?

This is where it becomes interesting. We argue that in Brussels people with a migration background are for once not made to feel they are in a minority. In Flanders, Wallonia or Belgium as a whole, they are often perceived and depicted as a minority group. When you are perceived and stigmatized on this ground, a common reaction is to identify more profoundly with the ethnic group of origin. It can even go as far as actively opposing any other form of identification. After all, why would you identify with a group that stigmatizes you?

In Brussels a distinction between 'us' versus 'them' is less likely to be made. Most Brusselians are Zinnekes and belong neither to the minority nor to the majority. Imposing a predisposed identity is impossible in Brussels, due to its myriad of cultures. Rather, Brussels is an open canvas that can be coloured and understood by everyone in a different way. Besides, in contrast to the Belgian, Flemish and Walloon identities, the Brussels identity cannot fall back on a (perhaps imaginary) common past. Brusselians from different cultures and ethnic groups do not really share a common history. The Brussels identity is rather based on a common present and future in a shared living environment that is characterized by diversity. Exactly within this diversity lies unity regarding identity formation. In Brussels the shared identity of the Zinnekes has been and is still created today in an organic, bottom-up way in which every citizen interprets and gives meaning to a shared identity.

What can we learn from the Brussels example? That inclusive identities are never predisposed or predefined. If Belgium, Wallonia and Flanders want to be inclusive and would like to have a shared identity, they could learn from the example of the Zinnekes in Brussels. Do not forget that the Zenne is the only river in Belgium that flows across the borders of Brussels, Flanders and Wallonia.

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1 The Youth Research Platform's JOP-Scholenmonitor gathered data in 2018 among 1279 pupils from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade of all Dutch-speaking schools in Brussels. The BRUXODUS-survey, financed by INNOVIRIS, gathered data from 1900 18- to 75-year-olds ((former) Brusselians with and without a migration background) in 2019.

# From — but not of — Europe: The Vicious Cycle of Inequalities in Belgium

by Gabriel Zohar

Immigrants seeking an alternative life in an unknown country face an uphill battle. The challenges of acclimatizing to a new culture entail learning a different language, navigating a different community, seeking employment, finding accommodation and adjusting to confusing cultural norms and social expectations. Unfortunately, the evidence continues to point to a disconcerting truth that, no matter what individuals with an immigrant background do to integrate into mainstream society, the odds are stacked against them.<sup>1</sup> In fact, even their children and grandchildren are affected by these disadvantages, generation after generation.

Belgium is among the countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) with the lowest levels of income inequality. Nevertheless, social mobility is alarmingly low. In Belgium, it takes on average as much as four generations for children of low-income families to reach the average income of the country. Moreover, unemployment levels are three times higher among residents/citizens with at least one parent from outside the EU than among residents/citizens with both parents and grandparents born in Belgium.<sup>2</sup> As such, it is no wonder that the percentage of people living below the poverty line is almost six times higher for some ethnic minorities, such as those from Turkish (59%) and Moroccan origin (56%) than for native Belgians (10%).

The low levels of income inequality in Belgium are therefore disguising an unfortunate reality. In Belgium, children with immigrant backgrounds have higher chances of lower academic achievement, unemployment, discrimination at school and in the workplace, and a higher likelihood of poverty. Minorities thus often face more barriers to economic integration than the general population. Both in the educational system

and in the labour market, physical differences and names reflecting a non-native ethnic group negatively influence access and success.<sup>3</sup> As a result, the chances of moving up or down the social ladder are heavily influenced by inherited traits for specific groups.

How did we get here? In the 1950s and 1960s, when Belgium welcomed many ‘guest workers’, it was thought that the educational differences between the native population and the new immigrants would lessen over time, as new immigrants would become more accustomed to their new environments. But that did not happen. Research by Phalet and Swyngedouw in 2003 has shown that the differences in educational opportunities, performances and expectations between residents/citizens of immigrant descent and native populations in Belgium have decreased over time, but certainly not disappeared. And this is still the case today.

Although the influence of the parental socio-economic status on students’ achievements in secondary education is not unique to this country, it is ‘particularly strong in Belgium’. In fact, Belgium remains among the top four – out of 43 countries – with the highest impact of socioeconomic background on educational achievement.<sup>4</sup> This impact is different across populations. Based on a statistical analysis, Verhaeghe and colleagues in 2016 pointed to differences in educational tracks (general, technical, vocational or school/workplace), delays in educational trajectories and expectations of finding a job among three different population groups in Belgium (natives, residents/citizens with specifically EU15 background, and residents/citizens with non-EU15 background). And whereas socio-economic status could explain most of the differences between natives and individuals with EU15 background, it could not account for individuals with a non-EU15 background. When individuals were asked for reasons why they could not find a job, most of the youngsters within the EU15 group referred to difficult times on the labour market. Most respondents with a non-EU15 background emphasized they were not ‘given a fair chance’.<sup>5</sup>

This constitutes a big challenge to face up to in Belgium. Schools have the potential to meet the challenges, as they are places where democracy is taught. This process should begin with the recognition that the educational institutions themselves have contributed to the problem to some extent. Boone and Van Houtte concluded, for instance, that teachers in Belgium are biased against pupils with both immigrant status and socio-economic status when providing academic recommendations. Ethnic minorities are more prone to be steered towards technical rather than academic paths, compared to native individuals. In the European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey

(2010), it was also found that about one in every five people with an ethnic background from North Africa in Belgium has been discriminated against by school personnel.

At work or at school, ethnicity (24%), religion (9%), skin colour (5%), and age (2%) are the primary sources of discrimination. The rate of discrimination today against residents/citizens with a Turkish background in Belgium – whether at work, in education, health, housing, public services and shops – is more than twice that experienced by the previous generation (28% versus 13%).<sup>6</sup>

As such, these reports support what other studies on ethnic equality policies in Europe suggested long ago. Belgian citizens with immigrant background are still considered to be migrants, even several generations after having obtained Belgian citizenship. In any case, there is a lot of evidence to support the argument that there is a strong link between ethnicity, discrimination, poverty, low educational attainment and poor access to the labour market for ethnic minorities in Belgium.

The population of this country has grown by 6% over the last ten years,<sup>7</sup> mainly due to the growing influx of immigrant population, – +40% since 2007 – which currently represents 17% of the total population in Belgium. With a growing immigrant population, the systematic perpetuation of low educational attainments and poor labour market prospects poses a serious challenge for the present and the future of this country.

There are no simple solutions to this puzzle. But if a favorable future is to be chosen, even small changes may trigger significant transformations. One of the triggers I would suggest is to shift the collective mindset to one of greater recognition of the fact that it is possible to belong to any ethnicity without being automatically located somewhere at the fringes of society as outsiders. Therefore, it is essential to stop the classification of individuals using language. Terms such as ‘native’, ‘immigrant’, ‘second or third generation’ or ‘European’ are all the result of classifications that enhance the differences rather than the similarities of sectors of our population. No citizen, regardless of their background, should be considered as an immigrant in a country where he or she has been born.

Perhaps it is time to reshape a broader national identity that has greater social weight than issues of ethnicity. Social inequalities will not be reduced until the integration of citizens is no longer viewed as the result of a process of adaptation to the culture of the majority, but rather as a dynamic exercise of responsibility by all members of a

community. Neither ethnicity nor social status should be a factor in assessing a citizen's ability to achieve success in any given society. This is an achievable task that will require, among many other efforts, the reconceptualization of the concept of belonging in the direction of a notion that includes respect for the dignity of the other.

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# Recognising Diversity: Not “If” but “How”

by Lena Imeraj and Tuba Bircan

## Cities of differences

European cities today have become centres of diversity. But what do we mean by diversity? Diversity can be defined as ‘the fact of many different types of things or people being included in something; or as a range of different things or people.’<sup>1</sup> From an urban point of view, diverse cities represent people with different languages, citizenship, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, class, physical abilities, wealth, gender, identity, race and lifestyle. In reality, diversity is generally taken to mean being represented in one chosen category, namely ‘migrant/minority status’. As such, *being a migrant (descendant)* remains a pertinent criterion of exclusion and many people persist in viewing the inhabitants of the city as in two opposing groups: ‘us’ versus ‘them’. Societal groups are compared and contrasted: the integrated and the segregated, the included and the excluded, the ordered and the disordered, the accepted and the non-accepted, the haves and the have-nots. But diversity is not about binaries; it is about recognising and respecting that people are each unique in their own way. Hence, diversity has an inherent multidimensional nature.

Taking ‘migrant status’ as a starting point, today’s intricate make-up of the capital city has indeed been fed by perpetual immigration. But ethnic diversity has also become more and more self-sustained: it is not new immigration but the excess of births over deaths that maintains minority population numbers. The wide variety of life experiences leads to an enormous heterogeneity within ethnic groups, which becomes even more apparent against a background of increasing socio-economic inequalities and patterns of residential segregation. Over time, this has resulted in a reality where there are more differences within groups than between them. Remarkably, this diversity-within-diversity view goes mostly unnoticed in public debate. Yet, if diversity is poorly understood then how can the argument in favour of or against it be straightforward? And how can we talk about what inclusion/exclusion is or ought to be?



There are numerous and multifaceted challenges facing cities that aim to meet the needs of increasingly diverse populations and handle the pertinent risks of exclusion and damaged social cohesion. But diversity in itself is neither good nor bad. The real issue when addressing diversity is knowing how to understand and engage with its multidimensional nature.

## A stranger in Brussels

Being a ‘migrant’ – reflecting one of the core aspects of diversity – is a state of being that has no concrete definition. But it can be described using a variety of characteristics that relate to demographics, people’s motivations and opportunities, and also the timing, duration and eventual outcome of their migration history. While some people decide to migrate voluntarily for reasons of economic activity, family reunification or education, others may be unwilling migrants, needing to seek asylum for a safer life. With the same variation as the abovementioned “migrant” status, Brussels has a complex and dynamic structure with recognised opportunities and challenges. Between 2000 and 2019, Brussels experienced a general population growth from 960,000 to roughly 1,200,000 inhabitants, through natural growth and international immigration. Around 60% of Brussels inhabitants are of foreign origin;<sup>2</sup> approximately 184 nationalities are found in Brussels, ranking this city the second most ethnically, racially and culturally diverse area in the world after Dubai.<sup>3</sup>

The structural inclusion of migrants and their descendants is crucial for the development of a culturally rich, socially cohesive and liveable society. However, the complexity and fragmentation of inclusion processes arise from the persistent spatial, social and symbolic frictions between individuals of different ethnic groups in Brussels. The capital city cherishes its own culture, heritage, values, traditions, languages and ways of life. Thus, diversity is an undisputable reality in Brussels. Having said that, along with sense of belonging and trust, diversity is one of the key aspects of social cohesion. One of the main challenges for urban areas is guaranteeing social cohesion and equal opportunities for all. We also know that positive contact experiences between members of different groups can lead to cooperation, trust and respect, and hence can improve social cohesion. Accordingly, if recognition of differences, mutual understanding and respect are put into practice, a community may be both diverse, inclusive and cohesive.

Now let us engage in a short thought exercise. Imagine a handful of *strangers* in Brussels: who would you picture and where would they live? Would that *stranger* be wealthy or poor, skilled or unskilled, coloured or white, live next door or certainly not in your neighbourhood? Would he/she be young or old, male or female, alone or with his/her family? Perhaps you might imagine all kinds of strangers living in any number of Brussels neighbourhoods. Or instead, would only a specific type of stranger as described and bluntly stigmatised in some prevailing stereotypes come to mind? Maybe you can form a mental picture of some recently-arrived strangers. Would they be speaking a different dialect than a local-born Bruxellois (assuming they have a shared language) with a variety of aspirations and backgrounds? Could they be newcomers working at the headquarters of international companies or European institutions, students studying graduate degrees in local universities, or people fleeing conflict areas worldwide? They would most likely be living in widely different neighbourhoods as some of them have plenty of money to spend while others have nothing to spend at all. Or instead you might imagine long-established strangers born and raised in the city, being (fully) accepted by the locals, living amidst them, contributing to urban growth and having converged to *our* normal. Could these strangers be in difficulties, possibly? Even though born and raised in the city, could they still be struggling to negotiate and establish their position, identity and sense of belonging to the community? Do they want or need to live close to their co-ethnic community, by choice or by lack of choice? Or are they destined, no matter how hard they try, to remain perceived as perpetual foreigners because of their dark skin colour, religion or sexual preference, or background of poverty? Such people are likely to be confined to poor neighbourhoods where poverty is concentrated because a considerable share of the housing market is denied to them. Or are you visualising expatriates from neighbouring or more distant countries who, sharing linguistic, cultural and political attitudes, find it easier to settle and live amongst other dissimilar foreigners? Desirable expatriates, coming from a handful of developed countries, bringing with them education, wealth and skills and so allowed to live close to *our* homes because they have the financial and intellectual resources to afford and obtain a nice house? Perhaps you might try to form a mental picture of the invisible strangers sleeping in railway stations, the undocumented homeless, victims of human trafficking and so on. They are unwanted and therefore unseen. Or maybe you are thinking of strangers in transit, tourists or seasonal labourers, who are visiting the city or just passing through.

From the above thought exercise we have just seen that people whom we label with the single word '*stranger*' actually belong to an incredibly mixed group of people with different ethnic minority backgrounds, and with widely different demographics,

beliefs, motivations and experiences. They live in different districts in our host society according to their financial resources or the availability of a co-ethnic community to turn to, or the willingness of *others* – meaning *us* and not *them* – to share the same neighbourhood, neighbours, school, friends and so on and build their home. Their living environments may or may not be closely located next to *our* neighbourhoods with pronounced real or imaginary boundaries. This degree of integration depends on how *others* perceive and value the *stranger* stereotypes assigned to a particular person or group. The terms *stranger* and *migrant* have become defined by ideas of who does or does not belong to our society while setting aside the many contributions they might be making to society. So, whatever stereotype picture came into your mind in the thought exercise described above will depend on how deeply you were looking at the people around you. Ideally, you should have been seeing a vast and intricate throng of *strangers* and a fragmented patchwork of Brussels neighbourhoods that are, presumably, home to *strangers* of many or few kinds. If only we would be willing to see and acknowledge the uniqueness of all strangers.

Does *being a stranger* entail hidden costs? The answer is yes, but not always to the same degree. Strangers who are not really ‘wanted’ by the host society may, due to lack of acceptance in their surroundings, be prone to exclusion and discrimination in areas such as education, employment, housing and healthcare. Greater disadvantages may accrue to strangers who come from negatively perceived social groups defined by criteria of ethnicity and/or socioeconomic resources. But heaviest to bear are the costs that fall on strangers who are categorized on grounds of disability, race, religion or cultural and political beliefs. They have to struggle against discrimination, stigmatisation and criminalisation.

## Recognition: see me for who I truly am

In reality, thousands of *strangers* come to Brussels, some to settle here for the long term, others are just passing through. Many people may be living together in neighbourhoods even though they do not belong to the same social or ethnic group or share real-life experiences. The same is true for people who display similar or quite different characteristics and attitudes with regard to education, employment, family composition and transgenerational characteristics. So, one should not ask the question *if* but *how* differences between and within minority groups in urban settings matter when addressing issues of diversity and social cohesion.

Diversity is increasingly underpinned by a strong ideological commitment of city leaders to promote inclusion. They strive to achieve integration and convergence but this rarely turns out as expected. In truth, *de facto* inclusion and integration is largely a myth. Existing policies fail to comprehend the dynamic nature of diversity and often rely upon long-lasting population categories or on particular neighbourhoods solely focusing on ethnicity and race. Accordingly, ignorance of the immense diversity of ethnic minorities leads to an unheeded social reality.

Although the concept of social cohesion and its link with diversity is usually discussed through the lens of the host communities, it is essential to consider the *strangers'* viewpoints too. People need a balance between representing themselves and their aspirations for how to be recognised in their community. Consequently, given the escalating urban complexity, acknowledging the presence of minorities and recognising diversity is not enough. Minority groups wish not only to be recognised in their diversity, but also deeply care about 'how' they are perceived by natives, other ethnic groups and within their communities.

Cities are required to demonstrate social and political commitment and to pay special attention to holding frank and fruitful discussions on diversity and its impacts with all its citizens. Thus, cities need to support not only cultural awareness and cooperation but also spontaneous and constructive communication in order to build trust, inclusiveness and social cohesion. Moreover, a bolder presence and representation of people with diverse backgrounds in political decision-making and policy design – as a complement to the current monocultural elite – would promote critical thinking and strengthen cities in their governance of diversity. Their contributions would enhance urban institutional capacity to deal effectively with cultural diversity and its challenges. We might wonder what cities would be like if their leaders could be more diverse, assuming that the real-life experiences of people with different gender, age, ethnicity, religion, resources, etc. could inform and shape urban design differently. Ultimately, the challenge will be to appreciate and reconcile the strengths of openness and closedness of all communities, which in the end is not a matter of ability but one of will.

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2 People born in a foreign country and/or having (grand)parents being born in a foreign country.

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# 'You Don't Belong Here!': Expulsion Doubles the Punishment for One Criminal Offence

by Lars Breuls and Kristel Beyens

*"I have been in Belgium for 32 years. I speak Dutch very well. My mother lives here, my son, my sister. My whole life is here. Yes, I have been in prison, but I have served my sentence completely. Yet, I am still detained. They have taken my residence permit and when I go free, I cannot even work any more."*

(Karim, pseudonym)

Karim is awaiting expulsion in an immigration detention centre. He lost his residence permit after being convicted for a criminal offence. While doing research on immigration detention in Belgium, we soon learned that several people were in a situation similar to Karim's. Before long we realized that convicted foreign nationals are not only subjected to prison sentences but are increasingly targeted by the immigration control system and singled out for expulsion. This is experienced as an extra punishment. In political discourse and in media coverage expulsion is often presented as an effective instrument of crime control. In practice, however, the use of expulsion as a component of crime control leads to several harmful consequences, not only for the individuals involved but also for society as a whole.

According to immigration law, foreign nationals who do not possess a residence permit must leave the country. They are potentially subject to a forced removal or an expulsion. On 2 September 2015, 3,118 prisoners in Belgium did not have a residence permit.<sup>1</sup>

It could be argued that they should constitute a main priority for expulsion – an argument also put forward by the Belgian government. At the same time, following the Belgian Prison Act of 2005, *‘the rehabilitation of the offender and the preparation of his reintegration into society’* is an important objective of imprisonment for all prisoners. Even if they are not re-entering Belgian society, foreign national prisoners without a residence permit should be prepared for their return to their official country of origin. However, foreign nationals receive no practical assistance with their return nor help with rebuilding their lives once they are back in a country that they have usually left several years previously. Their right to re-integration has thus been neglected.

Foreign national prisoners who do possess a residence permit can also be subjected to immigration control following a criminal conviction, as in the case of Karim. A residence permit can be revoked (taken away) after conviction for a criminal offence. In 2002, the then Minister of Internal Affairs Antoine Duquesne introduced several protective measures which were inscribed in the Belgian Foreigners Act in 2005: people who were born in Belgian territory or who had arrived before they were twelve years old and resided regularly in Belgian territory would never lose their residence permit. In February 2017, these protections were abolished by the then Secretary of State for Migration Theo Francken. Newly passed legislation created the possibility of more easily revoking the residence permits of foreign nationals who are considered to be a threat to the public order. Even if they are born in Belgium – a legal ground for prohibition of expulsion in the past – they can now lose their residence permit and become subjected to a forced removal order if they pose ‘a serious threat to the public order’. This is a broad and multi-interpretable concept that leaves a lot of discretionary power to the administrative caseworkers working for the Immigration Department. The terror attacks in Paris in November 2015 were mentioned in the newspapers by the former Secretary of State for Migration to justify the need for the new law. As Francken explained: ‘The “terrorist of Paris” had French nationality but could not be expelled because he was born in Belgium.’

In fact, the notion of ‘serious threat to the public order’ is broader than terrorism: it depends on evolving case law and may also cover drug dealing.

Karim lost his residence permit after the 2017 legislation came into force. He was serving a prison sentence of 37 months – although not for ‘terrorism’, he emphasized. He had already been living in Belgium since he was five years old. After the grounds for protection were abandoned, he nevertheless lost his residence permit. *‘I’m in a hopeless situation,’* he explains in fluent Dutch. *‘I was in prison and now I have been in immigration*



*detention for five months. I know that they want me to go back to Morocco, but I am here in Belgium since I was five. I have never been back to Morocco'. The Moroccan embassy is not cooperating in his case, which means that Karim will probably resist his expulsion. In the absence of a valid travel document, the Belgian government must contact the diplomatic authorities of the presumed country of origin to ask for the identification of the person and consequently for the delivery of a travel document, a so-called 'laissez-passer'. If the diplomatic authorities do not cooperate and no travel document is obtained, the expulsion cannot be carried out. Not every country is willing to cooperate easily, especially when convicted people and/or people with long-term bonds to Belgian society are involved. People then become 'unidentified' and 'undeportable'.*

This does not mean that Karim's life will remain unaffected. Every person in Belgian territory without a residence permit who does not cooperate with expulsion can be detained on several occasions in a closed immigration detention centre. Re-apprehension and re-detention in an immigration compound is thus possible once Karim is released. Suddenly, Karim will be residing 'illegally' in Belgium without a residence permit, with heavy impact on his daily life (e.g. no possibility of getting a legal job and potentially even more detention).

This example illustrates how the detention and expulsion of migrants have become important tools for controlling foreign nationals who are convicted for criminal offences. This has severe consequences for the persons involved. People in a similar situation are expressing their feelings of being doubly or even trebly punished: first they serve a prison sentence, then their residence permit is revoked, then they are taken into administrative detention with a view to expulsion. They have the feeling of not being given a second chance – a chance for reintegration into the country they have been residing in for a long time. They are forced to leave the country where they have grown up and they have suddenly become 'illegal'. They have the feeling that they are not receiving equal treatment compared to Belgian offenders who end up in prison. Hamid (pseudonym), who is staying in immigration detention in the Netherlands, where similar possibilities of revoking a residence permit exist, explains:

*'When I was young, I only hung out with Dutch boys. They also committed criminal offences. They showed me the way. I felt like I was part of their group. I thought I belonged here. We are all punished, but I am doubly punished.'*

Not only is expulsion increasingly used as an instrument of crime control, it is also portrayed in the media as such. Yet broader issues remain mostly out of the picture. Are societies not responsible for the inclusion of persons convicted with a prison sentence who have been legally residing in their territories during a certain amount of time? This question is rarely posed, let alone satisfactorily answered. But even leaving aside the question of reintegration, current practices also raise questions about fulfilling another aim of punishment: the prevention of recidivism. It is debatable whether sending people to a country where they have no place to stay, no family to rely upon and, in some cases, have never even visited before, can be considered as an effective ‘crime prevention strategy’. It looks more like merely a blunt ‘not in my backyard’ or ‘dumping’ policy. Moreover, when a former residence permit is revoked and an expulsion cannot be carried out due to diplomatic non-cooperation, people are ‘pushed into illegality’. They can no longer live their former life (for instance, working regularly) and can repeatedly be detained in immigration detention following police control after being released. In the end, these practices of migration control not only harm the individuals subjected to it, but also our society at large.

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# Belgian Children in Syria Should Not Pay for the Sins of Their Parents

by Marijke Van Buggenhout, Nadia Fadil and Els Dumortier

‘My 4-year-old niece, who lost her arm after a gunshot wound, asked her mom if the arm went to heaven and if she should now follow.’

Together with her little brother and sister, this toddler is one of the 70 Belgian children located in refugee camps in north-east Syria.<sup>1</sup> The living conditions of these children have been reported as dramatic. A multi-disciplinary humanitarian team visited the camps for the second time in June 2019 and reported a deterioration in the hygienic, sanitary and overall living conditions in the camps due to overpopulation, resulting in a decline of physical and mental health. The report indicates that most children suffer from chronic malnutrition, resulting in irreversible consequences for their growth and development.<sup>2</sup> By the end of 2019, five Belgian children were reported to have died in the camps. Although accurate figures do not exist, a large proportion of Western-European citizens in these detention camps consists of children under the age of ten.

From 2017 onwards, the *right of return* for these children of European ISIS fighters and militants has been the subject of heated discussion. European countries have been divided on how to deal with those who have been dubbed by some as ‘*the Children of the Caliphate*’. Though governments claim that these children should not be punished for their parents’ mistakes, and do have a right to repatriation, the hesitant and reluctant behaviour of several European countries, including Belgium, obliges us to conclude otherwise.

Most European governments agree on the need to rescue children from the situation in which they find themselves and have even proceeded with the repatriation of orphans and unaccompanied children. Belgium was one of the first countries to acknowledge

its moral responsibility to undertake all feasible measures to bring back children up to the age of ten from Syria. Rightfully so as, according to criminal law, juvenile justice systems, international human- and children's rights standards, children cannot be held responsible for the actions of their parents. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, member states even bear an active duty to protect children from all forms of violence.

But the return of *all* children remains a thorny issue. A central reason behind this ambivalent position has to do with the overwhelming hostility towards the possible return of the parents. Most of these parents have been condemned for participation in terrorist activities; officials fear that repatriation of the children would entail the risk of a return of the parents. Indeed, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that a personal relationship between a child and a parent is inalienable. Several officials have thus warned that a return of the children could imply a possibility for the parents to return. Some European countries such as Denmark, the UK and Belgium have even proceeded with revoking the nationality of the parents.

Regarding the repatriation, the consistent strategy of the European member states has been passivity and deferral of any possible action. Often the instability of the 'war zone' is invoked to legitimise a government's inaction. Yet, since December 2017 (the moment when the Belgian government announced the repatriation of the children), long periods of relative stability have passed. A succession of academics, doctors, psychologists and journalists have regularly visited the camps. Compared to such initiatives to reach out to and help these Belgian children, the government's argument 'we are doing all we can' does look pale.

In the face of the growing pressure from civil society, the press and several lawsuits, the Belgian state has recently opted for a new approach: a repatriation of the children without their mothers. This means that mothers are coerced into 'deliberately' giving away their children in spite of the fact that separating children from their mothers breaches a number of fundamental psychosocial and judicial principles. In a context of armed conflict, the mother is often the only care figure left. This is exactly why the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child forbids the separation of children and parents in armed conflicts.

Hence, it needs to be concluded that, in reality, *these children are paying for the sins of their parents*. To completely understand what is going on, one needs to realize that a

‘state of exception’ is at play here: a situation where certain citizens are deprived of their constitutional rights such as the right to a fair trial and due process. The parents, who are considered ‘terrorists’, have been designated as public enemies and their citizenship rights are being questioned. The vehement opposition of most European states to repatriate and prosecute them within their own territories (and in several cases to oust them from their nationality), illustrates this international tendency to tighten human and citizen’s rights when it comes to terrorism offences. Hence the children are bearing the consequences of this ‘state of exception.’

This state of exception is also legitimised by the idea that departing to Syria is seen as the adoption of an extremist and dangerous lifestyle that is incompatible with ‘our’ European values. This justifies the idea that we should keep them as far away as possible from Europe or by ousting them from their nationality. Though one can seriously question whether departing to the Caliphate should imply a loss of constitutional rights, it is even harder to maintain that (new-born) children have also made a choice in favour of the Caliphate and hence deserve to lose their constitutional rights. An often-heard argument in the debates around the children is that their exposure to ‘extremist’ worldviews will turn them into a potential hazard. In so doing, we witness a reversal of the ‘right to protection’: rather than benefiting from the right to be protected, their ‘assumed’ early socialization in Syria is what turns them into a hazard.

As a consequence, the condition of ‘exceptionality’ extends not only to the parents, but also to the children. These children are stripped of almost every right imaginable: their right to education, health, protection, citizenship, and – by leaving them in extremely dangerous circumstances – even their right to life. Together with the public framing of these children as potentially dangerous and undesired amongst ‘us’, it becomes increasingly clear that these children are being severely damaged, not because they have committed terrorist acts or shown extremist behaviour themselves, but simply for being born of parents who are seen as such.

*Exodus 20.5: You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.*

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- 1 These children find themselves in detention sections in the camps Al Hol and Al Roj.
  - 2 Orthopaedic surgeon in the Report of the 2<sup>nd</sup> humanitarian mission to North-East Syria. <https://voice.sayno.be/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Rapport-2-Missie-Syri%C3%AB-juni-2019.pdf>

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**Zohar Gabriel** is a PhD researcher at the Department of Educational Sciences (EDWE) at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. His research focuses on the relationship between education and risk factors in the process of radicalization, leading to violent extremism.

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The pictures in this book and on the cover were taken by photographer **Esmā Alouet**. Born and raised in Genk, Esmā currently lives in Amsterdam. Having graduated as a clinical psychologist from KU Leuven, she draws inspiration from both her Moroccan cultural background and her experience as a psychologist in addiction therapy. Her photography is dynamic, establishing an equilibrium between fashion, portraits and stills.

You can discover more of her work at [www.ayashiatsu.com](http://www.ayashiatsu.com).

# DESCRIPTION OF THE PHOTOGRAPHS

- Front cover: "Pasionaria". Freedom of speech loudspeaker, dedicated to all migrants by Emilio Lopez-Mencheró - Stalingradlaan, Brussels. By Esma Alouet.
- p. 30 (top left): "Madame Chapeau" by Tom Frantzen. Madame Chapeau is a character in a play called "Bossemans en Coppenolle" from 1938 - Mussenstraat, Brussels. By Esma Alouet.
- p. 30 (lower left): "Nouveau souffle ou le Congo bourgeonnant" by Aimé Mpane. Africa Museum, Tervuren. By Esma Alouet.
- p. 30 (top right): "De denker in alle staten" by Willy van den Dorpe - Campus VUB, Etterbeek. By Esma Alouet.
- p. 30 (lower right): "Het Zinneke" by Tom Frantzen - Karthuizersstraat, Brussels. By Esma Alouet.
- p. 38-39: The Channel (Kanaal) - Gentssesteenweg, Molenbeek. By Esma Alouet.
- p. 60-61: Reception Centre Fedasil "Petit Chateau" - Negende Linistraat, Brussels. By Esma Alouet.
- p. 76-77: "Centres fermés, rêves ouverts" by Freddy Tsimba - Africa Museum, Tervuren. By Esma Alouet.
- p. 112: Picture of Fatima Mernissi, Moroccan sociologist. By Roeland Fossen.
- p. 126-127: Atelier de la Dalle - Brigitinnestraat, Brussels. By Esma Alouet.
- p. 149: Fresco by Propaganza - Boondaelsesteenweg, Elsene. By Esma Alouet.
- p. 164-165: Skatepark Ursulinnenplein, Brussels. By Esma Alouet.
- p.176-177: Premetrostation Lemonnier, Brussels. By Esma Alouet.
- p.198 (top left): Lloyd Georgelaan. Changed to George Floyd during BLM-protests, Brussels. By Esma Alouet.
- p. 198 (lower left): Patrice Lumumbaplein. Matongewijk, Brussels. By Esma Alouet.
- p. 198 (top right): Leopold II laan, stained June 2020 - Molenbeek. By Esma Alouet.
- p. 198 (lower right): Statue of King Baudouin, stained. June 2020. Sint-Goedelekathedraal, Brussels. By Esma Alouet.
- p. 218-219: Fresco George Floyd by Novedead - Jules de Trooz-intersection, Brussels. By Esma Alouet.
- Fresco Ihsane Jarfi by Anthea Missy - Sint-Kristoffelsstraat, Brussels. By Esma Alouet.



