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Crisis and Conjuncture

Climate, Borders, Politics

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Crisis and Conjuncture

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Editorial

Lars Cornelissen and Baindu Kallon

We live in an age of overlapping and cascading crises. Resurgent authoritarianism, bloody conflict and genocide, and spiralling climate catastrophe, each of which feeds off each of the others, are putting perceived humanitarian norms under severe strain while causing widespread social and economic turmoil.

One less visible aspect of deep historical crisis is that it often confounds thought. As crisis crashes through the social order many received categories of understanding prove inadequate to capture the shifts taking place or to theorise the unexpected and the unprecedented. This can leave social analysis reeling, dazed by interpretative whiplash.

The great Marxist theorist Stuart Hall used the concept of conjuncture to make sense of the overlapping crises of the late 1970s. For Hall, conjuncture refers to the coming together in a historical moment of disparate and frequently conflicting social, intellectual, and material forces that fundamentally threaten the existing social order. Conjunctural analysis, on this view, is the

work of disentangling these forces, tracing out their histories and logics, theorising how they interlink, and adjusting our conceptual frameworks accordingly. This work is neither easy nor pleasant: it demands of us, Hall wrote, echoing Antonio Gramsci, that we 'attend "violently" to things as they are, without illusions or false hopes, if we are to transcend the present'.[1]

Conjunctural analysis is less a *method for* than an *attitude towards* social analysis. It offers ways to resist intellectual paralysis, to prevent the contradictions and tensions that always follow crisis from short-circuiting our ability to theorise its logics. Indeed, for Hall, conjunctural analysis labours to demystify those aspects of a crisis that appear, on their face, to be out of place or in tension with each other by specifying their social and historical determinants and tracing out the logics according to which they coalesce, sometimes still in emergent forms, in the present moment.

It is in this spirit of demystification that, in October 2024, the ISRF convened a conference on the broad theme of **Migration and Democracy in a Time of Climate Crisis**. Held in Warsaw, Poland, the conference hosted a group of researchers whose work, though from varying disciplinary backgrounds and perspectives, is united by a concern to think through the overlapping crises of the present. Our guiding premise was that our three titular themes—climate, migration, and politics—cannot be adequately theorised in isolation from each other or from a single disciplinary vantage point.

This issue of the ISRF Bulletin brings together ten of the papers that were presented in October. It is the second issue to do so: issue 31, **Migration Myths and Realities**, contains a further six.[2] While that issue stages a deep dive into questions concerning migration, this

1 Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London 1988: Verso), 14.

2 Issue 31 of the ISRF Bulletin can be accessed at https://issuu.com/isrf/docs/bulletin_31_-_migration_myths_and_realities.

issue takes a broader perspective and explores the links, tensions, and affinities between migration and issues of climate and politics.

This issue opens with a contribution by Yasminah Beebeejaun, which takes us to Britain to explore post-war urban planning amid the arrival of Caribbean and South and East Asian migrants to the UK. By centring race, Beebeejaun unpacks how Britain's colonial history of spatial segregation shaped the post-war reconstruction of British cities. Beebeejaun links urban policy to racial disparities to revisit urbanisation in the UK and examine how Black and ethnic minority communities organised to counter their exclusion from urban spaces.

The second contribution is by Nicolás Águila, Paula Haufe and Joscha Wullweber and forwards a proposal for a green international monetary system that would be better equipped than the existing system to tackle the rapidly escalating global climate crisis. Drawing inspiration from John Maynard Keynes's work on a 'bancor' currency, the authors propose an 'ecor' currency that would form the pivot of an international system to finance the global green transition.

Angelika Fortuna's piece also speaks to the inadequacies of the existing international governance paradigm. She deconstructs the harmful myths that undergird much of the current discourse on migration trends in Europe. Locating current migratory patterns against the longer history of European colonialism, Fortuna reminds us that many of the economic pressures that cause people to migrate are rooted in the long history of colonial extraction. She proposes that we view migration in the context of the right to development, which requires us to radically rethink the global governance architecture as it currently exists, which serves principally to entrench rather than challenge global inequalities.

In her contribution, Lara Montesinos Coleman connects the global rise of fascism to the corporate capture of democracy and legal

systems. Her article traces how corporate elites reoriented the liberal 'rule of law' to serve their own interests. With multinational companies at the centre of the international order, Coleman reflects on the meaning of 'rights' and how communities are fighting back.

Dale Mineshima-Lowe asks whether social media can play a democratising role in building civil resilience surrounding such issues as climate change in non-democratic countries. Focussing on Myanmar, which transitioned back to military rule in 2021, she explores trends in social media traffic in recent years to ask what scope there is for citizen action on climate change.

In their piece, Ana Budimir, Ružica Šimić Banović and Valentina Vučković shift our focus back onto the theme of migration. They explore how government officials in Eastern European countries, which are currently experiencing significant population decline due to outward migration, approach diasporic communities abroad. Systematically reviewing different diaspora engagement policies, they note a shift towards diaspora investment strategies and ask what this shift implies for future policies.

Sean Kippin's contribution also addresses policy responses to migration but focusses on how right-wing governments in Western and Southern Europe relate to border policies. Outlining what he calls the 'unvirtuous circle', Kippin argues that while right-wing border policy tends to fail in political terms, this failure then creates discursive space for right-wing tropes about elite failure and corruption. More often than not, this prompts a further swing to the right, the effects of which we see all around us.

Constantinos Repapis's contribution searches for optimism within the current polycrisis. Acknowledging the economic and environmental destruction caused by our current system, Repapis draws from the work of John Maynard Keynes to explore how we can begin radically reimagining capitalism. In doing so, Repapis

stresses the need for new ideas to address today's problems and to build a more sustainable future.

In his article, Artur Kula asks how in Poland public conceptions of national belonging have shifted over time, arguing that a mythical and ahistorical notion of Polishness has emerged that erases the centrality to Polish history of refugees and diasporas of various kinds. In the recent past, this erasure of refugee agency has come to dovetail with a swerve to the political right, underpinning discursive justifications for increasingly authoritarian border policies, especialy on Poland's eastern border. Kula holds out that a new conception of Polishness is needed, one that should emphasise the pivotal rule refugees have played in the country's history.

The final article of this issue, by Adam Balcer, speaks to the unfolding humanitarian crisis on the Poland-Belarus border, where, as explored in more detail in ISRF Bulletin 31, refugees from Africa and the Middle East are being met with increasingly violent, and likely illegal, forms of border policing. Offering a powerful overview of the way successive governments have approached migration, he shows that the election of the nominally progressive Tusk government in late 2023 has not led to a decline in xenophobia but has, if anything, further entrenched it.

Exploring the Contradictions of Planning in Post-War Britain

Race, Ethnicity, and the Post-Colonial City

Yasminah Beebeejaun

The British housing crisis that predated the Second World War was greatly exacerbated by the aerial bombardment of many towns and cities during the Blitz. The post-war situation called for radical measures from the incoming Labour administration in 1945. Key pieces of legislation included the 1946 New Towns Act, which laid the basis for the development of a series of new settlements, initially in a ring outside London to disperse population, and also the wide-reaching 1947 Planning Act, which created a framework for spatial planning, including the nationalization of development rights.[1]

1 See Y. Rydin, *Urban and environmental planning in the UK* (London 1998: Springer).

Whilst this story of post-war urban planning in the UK is well known, the wider context for the transformation of planning and the intricate connections between processes of urban change and Britain's colonial legacy have received much less attention. The vital contributions of the Windrush generation in the rebuilding of Britain after the Second World War have become increasingly acknowledged in recent decades.[2] These migrants held British citizen or subject status as part of the British empire, which gave them free entry to the UK as part of the 1948 British Nationality Act. We know, however, that the majority of arrivals from the Caribbean and South and East Asia, known as the New Commonwealth, had to endure poor conditions when they arrived in Britain and that they faced significant racism and discrimination. Despite intense labour shortages, many people opposed their arrival and a de facto colour bar operated in many arenas of life. Housing in particular was one of the areas of fiercest public hostility and the slow pace of reconstruction and rebuilding only intensified these sentiments.

My current research explores the post-war planning system that developed as part of the wider incoming Labour Government's welfare state. I examine how urban planning addressed these contentious racial issues and the ongoing impacts this has had for the spatialization of racial and ethnic minorities in Britain. A key focus is the less explored relationship between post-war urban planning in Britain and its colonial operations as part of imperial development. The lack of attention to the connections between these two fields is surprising when we consider that prominent British planners undertook commissions in numerous overseas colonies that practiced forms of racial segregation. Many others served in colonial administrations before returning to the UK during the era of decolonization. Geographers Ruth Craggs and Hannah Neate, for instance, have described how ten out of the

2 See, for example, I. Patel, *We're here because you were there: Immigration and the end of empire* (London 2022: Verso Books).

total 28 post-war new towns in the UK were run by former colonial administrators.[3]

The dominant narrative has understandably focused on planning's role in the urgent post-war reconstruction of Britain as an inclusive and successful project. The discipline of planning has continued to show little interest in questions of race and racism in British cities.[4] As an ISRF Mid-Career Fellow, I am currently completing a book project that brings questions of race to the centre of planning historiography and questions the analytical separation of British planning from the colonial experience. I argue that British and colonial planning discourses are interconnected zones of operation. Whilst there has been a significant critique of imperial planning ideologies in formerly colonized societies from postcolonial and decolonial approaches there has thus far been only limited attention given to this imperial legacy in the shaping of post-war British cities.[5]

In the post-war era inner urban areas of slum housing were being demolished but housing construction was never able to meet the pace of demand. During this period tracts of dilapidated housing became part of what were termed the "twilight zones" as new anxieties emerged over the state of many inner urban areas. The reconstruction of British cities became an increasingly racialized dimension to policy-making which unfavourably contrasted white British populations with Black and ethnic minority communities. Government officials routinely drew on colonial stereotypes to consider that Black and minority communities were more content with lower living standards than the white British population.

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3 R. Craggs, & H. Neate, 'Post-colonial careering and urban policy mobility: between Britain and Nigeria, 1945–1990', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 42, no. 1 (2017): 44-57.

4 See R. Gale, & H. Thomas, *Race, faith and planning in Britain* (Abingdon 2020: Routledge) for a discussion.

5 See Y. Beebeejaun, 'Provincializing planning: Reflections on spatial ordering and imperial power', *Planning theory*, 21, no. 3 (2022): 248-268 for a discussion.

Integral to my study is a greater understanding how colonial spatial segregation, underpinned by racial imaginaries of European superiority, did not disappear during formal processes of decolonization but became absorbed or reformulated within post-war Britain. Although the actions of other parts of the state, particularly the police, have been widely explored in relation to the control of urban space, the role of urban planning in the management of immigration and resettlement has received far less attention. Ethnic and racial minorities became uncritically accepted as a key indicator of urban decline by policy-makers by the time the inner city was becoming a focus of attention.

Alongside these policy developments, the academic fields of planning and urban studies were in a state of upheaval in the 1960s and 1970s. Fields such as urban sociology were developing alongside, but often in tension with, the planning discipline, which was in turn increasingly preoccupied with its institutional status within the expanding higher education system. By the 1970s these fields diverged even further as planners turned their attention to thinking about processes of rationalized decision-making to intervene within the inner cities. By the 1980s and the Thatcher era, the planning discipline had undergone a further shift away from progressive ideals. The legacy of British colonial planning commissions in the post-war period by key figures such as Patrick Abercrombie reflected the problematic ideas around ethnic and racial minorities. The prominent planning academic Peter Hall, for example, promoted ideas such as enterprise zones that drew on essentialist conceptions of racialized difference from the colony of Hong Kong wherein some ethnic groups were perceived as being more "entrepreneurial" and better suited to the revitalization of urban areas.[6]

6 See for example P. Hall (ed.), *The inner city in context: the final report of the Social Science Research Council Inner Cities Working Party* (London 1981: Heinneman) and P. Hall, 'The inner cities dilemma', *New Society*, February 3 (1977): 223-225.

In contrast, postcolonial insights into urban planning, inspired by Dipesh Chakrabarty and other scholars, have been increasingly significant in helping us examine the multiple ways that colonialism has impacted on understandings of racial and ethnic difference in the shaping of British cities. If British planning studies have rarely focused on the influence of colonial planning ideologies on state approaches towards postwar settlement of Black and ethnic minority communities, then a vibrant field of work has emerged within related disciplines.[7] Black British studies emerged with important sociological contributions led by Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, and others engaging with the construction of race in Britain, drawing on the experiences of New Commonwealth communities and their descendants.[8] There are also earlier studies from the 1960s onwards that directly research racial discrimination in relation to housing and the operation of a de facto colour bar in British cities. The renowned urban sociologist Ruth Glass, better known for her work on gentrification, considered that the prejudice against Black people in London across multiple spheres of everyday life demanded urgent attention. Yet these studies and insights seem to have developed in parallel to the preoccupations of the British planning discipline that remained tethered to ideas of the public interest as negating the need for specific interventions on race, gender, and other vectors of difference.[9] An important field of new historical scholarship has explored how anti-immigration politicians activated a narrative that new arrivals from the Commonwealth were second-class citizens who should

7 D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial thought and historical difference* (Princeton 2000: Princeton University Press).

8 P. Gilroy, *There ain't no black in the Union Jack* (London 2013 [1987]: Routledge); S. Hall, *The fateful triangle: Race, ethnicity, nation* (Cambridge 2017: Harvard University Press).

9 See Gale & Thomas, *Race, faith and planning in Britain* and Y. Beebeejaun, 'What's in a nation? Constructing ethnicity in the British planning system', *Planning Theory & Practice*, 5, no. 4 (2004): 437–451 for a discussion.

not benefit from the welfare state or how the presence of migrants became an indicator for the inner city itself.[10]

These interventions have more critically analysed the interrelationships between urban planning and how race was represented through the prism of incompatible differences, justifying ideas of de facto segregation. In my ongoing research project, I build on these strands of work in new ways by emphasizing the centrality of urban planning thinking to new patterns of racial and ethnic exclusion in post-war British cities. In particular, I stress the need to understand the dual dynamics of colonial governmentalities within the planning system that connect empire and metropole across a series of architectonic, cultural, political, and ideological spheres. At the same time, people of colour were organising to help build ethnic and racial communities and to tackle forms of racialized disadvantage. These important movements emerged from within the inner city. I look to contrast these important aspects to Black British history with the prevalent government discourses that continue to devalue areas of Black and minority presence. There remains an urgent need for British planning to re-evaluate its own historical legacy within these debates. The postcolonial planning scholar, Libby Porter, writes about unlearning the colonial cultures of planning in the Australian context.[11] Her insights can be extended to the British and wider European context. These new insights challenge the limitations of current thinking about race and ethnic difference in UK thinking. In addition, revisiting Britain's colonial histories in the

10 A. Kefford, 'Disruption, destruction and the creation of 'the inner cities': the impact of urban renewal on industry, 1945–1980', *Urban History*, 44, no. 3 (2017): 492-515; J. Rhodes & L. Brown, 'The rise and fall of the 'inner city': Race, space and urban policy in postwar England', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 45, no. 17 (2019): 3243-3259; C. Schofield, *Enoch Powell and the making of postcolonial Britain* (Cambridge 2013: Cambridge University Press); R. Waters, 'Respectability and race between the suburb and the city: an argument about the making of 'inner-city' London', *Urban History*, 50, no. 2 (2023): 214-231.

11 L. Porter, *Unlearning the colonial cultures of planning* (Abingdon 2016 [2010]: Routledge).

light of ongoing racial disadvantage offers further opportunities to develop a critical historiography of UK planning.

My project highlights the question of race within post-war planning. My ambition is to more fully articulate the role that planning has played in facilitating racial disparities within post-war urban Britain. To do so I am turning to a range of archival sources from national and local government as well as important repositories of histories of racial and ethnic communities such as those held in the Black Cultural Archives and the George Padmore Institute in London. I draw on decolonial and postcolonial theory to revisit the negative planning and political depictions of inner urban areas to set out how Black and minority ethnic communities have been pivotal to creating the infrastructure to enable everyday life in Britain and to build innovative forms of anti-racist praxis.

Towards a Green International Monetary System

The Ecor and a Green World Central Bank

Nicolás Águila, Paula Haufe
and Joscha Wullweber

Every country around the world is affected by the climate crisis. The sustainable transformation necessary to combat climate change is an all-encompassing process requiring deep economic, political, social, cultural, and ecological changes in the way our society is organized. One of the required dimensions of the transformation process involves finding ways to ensure the availability of financial flows needed for sustainable investments.

The financial means to pursue a sustainable transformation, however, are very unjustly distributed: while high-income countries have the capacity to create the money needed, middle- and low-income countries do not. This state of affairs is particularly problematic considering that in general Global South countries have been contributing the least to worldwide carbon emissions while being the most affected by adverse ecological and climate impacts including floods, droughts, and hurricanes, among others.

Lacking the capacity to create necessary financing, Global South countries require access to foreign currency to import essential goods and services for the green transformation. Estimates show that emerging and developing countries will need to spend an annual amount of around 1 trillion US dollars by 2025 and 2.4 trillion US dollars by 2030 to pursue investments crucial to limit global warming to the target of 1.5 degrees.[1] However, to date, excluding China, total climate finance to emerging and developing economies stands at 244 billion US dollars.[2] Additionally, Global South countries are already highly indebted and the cost of capital (the rate of return required by investors) is two to three times as large in the Global South as it is in the Global North.[3] Recent research shows that under these circumstances foreign financial investors are unlikely to finance the green investments lacking in the Global South. This is the case, above all, because particularly in areas such as environmental conservation, restoration, and

1 A. Bhattacharya, M. Dooley, H. Kharas & C. Taylor, *Financing a big investment push in emerging markets and developing economies for sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery and growth* (London & Washington, D.C. 2022: Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment & Brookings Institution).

2 B. Naran, B. Buchner, M. Price, S. Stout, M. Taylor & D. Zabeida, *Global Landscape of Climate Finance 2024: Insights for COP 29* (2024: Climate Policy Initiative). Online at: https://www.climatepolicyinitiative.org/publication/global-landscape-of-climate-finance-2024/

3 A. Persaud 'Unblocking the green transformation in developing countries with a partial foreign exchange guarantee', Climate Policy Initiative Working Paper 2024. Online at: https://www.climatepolicyinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/An-FX-Guarantee-Mechanism-for-the-Green-Transformation-in-Developing-Countries.pdf.

protection, many sustainable projects are inherently high risk with little or no profit potential.

In other words, the level of global finance has fallen far too short to effectively finance the required transformation. Not surprisingly, calls to reform the international monetary system have been growing in recent years. In June 2023, at the Paris Summit for a New Global Financing Pact, UN Secretary-General António Guterres characterized the global financial architecture as "outdated, dysfunctional, and unjust". He called for "a new Bretton Woods moment—a moment for Governments to come together, re-examine and re-configure the global financial architecture for the twenty-first century".[4] This is also the goal of the Bridgetown Initiative for the Reform of the Global Financial Architecture launched in 2022 by the Prime Minister of Barbados, Mia Mottley.

With this goal in mind, and inspired by Keynes' bancor proposal, we make the case for the introduction of a global special purpose money to overcome the constraints of financing green projects in the Global South.

Money creation, power, and global currency hierarchies

Considering how to create global financing opportunities for sustainable transformation requires examining power relations inscribed in the global financial architecture.[5] In principle, there is no natural limit to the amount of money that can be created. In theory, any green project is fundable as long as necessary resources are available, and the actors involved are willing to accept the money in question. However, not all monies are

4 United Nations, 'Global Financial Architecture Has Failed Mission to Provide Developing Countries with Safety Net, Secretary-General Tells Summit, Calling for Urgent Reforms' 22 June 2023. Online at: https://press.un.org/en/2023/sgsm21855.doc.htm.

5 J. Wullweber, *Central Bank Capitalism: Monetary Policy in Times of Crisis* (Stanford, CA 2024: Stanford University Press).

created equal. The US dollar holds a central place in the current international monetary system. Located at the very top of the global currency pyramid, it is the unit of account in which most global trade and finance are denominated, and the currency used for reserve accumulation. Most importantly in the context of this article, the US dollar is the medium of payment in which international balances are settled. Accordingly, one of the largest hurdles to financing sustainable and just transformation is the need on the part of Global South countries to acquire US dollars to import and pay for the goods, services, and technologies they require but do not (yet) produce for the sustainable transformation. Although the ultimate aim of transformation processes is certainly to strengthen local production and markets, the import of certain goods and services is unavoidable, and will likely remain so, at least for some time to come. To move towards renewable energy sources, for example, countries need to import solar panels, wind turbines, and other commodities that they may not yet have the capacity to produce themselves.

Most Global South countries, however, either lack dollar reserves or cannot obtain the amount they need because they do not have sufficient trade surpluses. Access to foreign currency credit is either not an option or very expensive, and many of these countries are already highly indebted. As a result, proposals to provide finance to the Global South will continue to fall short in ambition unless a new, non-hierarchical international monetary system is created in accordance with the principles of global justice.

Keynes' international clearing union and bancor proposal

In the early 1940s, John Maynard Keynes developed a proposal for shaping the post-war international monetary system in a way that would avoid financial crises in the long run and balance global trade. His idea involved the creation of an International Clearing Union (ICU) that would allow countries running a commercial

deficit to temporarily hold debit balances with surplus countries.[6] According to his plan, both deficit and surplus countries would be members of the ICU, which would have its own unit of account: the bancor. Bancors were designed to exist only for the purpose of settling international balances between monetary authorities (central banks, for example) and not for private use between individuals, companies, or banks. All countries participating in the union were to have ICU accounts through which they could transfer bancors to one another so as to settle external balances. Membership in the union would likewise require countries to commit to accepting bancors as a means of payment. Accordingly, whenever one country incurred a deficit with another, the former would be debited with bancors from its account at the ICU and the latter would receive a corresponding bancor credit. This would automatically expand the system's bancor reserves. Implied in this arrangement is the assumption that the amount of money in the system would adjust endogenously to the real demands of trade and would not be exogenously determined by a pre-existing amount of money. Viewed from a different angle, the arrangement was designed to give countries a certain amount of flexibility in financing their trade deficits while allowing them sufficient time to sort out their external accounts.

Keynes' plan also dealt with the question of how countries would restore equilibrium in their balance of payments. It opposed a contractionary adjustment that would burden deficit countries by reducing their balance of payments deficit through the reduction of imports, the devaluation of their currency, and the adjustment of their fiscal and monetary policy. Instead, it required both debtor and creditor countries to make adjustments to establish equilibrium. The key reason for proposing symmetric adjustment stems from the fact that the sum of all surpluses equals the sum

6 J.M. Keynes, 'The Keynes Plan: Proposals for an international clearing union', in: N. Lamoreaux & I. Shapiro (eds.), *Bretton Woods Agreements: Together with scholarly commentaries and essential historical documents* (New Haven, CT 2019: Yale University Press).

of all deficits. As a result, if the latter is considered a problem, then the former should be as well. According to Keynes, contractionary adjustment is detrimental not only for deficit countries but also for surplus countries since the reduction of imports by a deficit country leads to a reduction in world trade. In such a situation, surplus countries face a reduction in exports with negative consequences for their output and employment. To remedy this detriment, Keynes advocated for the expansion of international trade to ensure that all economies produce at full employment. To achieve this, Keynes' proposal aimed to restore equilibrium by incentivizing surplus countries to boost their spending in deficit countries. Adjustment in this sense is expansionary. When spending is increased, credit balances do not lie idle in the coffers of the surplus countries, but are used to expand world trade for mutual benefit.

Towards a Green Bretton Woods system with the ecor at the centre[7]

Times of crises, like the situation that prompted the founding of the Bretton Woods system after the Second World War, often lead to "critical conjunctures" that mark the politicization of structures that would otherwise seem almost impossible to change.[8] Such a scenario may once again develop in the foreseeable future if the climate crisis continues to escalate.

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7 We use the reference to Bretton Woods to indicate the possibility of an international monetary system arising as a result of international coordination that achieved a certain level of financial stability. However, we acknowledge that the historical founding process excluded many countries of the Global South. Moreover, the system that came about as the outcome of those negotiations is based on the US dollar, which already constitutes an inherent impediment to sustainable development. Finally, our concept is not in any way intended to replicate or supersede the currently remaining Bretton Woods institutions, the World Bank, or the International Monetary Fund.

8 R. Eckersley, 'Greening states and societies: from transitions to great transformations', *Environmental Politics* 30, no. 1-2 (2021): 245–265.

To overcome one of the largest problems in terms of financing sustainable transformation, we build on Keynes' plan with the overarching aim to develop a supranational arrangement that would provide countries especially, but not only, from the Global South with the financial leeway they need to import green goods, services, and technologies essential to achieve the objectives of sustainable transformation. Towards this aim, we propose the creation of a Green World Central Bank (GWCB) embedded within a Green international monetary system that could issue its own unit of account, which we call the ecor, fixed to the dollar or other assets. National currencies would be fixed to the ecor but at adjustable exchange rates. Because ecors would not be convertible into US dollars or any other currency, they would only be valid within the system. This would eliminate any risk of a run on the GWBC.

Under our proposal, all participating countries would have an account at the GWCB. When a country needs to import green goods or services (for example, solar panels or wind turbines), it would ask the GWCB for a loan in ecors. If accepted, the GWCB would create ecors through the act of lending by digitally crediting a country's GWCB account at a zero or very low interest rate. The importing country would then transfer the ecors to the GWCB account of the exporting country to pay for the imports that it needs. In this way, the system allows for financing a necessary trade for the green transformation that would have otherwise not happened. This would alleviate financial constraints and provide the elasticity necessary to finance sustainable projects.

In the system we propose, projects would need to be approved by both the national government and the GWCB. Therefore, only those meeting the internationally agreed sustainable standards would have access to funding. This would ensure a built-in limit to the quantitative expansion of ecors. More importantly, the Green Bretton Woods System would give deficit countries more autonomy to actively advance their national endeavours towards

sustainable transformation without relying on the benevolence of international donors, conditional loans from international financial institutions, or private, profit-motivated financial institutions. This would contribute to the development of Southern sovereignty, allowing Global South countries to shape their own transformation.

Assuming that the sustainable transformation will be a gradual and time-consuming process, the design of the system should take into account the fact that in some countries transformation is likely to be a lengthy process involving significant deficits, while in others there will be sustained periods of surplus. This should not be a problem since ultimately all countries will benefit from climate change mitigation and adaptation, not least because of its money-saving potential. For the system to work in the long run, however, countries in need of funds in the short term would eventually have to reverse their foreign trade position to repay their debts. This, in turn, implies that the productive structure of deficit countries would have to become competitive enough so as to be able to export and earn the ecors needed for repayment. In our proposal, this would be achieved by an international increase in demand, leading to an expansionary adjustment of imbalances. In order to avoid replication through the system of existing patterns of ecologically unequal exchange, mechanisms would be required to encourage surplus country spending on sustainable activities. As ecors can only be spent in the system (not convertible into dollars or other outside currencies), surplus countries have an incentive to spend their accumulated balances in other countries, creating further demand and positive loopback effects. Surplus countries might be reluctant to join the Green Bretton Woods System if they were unable to find an attractive way to spend their credits. The larger the system were to become, however, the more possibilities there would be for surplus countries to use their ecor credits. Thus, as more and more countries come to accept and use the system, trust in the ecor would grow.

As our proposal specifically focuses on special purpose money, it is meant to supplement rather than supersede the current international monetary system. It could, however, be a first step in setting up the infrastructure required to completely overcome the current hierarchy, and to ultimately replace the current international monetary system with a more globally just system. During the transformation to a sustainable economy, the area of circulation of ecors would gradually expand and eventually displace the US dollar and other currently dominant currencies. Our proposal aligns with and extends proposals to reform the international monetary system that are currently being considered, above all, by the UN and the Bridgetown Initiative.

In summary, the Green Bretton Woods System with a Green World Central Bank and a supranational currency, the ecor, at its core would constitute a strong force with the potential of promoting sustainable and just transformation on a global scale. It would make it possible for countries of the Global South to move towards sustainable investments and create green jobs, thus rendering their economies more sustainable. It introduces an enabling structure capable of overcoming current constraints on financing climate change adaptation and mitigation, while reducing loss and damage and driving the global transition towards zero greenhouse gas emissions. Without such a system, shortages of hard currencies such as the US dollar make necessary investments impossible. Furthermore, the proposal would allow producers of green goods and services to secure additional sources of demand which would also benefit their domestic economies. Accordingly, the ecor system would benefit not only deficit, but also surplus countries.

Deconstructing Migration as Connected Histories and Right to Development

Angelika Fortuna

Media portrayals of a migration crisis offer a highly simplified version of what is going on. Boats reaching the Mediterranean shores, desperate migrants waiting for entry at the border, everyday violence, chaos and casualties: these scenes play out on repeat in our media

outlets, framing the 'surge' of immigrants as crisis of the twenty-first century and the most divisive issue in Western politics today. Meanwhile, another media clip displays what appears to be a crisis situation in recipient countries; immigrants taking advantage of the welfare system, plotting terror attacks, causing housing shortages, increasing inflation, and so on and so forth. It offers a stark reminder of how easy it is to scapegoat others as a divisive political strategy in times of crisis, facilitated by public fear and enshrined by propaganda. History can absolutely confirm how this dynamic works.

If the previous global pandemic tells us anything, it is that we are increasingly interlinked with one another's crises. Applying this lesson, *interlinkedness* would be my approach if we are to treat migration as a crisis. The first proposition that deserves our attention is that the migration crisis is "not independent of the economic system in which it occurs and recurs."[1] Our economic system has long been a cause of stark global inequality, with migration as a direct effect or reflection of that fact.[2] Millions of poor individuals and families leave their home countries in search of new livelihoods, frequently pursuing intercontinental migration to improve their income in wealthy destination countries.[3]

But there are deeper mechanisms at work here. There is nothing inherently natural about inequality: poor countries (which is to say sending countries) do not remain poor because of their geographical location, nor does it have anything to do with their populations' intelligence, nor with reduced agricultural yields caused by climatic change. There are close links between resource grabs and wealth accumulation at a global level, proving that

1 F. Obeng-Odoom, *Global Migration beyond Limits* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 95.

2 R. Black, C. Natali & J. Skinner, 'Migration and Inequality', World Bank Background Paper (2005), accessible at: https://hdl.handle.net/10986/9172.

3 T. Faist, 'Cross-Border migration and social inequalities', *Annual Review of Sociology,* 42, no. 1 (2016): 323–346.

impoverishment is not natural but made and much migration is enforced to mobilise labour and capital. Proponents of the critical world systems approach have touched upon (un)just distribution of world resources, emphasising how structural penetration and destabilisation of peripheral areas generate the conditions that facilitate mass displacement. For decades, interference in foreign affairs in the form of wars of aggression and monopolistic trade policies have been more than sufficient in perpetuating resource crisis at the expense of poorer nations. Seeking protection or a sustainable livelihood elsewhere then becomes necessary for survival. Yet, the predominant migration myth turns the narrative of "who interferes with whom" upside down, as illustrated by the following speech by Josep Borrell:

> Yes, Europe is a Garden. [...] The rest of the world [...] is not exactly a Garden. The rest of the world, most of the rest of the world, is a Jungle. And the jungle could invade the Garden. And the Gardeners should take care of it, should take care of the Garden. But they will not protect the garden by walls, by building walls. A nice, small Garden surrounded by high walls in order to prevent the Jungle coming in is not going to be a solution because the Jungle has a strong growth capacity and the wall will never be high enough in order to protect the Garden. The Gardeners have to go to the Jungle. Europeans have to be much more engaged with the rest of the world. Otherwise, the rest of the world will invade us, by different ways and means.[4]

4 Josep Borrell was a High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs & Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (2019-2024). Quoted from https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-diplomatic-academy-opening-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-inauguration-pilot_en.

On Colonial Surplus and "Migrating Language"

Let us not forget *who began invading whom* in the first place. Invading for resource exploitation was the main feature of European colonialism, and set world development on the unequal trajectory it is still on today. Colonialism orchestrated mass resource exploitation to fuel European industrialisation in the 19th century. Scholars who have quantified the monetary value of gains from colonial dispossession, adjusted for present inflation and interest rates, argue that plundered silver from Spanish colonies could be worth up to $US165 trillion,[5] Britain drained $US45 trillion of wealth from India,[6] and Dutch rule in Indonesia produced a $US5.123 billion colonial surplus.[7] We can expect an even more staggering figure of gains from African colonies. It is also worth noting that colonial governments shipped 12 million Africans to the Americas as part of the transatlantic slave trade, making European colonialism "the biggest forced migration in history",[8] not to mention slave economies in other colonies in Asia and Latin America.

European colonialism underpins an enduring connection between language and migration. Take a look at Africa's complex multilingualism, for instance. Colonial divide and rule strategies successfully facilitated the spread of European languages across the continent. Shortly after the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, when European powers started to exploit and territorialise Africa more systematically, African workers from local villages developed a hybrid language to bridge communication with their European

5 J. Hickel, *The Divide: Global Inequality from Conquest to Free Markets* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2018).

6 D.R. Chaudhury, 'British looted $45 trillion from India in today's value: Jaishankar', *The Economic Times*, 3 October 2019, accessible at: https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/british-looted-45-trillion-from-india-in-todays-value-jaishankar/articleshow/71426353.cms?from=mdr.

7 A. Gordon, 'How Big was Indonesia's "Real" Colonial Surplus in 1878–1941?', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 42, no. 4 (2012): 560–580.

8 H. de Haas, *How migration really works: The facts about the most divisive issue in politics* (Basic Books, 2023), 31.

masters and workers from other regions who did not speak their native language.[9] Until this very day, the languages of colonisers, such as French, German, English and Portuguese remain widely spoken across African countries, even decades after their independence. There even exists a 'coloniser language map' of Africa.[10]

In the present time, language proficiency is integral to the European migrant integration regime. This is especially relevant with the dominant geographical direction of global migration flows, favouring OECD (which includes EU) countries as preferred destinations. Consequently, it is commonly known among overseas workers that European employers, businesses and visa point systems place a preference (sometimes a strict requirement) on having bilingual/multilingual skills to fill the gap of skilled labour shortages. It is notable that out of 86.7 million international migrants living in Europe in 2020,[11] Africans only account for 27,2% (7,2% of whom are refugees), compared to Asians (41%).[12] So African migrants are not overcrowding Europe, as claimed by the mainstream narrative. While formal migration pathways to Europe remain constrained, forcing many migrants to undertake dangerous crossings of the Mediterranean, the majority still use legal migration routes to emigrate.

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9 N.A. Hosani, 'Language Maps from Africa to Europe', *Acta Neophilologica*, 55, no. 1–2 (2022): 133–158.

10 Exploring Africa, 'Colonial Exploration and Conquest in Africa', accessible at: https://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/colonial-exploration-and-conquest-in-africa-explore/.

11 J. Chavda, 'Key facts about recent trends in global migration', Pew Research Center, 14 April 2024, accessible at: https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/12/16/key-facts-about-recent-trends-in-global-migration/.

12 Africa-Europe Foundation Debate, 'Africa and Europe: Facts and Figures on African Migrations', Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 18 March 2022, accessible at: https://www.wathi.org/africa-and-europe-facts-and-figures-on-african-migrations-mo-ibrahim-foundation-january-2022/.

Rethinking Migration as Right to Development

Evidence suggests it is the 'Garden' that continues to make the 'Jungle' increasingly dependent on the former for development. This routes back to the "underlying patterns of colonial appropriation and continues to define the global economy".[13] The unprecedented increase of South-North migration that started in the 1990s can be attributed to the implications of the neoliberal structural adjustment programmes imposed on countries in the Global South. Since its implementation in 1980-90s, Global South countries have lost hundreds of billions of potential GDP, resulting in debt burdens that lead to more borrowing to meet the IMF and World Bank conditions. It is not hard to see how the Global South keeps on servicing debt repayment at the expense of financing education, healthcare, and infrastructures required for basic development. Over the period of 1960 onward, the Global North has drained $US62 trillion (or worth $US152 trillion adjusted for inflation) from the Global South as a result of asymmetrical trade policy, Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) payments, cheap raw material, and unfair wages. In the context of climate justice, renewable energy infrastructures are no different than exploitation in search for raw materials such as cobalt, nickel, and silver needed to build a greener West, often at relatively low prices compared to the cost of environmental pollution, labour, and human suffering in the South.

It is important to recognise that migration and inequality come hand in hand in the contemporary development framework. However, when migration is translated into international development policy, development seems to be about practical means to reduce migration and less likely to close the gap of structural inequality. The underlying assumption is that if people

13 J. Hickel, D. Sullivan & H. Zoomkawala, 'Rich countries drained $152tn from the global South since 1960', *Al Jazeera*, 6 May 2021, accessible at: https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/5/6/rich-countries-drained-152tn-from-the-global-south-since-1960.

migrate to wealthier countries, a share of the world's resources would be distributed in the form of remittances, technology, skill and knowledge transfers, or investment, all of which can contribute to the development of the migrants' home countries. Policy solutions such as boosting economic development in the sending countries, aid assistance, education and training programmes, and trade cooperation are well encouraged and implemented to curb migration. This is where rethinking the *right to development* reinforces my second preposition, as there has been no sufficient proof that more development means less migration. Hein de Haas in his paper, "Turning the Tide? Why Development Will Not Stop Migration,"[14] provides some useful background. First, trade cooperation does not promote development in poor countries as it is inconsistent with protectionist trade policies of wealthy countries (such as the aforementioned TRIPS). Second, a lack of coherence between development aid and migration arises from diverging political purposes. He argues that development assistance has often been used to aid autocratic regimes in the form of weapons, provoking armed conflict that leads to mass displacement thus triggering refugee and humanitarian crisis. Third, most migration policies are inaccurately oriented at reducing poverty, as poverty is traditionally seen as a key driver of migration.

If international migration policy continues to prioritise an integrated development approach (which seems likely), I would argue that migration and/or development as distributive justice to global inequality can truly work only when there is a simultaneous, meaningful effort to reform the global governance architecture. This spirit partly goes back to the 1999 Battle of Seattle at the WTO Summit anti-MEI movement against the WTO, World Bank and IMF as core neoliberal institutions perpetuating global inequality since their inception.[15] Apart from that, I would argue that migration is a

14 H. de Haas, 'Turning the tide? Why development will not stop migration', *Development and Change*, 38, no. 5 (2007): 819–841.

15 A. Azedi & E. Schofer, 'Assessing the Anti-Globalization Movement: Protest Against the WTO, IMF, and World Bank in Cross-National Perspective', *The*

logical consequence when economies become more advanced. The advanced economic character of the European 'Garden', for example, requires the existence of a dichotomy between skilled and low-skilled labour, as disparities in competitiveness and skill differentiation grow. This encourages migration as a solution to ageing domestic populations whilst addressing the productivity gap.

Finally, while I agree that building walls will not protect the Garden, the Garden and Jungle parable precludes the interlinkedness of development and migration that one should not overlook. This makes me wonder whether migration truly is a crisis, or whether the real crisis is global inequality. If so, might such a parable perhaps serve to unite a group of thinkers, artists, and filmmakers, such as those we were present at the ISRF Conference in Warsaw, as its crassness makes us chuckle and invites us to deconstruct ideas of what global equity should or might reflect?

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Liberalism, Fascism and the Politics of Rights

(Or: Corporate Attempts to Obliterate Democracy, and Law as Terrain of Struggle)

Lara Montesinos Coleman

I

The Independent Social Research Foundation's recent conference, Migration and Democracy in a time of Climate Crisis, raised three issues that are increasingly entangled. In a context of spiralling inequality and declining class consciousness, the far right has fostered and thrived upon fears of societal breakdown. With brutal racist nationalisms now pervading even the more centrist

political parties, and climate breakdown escalating forced displacement around the world, more and more people have become targets of authoritarian crackdowns on migration. Meanwhile, unprecedented levels of Western complicity in the genocide in Gaza had, by early 2024, led to warnings of the disintegration of the 'rules-based international order'. 'It is as if the grave moral lessons of the Holocaust, of World War II, have been all but forgotten, and with them, the very core of the decades old 'Never Again' principle: its absolute universality, the notion that it protects us all or none of us', Agnès Callamard wrote in *Foreign Affairs* last year. 'This disintegration, so apparent in the destruction of Gaza and the West's response to it', Callamard continued, 'signals the end of the rules-based order and the start of a new era'.[1] Such warnings now seem to have reached their apotheosis with the second Trump administration in the United States.

Amid laments for liberal democracy and the 'rules-based order', it is easy to embrace liberal institutions and liberal languages of rights. Yet liberalism, even at its height, co-existed comfortably with imperial plunder and authoritarian rule. As thinkers from Aimé Césaire to Hannah Arendt emphasised, the fascism that came to Europe in the first part of the twentieth century had its antecedents in European colonialism. So too were the horrors of the Third Reich deeply influenced by the Jim Crow laws in the United States that denied rights to those with Black and Indigenous heritage and segregated them from white US citizens. Now, with the dramatic neo-fascist turn in the United States, acknowledgment of this history has led some to insist that any attempt to resist via the defence of liberal rights is doomed to complicity with the structural forces of oppression.

1 Agnès Callamard, 'Gaza and the End of the Rules-Based Order', *Foreign Affairs*, 15 February 2024. Online at: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/israel/gaza-and-end-rules-based-order.

I want to suggest in this article that *both* those embracing liberal rights *and* those rejecting rights as means of resistance tend to overlook the more recent roots of the resurgence of fascism: the corporate capture of democracy in the latter part of the 20th century. The prevailing focus on the rise of the far right—even when combined with analysis of historical relations between liberalism, colonialism and fascism—obscures the more recent history of dispossession upon which the far right has thrived. What is then excluded from scrutiny is how, over the past few decades, any democratic initiative against the interests of multinational capital has been quietly but effectively outlawed via the redesign of international law by corporate elites.[2] Recognition of this, and the fact that those same corporate elites are now planning for profitability in the face of apocalyptic levels of global warming,[3] has major implications for how we think about rights, resistance and the 'rules-based international order' in the face of fascist resurgence.

II

The 'rules-based order' is in fact relatively new terminology, popularised by Western politicians in the 2000s. It has been used to refer not only to the international human rights system and the 'decades old "Never Again" principle' but also to a redefinition of international 'rule of law' that, with the founding of the World Trade Organization in 1995, made the rights of property and investment sacrosanct. Even the establishment of the International Criminal Court in 2002 was part of a wider embrace of the principle of

2 I discuss this recent history at length in *Struggles for the Human: Violent Legality and the Politics of Rights* (Durham, NC 2024: Duke University Press), chapter 1.

3 See David Whyte, *Ecocide: Kill the Corporation Before It Kills Us* (Manchester 2020: Manchester University Press).

access to courts across frontiers that was part of this agenda.[4] In summary, the 'rules-based order' emerged as a shorthand for the rules required to enforce the tyranny of corporations, although an easy slippage in meaning enabled it to simultaneously gain connotations of universal human rights.

Prior to the foundation of the World Trade Organization, international financial institutions had already begun to redefine 'rule of law' as a 'neutral' means of ensuring growth that in reality implied 'harsh control of any individual threatening the bottom line of property rights'.[5] Whereas, previously, World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) interventions in countries' legal systems would have been considered illicit political interference, the redefinition of law as neutral and technical enabled a crucial shift. It became commonplace for aid to be conditioned on domestic legal reform, while corporations became *de facto* legislators through lobbying and consultancy. Democratic demands for alternatives to deregulation, privatisation and relentless pursuit of foreign direct investment were, in effect, blocked by the law itself. Combined with existing mechanisms such as Investor-State Dispute Settlement, established after the Second World War to limit the autonomy of decolonising nations, the result was skyrocketing levels of inequality and intensified dynamics of plunder, alongside authoritarian repression of those who sought to defend land and public services.

This profoundly anti-democratic conception of 'rule of law' has also had an important role to play in Europe's authoritarian drift. EU policy had already set the stage for the legal entrenchment of austerity measures when the 2010 Greek financial crisis hit. In exchange for a bailout package, the EU and IMF imposed strict

4 Christine Schwöbel-Patel, *Marketing Global Justice: The Political Economy of International Criminal Law* (Cambridge 2022: Cambridge University Press), 85-89, 181-185.

5 Ugo Mattei and Laura Nader, *Plunder: When the Rule of Law is illegal* (Malden, MA 2008: Basil Blackwell), 47.

conditions on Greece, reflecting a commitment to prioritising fiscal responsibility and labour market deregulation over public welfare, while the EU introduced stricter 'economic governance' regulations designed to pre-emptively enforce similar measures in other member states. By 2015, the President of the European Commission could declare that the Greek government under the political party Syriza would be unable to implement its economic programme, because 'there can be no democratic choice against the European treaties'. Britain, notwithstanding its 2020 exit from the EU, also has a track record of using legal targets to tie its own hands and subordinate national democratic choices to the goals of economic governance in the interests of monopolistic corporations.[6]

Much has been written about how austerity paved the way for the far right in Europe, as well as the United States. Yet it is vital not to downplay the significance of this legal entrenchment of the power of corporations. Indeed, the corporation itself is a legal construct, defined by principles of separate corporate personhood and limited liability of shareholders and bosses, that was 'designed to dehumanise social relationships and guarantee indifference to human suffering and environmental degradation'.[7] To focus on the visibly authoritarian, indeed fascistic, aspects of former liberal democracies is to miss these deeper, structural underpinnings of the present crisis. In continuity with long historical relations between liberalism, fascism and colonialism, the 'silent coup' by corporate power began as an attempt to preserve a colonial international division of labour in the wake of decolonisation.[8] With it, however, colonial-style relations of expropriation have boomeranged back into liberalism's historical strongholds.

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6 Robert Knox, 'Legalising the Violence of Austerity', in, *The Violence of Austerity,* edited by Vickie Cooper and David Whyte (London 2017: Pluto Press), 181–184.

7 Whyte, *Ecocide*, 65.

8 See Matt Kennard and Claire Provost, *Silent Coup: How Corporations Overthrew Democracy* (London 2023: Bloomsbury).

III

None of these phenomena are aberrations of liberalism but expressions of a perpetually present underside. Liberalism may proclaim itself as the doctrine of freedom and equality but, as Karl Marx observed in *On the Jewish Question,* these liberal principles embody a different vision of humanity and different moral reference points to the capitalist order within which they are asserted. Liberal thinkers have tended to circumvent this contradiction by distinguishing the criteria for moral action from those for economic action. Adam Smith's moral philosophy, for example, was worked out in perpetual tension with his political economy, which made clear that societies must not only exercise the right to kill to generate terror of punishment for crimes against property, but also 'the market … must necessarily at certain precise moments, "let die"'.[9] Smith could only oppose slavery because his moral sentiments coincided with his economic reasoning on the matter: slavery was not only inhumane but also inefficient.

The fact that the idea of a 'rules-based order' is used to refer both to the institutions of liberal internationalism and to a regime of international economic law that implies systematic plunder and dispossession also reflects this contradiction. The idea of 'rule of law' itself has been shaped within the poles of two distinct constellations of meaning. From one direction, the 'rule of law' has been conceived as a protection against tyranny, the idea that all are equal under the law, which has been taken up in struggles against arbitrary power and colonial rule and reasserted in the 'Never Again' that became a rallying cry of 20th-century human rights advocates. From another direction, however, with an equally secure

9 Warren Montag, 'Necro-economics: Adam Smith and death in the life of the universal', *Radical Philosophy* 134 (2005). Online at: https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/necro-economics

foothold in liberal thought, the 'rule of law' refers to institutions that protect property rights and rights to accumulation.[10]

What is perhaps surprising is that, at the very moment that international 'rule of law' was redefined in the service of corporate power, corporations came to profess concern with human rights. However, as I discuss in my recent book *Struggles for the Human*, the result was not a revival of the old tension in liberal thought between ethics and economics but the collapse of that tension via a 'privatisation of human rights' that recast the very meaning of what it is to hold rights. Instead of being conceived as limits on what could be done in the service of property and profit, human rights became abstract add-ons to plunder, dispossession and the tyranny of corporate power. Alongside other cosmopolitan values, rights became part of a widespread ethical newspeak that served not only to conceal but to reinforce what were already deeply fascistic tendencies.

In Colombia, where I was based during much of the work for *Struggles for the Human,* even corporate-backed massacres and selective killings of people occupying land targeted for resource extraction have been accompanied by the language of human rights. Indeed, this phenomenon had become so pronounced by the early 2000s that poets Humberto Cárdenas and Álvaro Marín referred to it as 'defending life by sowing death'.

IV

It is in this light that I want to consider the value of appeals to liberal discourses of human rights. In doing so, I do not seek to downplay the need for radical alternatives to existing legal and political economic systems, or the extent to which these need to be informed by ethics of care, mutual aid and harmony with

10 Mattei and Nader, *Plunder*, 14–15.

nature, as well as militant class struggle. Yet one of the concerns that motivated *Struggles for the Human* was how liberatory politics are routinely undermined by what I call 'pernicious optimism': attachment to the fantasy that this or that vision of change is going to somehow make things different.[11] There, I considered this particularly in relation to the 'feel good' ethics of much liberal cosmopolitan intervention which, by recasting rights as abstract values to be tacked on to what already exists, can consolidate necro-economics. However, at the present juncture, it is important to emphasise that the risk of pernicious optimism is also attendant on much would-be radical thinking. We need systemic transformation but, without concrete intervention to dismantle the legal structures at the heart of the present crisis, mutual aid becomes palliative care, while supposed 'alternatives' become add-ons to more of the same.

Law is sometimes treated as if it were itself an add-on, part of the superstructure, a means through which capitalist relations are regulated and remedy sought for infractions. Yet, law is constitutive of capitalist relations at a far deeper level. Schwöbel-Patel makes a similar point in relation to how the prevailing model of 'green' energy transition replicates destructive patterns of extractivism. Law, she writes, 'acts as a network of pipelines laid at the frontiers of value extraction, which enable the smooth transit, accumulation, and concentration of capital'.[12] This 'legal pipeline' itself must be dismantled—for example via means to restrict the scope of corporate activities and to radically limit the ability of capital to

11 Optimistic attachments, in Lauren Berlant's well-known theorisation, have a particular sort of affective structure: 'a sustaining inclination to return to the scene of fantasy that enables you to expect that this time, nearness to this thing will help you or a world to become different in just the right way'. Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham 2011: Duke University Press), 2.

12 Christine Schwöbel-Patel, 'Legal Pipelines of the Green Transition: What Remains the Same', CRASSH blog, 11 October 2023. Online at: https://www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/blog/legal-pipelines-of-the-green-transition-what-remains-the-same/

reproduce itself.[13] It is difficult to see how any of this might be achieved without the use of law and legal argument—including liberal principles of rights.

In this regard, there is much to be learnt from movements who have long histories of using law against capital, in full awareness of the violence of the law. I discuss in *Struggles for the Human* how trade union, peasant, Black and Indigenous organisations in Colombia use legal argument to expose irreconcilable contradictions between principles of human rights and the legal underpinnings of economic order. These struggles invoke discourses of rights in a country with a strong liberal tradition that has existed in continuous historical tension with far-right repression and fascistic state tendencies. However, they do not invoke rights in a way that is affirmative of liberal ideology or which takes liberal democracy as a horizon. The parameters of these struggles are profoundly anti-colonial, keenly aware of the imbrications of liberalism with imperialism and fascism, in a context in which liberal concepts hold widespread salience.

Popular tribunals such as the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal have been the most visible sites of these strategies. For instance, tribunals have used legal argument to hold state officials and corporate executives to account for the genocidal consequences of their actions, and to denounce the international rule of law itself for placing private economic interests above people's dignity and rights. These initiatives have deep ties to movements pursuing radically alternative political economies, based on the explicit rejection not only of capitalism but of the entire conception of the human that underpins the liberal discourse of rights. Yet these movements too mobilise rights in direct opposition to state-corporate strategies of dispossession and an economic model that threatens ecological catastrophe.

13 See Whyte's proposals along these lines in *Ecocide*, 167-169.

If there is an element of liberalism at play in these appeals to rights, it is a liberalism of the cracks, of defence against tyranny and limits on power, as a means of creating space for something radically different. It is, perhaps, not far off Judith Shklar's 'liberalism of fear': a sceptical stance toward liberal optimism and liberalism's claims to represent the common good that is instead oriented towards the avoidance of cruelty. In their strategic mobilisation of liberal concepts, these movements also highlight the need to address the economic cruelty that, through the legalised tyranny of corporate capitalism, has condemned so many to misery and death. It is this corporate tyranny which now threatens, not only any version of democracy, but also our planetary survival.

What's My Social Media Telling Me?

Can Social Media Have a Democratizing Impact on Climate Change Narratives within Non-democratic Countries?

Dale Mineshima-Lowe

One of the most captivating assumptions about digital technologies is perhaps that they can be a force for good. There has been and continues to be an overwhelming notion that we can solve many of the global issues around us with more developed technologies. If this is the case, then logically one could assume that digital technologies, including social media applications, could provide a way of democratizing discourse around climate change, allowing citizens to discuss and organize themselves towards adapting and mitigating the impact of climate change around them. What is presented here is the groundwork for a new research project in an under-developed area of study,

focussing specifically on climate change narratives. It explores the context in which questions about the use of social media to democratize climate change narratives can be asked. This would include questions such as: 'Can social media and digital technologies help to develop citizen resilience even in non-democratic countries like Myanmar (Burma)?' Such a question requires us to understand the current political, social, and economic landscape around digital connectivity and social media use, so that we may identify what barriers and challenges might exist, in particularly in countries where democratic practices and norms are weak or non-existent.

Since its independence in 1948, Myanmar (formerly known as Burma) has had a history of sub-national, ethnic struggles as different groups have sought autonomy and representation within the state. From around 1962 through 2010, the state was ruled by a military junta which suppressed all dissent and opposition. However, in 2010, it began to see some gradual changes, accompanied by a transition towards political and economic liberalization.[1] This led to free elections in 2015, which brough to government the National League for Democracy (NLD) and its leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, to serve as State Counsellor in late 2016, bringing about what many thought was a transition towards democracy.

What followed was a decade of movement towards liberalisation with political, social, and economic change within the country, which witnessed a diversification of media outlets, widening access to information, and the beginnings of external relations to build and develop the country economically. However, in 2017 the democratically elected government was damaged domestically and internationally by military operations in Rakhine state, causing over half a million Muslim Rohingyas to flee Myanmar

1 K. Stokke and S.M. Aung, 'Transition to Democracy or Hybrid Regime? The Dynamics and Outcomes of Democratization in Myanmar', *European Journal of Development Research*, 32 (2020): 274–293.

into neighbouring states like Bangladesh, along with reports of violence and deaths. This military action highlighted the strength the military still possessed, ongoing fractions between different political and ethnic groups, and the NLD's tenuous grasp on government at the time. This volatile situation eventually led to the most recent coup d'état of February 2021 and the reinstatement of military rule within the country.

Internet and Social Media Usage within Myanmar

DataReportal collates of data on internet usage, social media usage, and mobile connectivity within countries.[2] Its data on Myanmar show some interesting trends related to digital technologies, allowing us to consider if social media could be utilised to have a *democratizing impact*[3] on climate change narratives across the different ethnic states and regions within Myanmar.

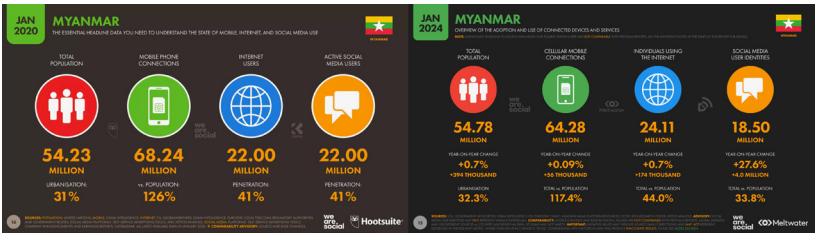


Figure 1: Figures for Mobile Phone Connections, Internet Users, and Active Social Media Users. Source: DataReportal.

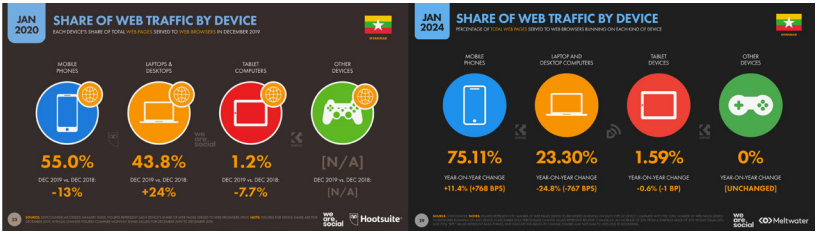
2 See https://datareportal.com/about.

3 Here, 'democratizing impact' refers to citizen agency and influence on climate change narratives and discourse, in particular within a military-controlled country like Myanmar.

According to UN population data, between January 2020 and January 2024 Myanmar had an estimated population number between 54 and 55 million people. The snapshots (Figure 1) above illustrate a drop in mobile phone connections during this period – from 126% of the total population to 117.4%. These figures show that some people have more than one mobile connection, which could indicate multiple SIM cards or mobile phones in use per individual. In terms of internet usage and active social media users, the data shows an increase in internet users on any device and a decrease in social media users and accounts – although this does not necessarily represent an increase/decrease in the number of individual users, as there may be some statistical overlap caused by individual users using multiple devices to access the internet.

One of the more interesting things to note about the data on internet and social media traffic and access in Myanmar is illustrated in Figure 2 below. During the time between end of 2019 and end of 2023, the data shows there has been a significant increase in web traffic via mobile phones (55% of the population to 75%) and a decrease in web traffic by laptops and desktop computers (43.8% to 23.30%). Other data on internet usage also shows how many citizens are accessing the internet, with most citizens accessing social media via mobile phones – with Facebook

Figure 2: Comparison of the 2020 and 2024 collated data on the 'Share of Web Traffic by Device' for Myanmar. Source: DataReportal.



having the largest share of web traffic[4] of all social media platforms identified by users within Myanmar (89.7%). Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, and Instagram are identified as the next largest four social media sites.

Overall, the implications from the various data sources suggest changes to how citizens are accessing social media and the internet, moving to more mobile use. This may be the result of internal migration as the conflict moves, restrictions on movement and enforcement of the 2010 conscription law by the junta from February 2024, as well as changing access to data and connectivity for individuals. However, what can also be extrapolated from the data on internet and social media usage is that use is still occurring despite the change in government in power.

The 2021 coup and its impact on media and digital discourse

Since the 2021 coup that brought the military back to power, the military government has tried to ban media outlets and exert control on journalists and the flow of information, both domestically and internationally. According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), since its take-over of the country the junta has shown intolerance for any narratives not in line with its own. This has prompted many journalists to flee the country while others have been imprisoned, with the CPJ reporting that at the end of 2022 Myanmar had the third-highest number of imprisoned journalists globally.[5] Any media left in the country are considered by most citizens to be

4 Here web traffic is measured by 'referrals' via clicks or links to third-party websites from social media platforms.

5 The Committee to Protect Journalists, 'Journalist jailings near record high in 2024 as crackdown on press freedom grows', 16 January 2024, online at: https://cpj.org/2025/01/journalist-jailings-near-record-high-in-2024-as-crackdown-on-press-freedom-grows/.

state-controlled or state-supporting media, or even propaganda outlets of the junta.

The junta did not just target the national media landscape following its takeover in 2021. It also blocked social media platforms along with independent and international media, thereby requiring users to make use of VPN apps to stay connected and access information from alternative sources. There have been subsequent crackdowns since then – including a ban of VPN usage during the summer of 2024. This ban shut down some of the most favoured VPN services in the country at the time, disconnecting citizens from their favoured online media – Facebook and WhatsApp, among other websites. There were also reports by local media and citizens of soldiers inspecting citizens' phones at random, looking for illegal VPN apps and then issuing fines or arresting those found to have VPNs on their phones. This demonstrates that there was a firm push to control the flow of information within the country and moving in/out of the country.

Other similar measures include the imposition of taxation on SIM cards and internet services (early 2022), a measure that saw a 15-percent tax levied on internet providers' income and a 20,000 kyat (USD$11) commercial tax on SIMs. The obvious effect was that such measures raised costs for consumers, though one additional side-effect is the impact on educational provisions, as due to COVID-19 and displacement from the conflict many people are having to access education online. The burden of additional costs for internet access will determine who is able to continue their education and who is not. There has been a power supply-demand gap across the country that has increased since 2019, where power shortages occurred due to lower electricity production from gas-fired power plants and electricity generation via hydropower plants was increased in an attempt to fill the gap.[6]

6 World Bank, *In the Dark: Power Sector Challenges in Myanmar* (2023: World Bank), online at: https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/myanmar/publication/in-the-dark-power-sector-challenges-in-myanmar

Additional restrictions to internet connectivity have occurred due to power outages since the military takeover in 2021 due to political instability, as well as reports of the junta cutting off connectivity in regions where armed resistance to the its rule has been ongoing.

In a more recent move that has many inside and outside of the country viewing it as a potential further infringement of citizens' rights and online activities, a new cybersecurity law was put into place as of January 1, 2025.[7] The aim of the law, according to the junta, is to prevent threats to national sovereignty, peace, and stability through the use of electronic technologies. However, many see the newly passed law (not yet in force but to be determined at a yet undisclosed date) as detrimental not only to people within Myanmar, but to Myanmar citizens living abroad as well, as the law claims to apply to all nationals regardless of location.

Conclusion: Can social media be a space for climate change narratives within this type of context?

Given the current situation within the country, can social media be a space for democratizing climate change narratives? What, then, are some of the potential barriers and challenges for exploring social media as a democratizing space for climate change narratives in countries with similar political and social contexts as Myanmar? While the next steps for this evolving research project involve data collection via surveys and interviews with specific actors, preliminary thoughts related to some the key challenges can be identified within the specific context of Myanmar.

While there are voluntary and community groups working on the ground within Myanmar who are concerned about climate change and the impact of it to lives, livelihoods, and communities, it is

7 See https://www.rfa.org/english/myanmar/2025/01/02/cybersecurity-law-vpn/.

less clear whether these groups are involved in specific climate change narratives that exist around resilience, adaptation, and mitigation. Others researching the nexus of climate change and conflict have looked at local community and civil society actors within Myanmar, as they have and continue to have an important role in managing day-to-day responses and have the potential to be community builders to support climate change resilience. Examples of community-led actions, such as the "installation of micro-hydropower facilities in war-torn Chin State," indicate some potential solutions, in this case, bringing renewable energy sources to local communities.[8] What emerges from this and other research to date is that what has been missing is that some local and marginalised groups, particularly ethnic groups and women, have had little agency in feeding into the shaping of narratives to develop action plans and policies, even at the local level.

Current climate change research in Myanmar highlights the gender bias and lack of agency by marginalized ethnic groups associated with developing narratives and actions. To address the lack of agency in shaping narratives of climate change, perhaps consideration needs to be given to how to leverage the population's current use of social media and the internet. With citizens still currently engaged in use of the internet and accessing social media within Myanmar despite challenges posed by the government's current policies and legislation, local civil society groups, as well as external partners, should be reviewing how to use social media to further engage communities in shaping how climate change is understood. Leveraging current social media use allows for pathways that engage those groups that are most marginalized and who have few ways of voicing their concerns, considerations, and experiences of climate change, to build resilience.

8 K. Kim, 'Concurrent Challenges of Conflict and Climate Change in Myanmar', *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* (2024), online at: https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2024/06/09/concurrent-challenges-of-conflict-and-climate-change-in-myanmar/.

Should They Stay or Should They Go (Back)?

Exploring the Diaspora Engagement Possibilities in Southeastern Europe

Ana Budimir, Ružica Šimić Banović and Valentina Vučković

Considering historical migration trends, robust cultural connections, and the economic and political dynamics in Southeastern Europe (SEE), the engagement potential of diaspora communities presents a fruitful research opportunity. Just imagine losing 10% of your national population in 10 years. In the context of discussions about overpopulation, migration, climate change, and sustainability, this might seem off-topic, but population loss is a common issue for SEE countries and as

a result, diaspora communities from this region are some of the largest in Europe. Croatia is no exception, having lost a tenth of its population in only a decade. As a result, today Croatia is most dependent on private remittances and personal transfers out of all EU countries, amounting to 7.2% of Croatia's GDP in 2023, or €5.61 billion.[1]

The economic impact of the diaspora goes well beyond remittances alone, however. Diaspora members can invest in businesses, start-ups, and infrastructure, but usually face various obstacles (such as poor quality of institutions or bureaucracy). To address this issue, governments are increasingly seeking ways to (re)connect with their diaspora members and engage them from abroad, if not bring them back. Quite often, there's no need to reinvent the wheel—learning from others can be effective. Our goal in this short article is to investigate diaspora mobilization initiatives in other Southeast European countries that could serve as good practices for engaging with Croatian emigrants.

Diaspora Engagement Policies

There exists a long-standing debate about who counts as diaspora and who does not. Anthropologists, political scientists, sociologists, and economists look at the term from different angles and shed light on its different aspects. Here we follow Grossman's definition of diaspora, according to which diaspora represents a 'transnational community whose members (or their ancestors) emigrated or were dispersed from their original homeland but remain oriented to it and preserve a group identity.'[2] The fact

1 Ljubica Gatarić, 'Obilato pomažu: Nova generacija migranata nije presjekla veze s domovinom i članovima obitelji', *Vecernji*, 16 December 2024, online at: https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/iz-njemacke-godisnje-stizu-tri-milijarde-eura-privatnih-doznaka-iz-irske-607-milijuna-eura-1823725

2 Jonathan Grossman, 'Toward a Definition of Diaspora', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42, no. 8 (2019): 1263-1282.

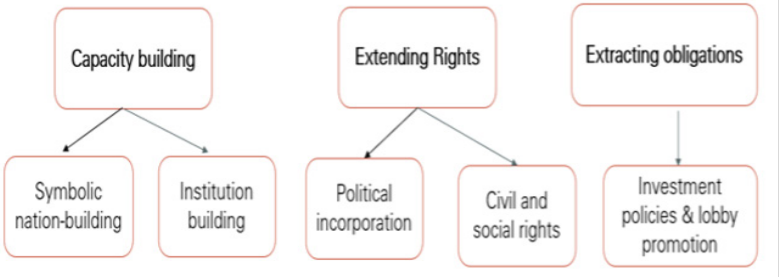


Figure 1: Gamlen's typology of diaspora engagement policies.

that these people remain oriented to their origin country in some way signifies their potential for further engagement, which can be incentivized by using specific engagement policies.

The typology of diaspora engagement policies varies from author to author, but one of the most well-known typologies is developed by Gamlen.[3] His typology, reproduced in Figure 1, identifies three different types of diaspora engagement policies: capacity-building policies, extending rights to diaspora, and extracting obligations from diaspora. The first one, capacity building, is divided into symbolic nation-building, which may include organizing language or culture classes, and institution building, by establishing ministries or agencies that deal with diaspora engagement. The second type, extending rights, deals with political incorporation, for example by giving voting rights to diaspora members or other types of civil and social rights. The third category is called extracting obligations and mostly relates to investment policies and/or investment promotion for diaspora members or lobbying for certain policies.

Whether it is to attract investment or secure more votes in upcoming elections from those living abroad, governments are

3 A. Gamlen, 'The brain drain is dead, long live the New Zealand diaspora', Working Paper No. 10 (Oxford 2005: Centre on Migration, Policy and Society).

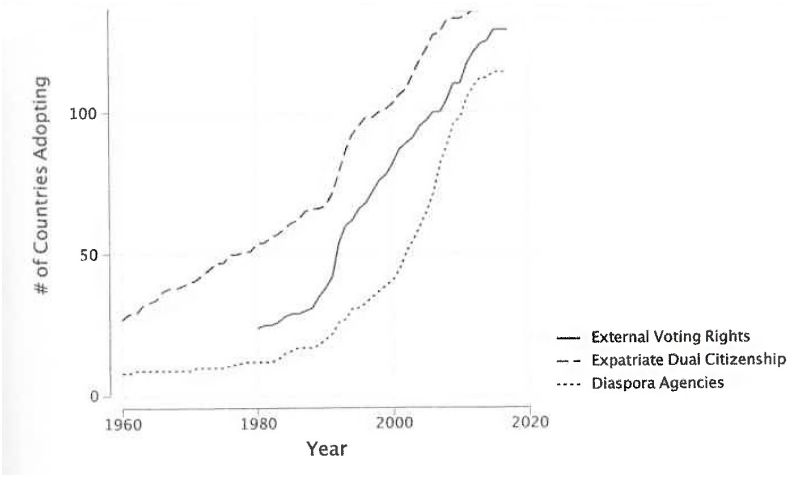


Figure 2: Trends in State-Diaspora Relations[4]

increasingly seeking ways to engage with their diasporas. To this end, they may grant external voting rights, enable dual citizenship, or establish diaspora agencies, all of which have rapidly developed in the last 20 years (see Figure 2).

The following sections use Gamlen's typology to examine which type of diaspora engagement policies have been predominantly used in SEE countries. Before this, some context is provided about the magnitude and trends with regard to this phenomenon in the region.

Population loss: a common denominator for SEE

Southeastern Europe is experiencing one of the most substantial depopulation trends in the world, and the European Commission

4 Figure reproduced from D. Leblang and J. Glazier, 'Diaspora Engagement Strategies: Theory and Case Study Evidence', in: L. Kennedy (ed.), *Routledge International Handbook of Diaspora Diplomacy* (Abingdon 2022: Routledge): 34–47, 35.

has identified brain drain as one of the most significant issues affecting the region.[5] For example, half of Bosnia and Herzegovina's population, and 42% of Albania's population, lives abroad.

Migration is influenced by various push and pull factors widely covered in existing literature, including scarce economic prospects, political unrest, and the search for enhanced educational opportunities or better job conditions in Western Europe and North America. Studies have shown that large-scale emigration from Eastern Europe has mixed economic effects: while remittances and reduced unemployment provide short-term benefits, long-term challenges include labour shortages, brain drain, and demographic decline, all of which hinder economic growth and productivity.[6] Taking into consideration current socio-economic indicators, the trend of depopulation is expected to continue, and it is projected that countries in Southeastern Europe will lose between 6.2% (Montenegro) and 22.5% (Bulgaria) of their population until 2050 (see Figure 3). What is more, brain drain has been on the rise in (South)Eastern Europe, and its effects are expected to be long-term in many aspects.[7] From a contextual point of view, the brain drain should be seen as an issue that affects both sending and receiving countries and that interacts with 'push' factors in the former as well as 'pull' factors in the latter. Moreover, corruption in countries of origin significantly drives the outflow of high-skilled professionals, as they seek better institutional environments. This brain drain can further weaken

5 S. Kondan, 'Southeastern Europe Looks to Engage its Diaspora to Offset the Impact of Depopulation', Migration Policy Institute, 25 August 2020, online at: https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/southeastern-europe-seeks-offset-depopulation-diaspora-ties

6 R. Atoyan, et al., 'Emigration and Its Economic Impact on Eastern Europe', *IMF Staff Discussion Note*, July 2016, online at: https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/sdn/2016/sdn1607.pdf.

7 Z. Troskot, M.E. Prskalo and R. Šimić Banović (2019). 'Key determinants of emigration of the highly qualified population: the case of Croatia with comparative reference to the EU new members', *Zbornik radova Pravnog fakulteta u Splitu*, 56, no. 4 (2019): 877–904.

economic development and institutional quality in the affected countries, creating a negative cycle.[8]

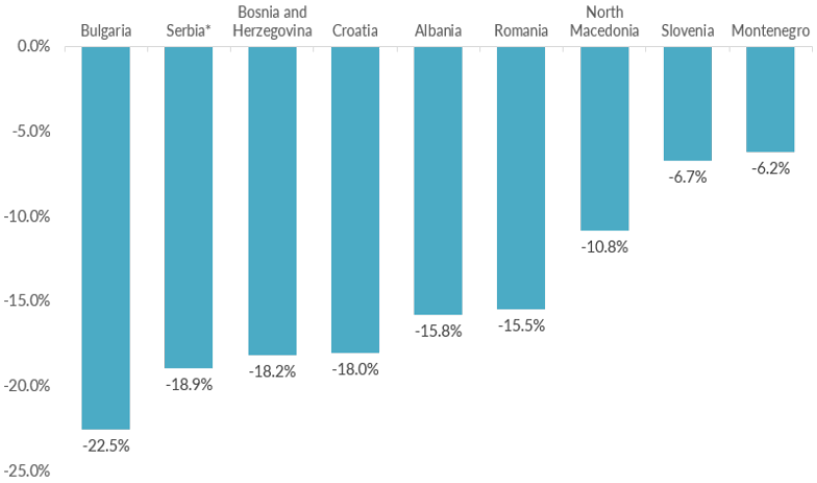


Figure 3: Projected Population Change in Southeastern Europe, 2020-50[9]

However, the increasing significance and successes of diaspora engagement strategies and initiatives throughout SEE offer a crucial testing ground for potential policy solutions, which could overturn the brain drain into brain gain and promote sustainable development. To achieve this, a cross-institutional approach in managing migration, including all stakeholders (public, private and non-governmental) in migration governance at national and local levels is needed.[10] In that regard, collaboration with international

8 A. Ariu & P. Squicciarini, 'The Balance of Brains: Corruption and High Skilled Migration', Institut de Récherches Économiques et Sociales de l'Université catholique de Louvain, Discussion Paper 2013-10.

9 Figure reproduced from Kondan, 'Southeastern Europe ...'.

10 European Training Foundation, *'USE IT OR LOSE IT!' How do migration, human capital and the labour market interact in the Western Balkans?* (2022: European Training Foundation), online at: www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-04/Migration_Western%20Balkans.pdf.

organizations seems to play a vital role. The examples include, for instance, Serbian diaspora migration with the UNDP's assistance11 and Romanian Brainmap[12] with the assistance of EU funds.

How exactly does diaspora engagement work in practice? Mapping diaspora engagement initiatives in SEE

Over the past two decades, Southeastern European governments have expanded their traditional diaspora engagement—which includes naturalization laws, external voting rights, and cultural heritage support—by creating dedicated ministries and agencies and collaborating with NGOs and the private sector to strengthen ties with citizens abroad and those with shared ethnic heritage.[13] Non-EU countries have collaborated extensively with international organizations on diaspora engagement, such as USAID or the World Bank. In this section, the policy landscape of diaspora engagement is analyzed by applying three sets of diaspora engagement policies: capacity building, extending rights, and extracting obligations.

Capacity-Building Policies

Capacity-building policies include symbolic nation building and institution building. With regard to symbolic nation building, all countries organize or offer some type of language or culture classes for diaspora members. In terms of institution building, all countries have at least an agency or a department dedicated to diaspora relations and engagement, while some countries also have specific ministries. This includes Kosovo's Ministry for Foreign Affairs and

11 Draško Drašković, 'A glimpse into LinkedIn data to understand Serbian labour out-migration', UNDP, 8 October, 2019, online at: https://www.undp.org/serbia/blog/glimpse-linkedin-data-understand-serbian-labour-out-migration.

12 See https://www.brainmap.ro/.

13 Kondan, 'Southeastern Europe ...'.

Diaspora, Croatia's Ministry for Demography and Immigration,[14] and Montenegro's Ministry of Diaspora Affairs.

Extending rights

Extending rights involves political incorporation as well as the provision of civil and social rights. Political incorporation can be achieved, for example, by granting voting rights to diaspora members. This practice, which is implemented in some form in all EES countries, has been subjected to criticism due to the fact that diaspora members do not reside in the country but still influence electoral outcomes. In terms of civil and social rights, this may include allowing emigrants to access certain social security benefits or healthcare rights.

Extracting Obligations

According to Gamlen's typology, investment policies and lobby promotion are part of extracting obligations from the diaspora. For example, the Diaspora Invest Project in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), launched in 2017 with a budget of US$6.6 million funded by USAID, successfully leveraged diaspora investments for economic development. Over its first four years, the project distributed US$2 million in grants to 164 companies, which invested over US$22 million of their own funds, increased sales by over 70%, and created 1,571 new jobs. The programme, which strengthened links between the diaspora and local communities, entered its second phase in 2022 with a budget of US$15.7 million.

Furthermore, some countries, such as Romania and Croatia, are implementing schemes to support diaspora members to return to their home country and starting their own businesses. In Romania,

14 The name of this ministry is misleading as it is solely responsible for diaspora relations and return. Additionally, the Ministry, along with other organizing bodies, is tasked with proposing policies for the return migration of the Croatian diaspora and their reintegration into Croatian society.

Figure 4: Diaspora Invest Project, USAID

this includes the third edition of the Startup Nation programme, which has seen 1,648 SMEs registered by Romanians returning from abroad.[15] Croatia launched the 'I Choose Croatia / Biram Hrvatsku' scheme in January 2022, aiming to encourage the return of Croatian citizens under 60 from EEA and overseas countries by offering financial support for self-employment. In three years, the initiative has resulted in about 700 people returning, primarily to underdeveloped areas, mostly from Germany. It is important to note that neither of the measures was designed as a standalone measure, but rather as an addition to existing policy measures on supporting entrepreneurship. The mentioned strategies show that countries are committed to engage the diaspora as a factor of socio-economic development. However, some challenges persist in their implementation and funding, as well as in cooperation with local stakeholders.

Conclusion

Enhancing diaspora engagement requires a complex strategic approach that would include instruments such as targeted tax incentives for diaspora members investing in their home countries,

15 Iulian Ernst, 'Romanian entrepreneurs still waiting for grants promised under StartUp Nation 2022 scheme', *Romania-Insider,* 4 November 2024, online at: https://www.romania-insider.com/romanian-entrepreneurs-grants-startuo-nation-2022.

the creation of diaspora investment funds to foster entrepreneurial projects, and programmes aimed at helping returning professionals reintegrate into local economies. Governments in Southeastern Europe are increasingly focusing on economic diaspora engagement, with countries like BiH collaborating with international organizations to achieve this goal. Building collaboration between the public and private sectors is recognized as a contributing factor through integrating skilled diaspora individuals, either by addressing labour market gaps or through innovation cooperation. Previously, the emphasis was more on cultural and linguistic connections as part of post-socialist nation-building efforts. In terms of symbolic nation building, all SEE countries continue to organize or offer language and culture classes for diaspora members. These activities have not ceased, but there is now a growing emphasis on incentivizing investments and fostering more substantial economic engagement with the diaspora. This shift aims to leverage the economic potential of the diaspora to contribute to the development and prosperity of their countries of origin.

The Unvirtuous Circle

What happens when radical right populists control immigration policy?

Sean Kippin

The rise of radical right populist parties and figures is one of the defining stories of our time, with their standard bearer parties emerging from the fringes and into the mainstream over recent years in response to the growing salience of certain policy issues and discontent with traditional political parties. Populist actors are identifiable by their engagement in a style of rhetoric which identifies a mutually antagonistic relationship between a 'corrupt' establishment

and a 'pure' people.[1] Radical right populists, as the dominant (as well as most troubling) variant, add to this a nativistic perspective focused on protecting 'in' groups from 'outsiders' and a concerning distaste for elements of liberal democracy.

Their electoral success has been varied and remarkable, with governments in East and Western Europe, Latin America, and now the United States led by parties (or at least directly elected Presidents), who fit comfortably within the radical right bracket. They are also shaping the approaches of mainstream parties. While previous scholarship has focused predominantly on the effects of populists to parties and party systems, we are now in a position to begin making observations about the consequences of populist governments on policy outputs, and the way these interact with other features of political and policymaking systems. This article explores these dynamics as they relate to immigration policy.

Populism in power: authoritarianism and nativism

Populists in office tend to use their power to accumulate more power, through acts of executive fortification, the disempowerment of mediating public and civil society institutions, and seeking to control public discourse. They may also seek to engage in 'illiberal' policymaking, which encompasses 'forging' (of a new 'morality' politics), 'bending' (legally permissible but anti-democratic innovations), and 'breaking' (the straightforward breaking of domestic or international law).[2] The playbook has been deployed to varying extents, but most notably in Hungary and Poland. A version is currently being deployed by President Trump. Such reforms, cumulatively, have a deleterious impact

1 C. Mudde and C.R. Kaltwasser, *Populism: A very short introduction* (Oxford 2017: Oxford University Press).

2 A.L. Pirro and B. Stanley, 'Forging, bending, and breaking: Enacting the "illiberal playbook" in Hungary and Poland', *Perspectives on Politics*, 20, no. 1 (2022): 86-101.

on the public realm, and can facilitate processes of 'democratic backsliding' such as through the strengthening of the executive, the disempowerment of mediating institutions, and the growth of corruption and clientelism.[3]

One policy area that has been a substantial site of innovation for radical right populists is immigration. This is understandable, given that it is an issue upon which such parties depend to a large extent for public and electoral support. The increasing diversity of contemporary societies, a perception of societal and economic decline, and widely held and longstanding xenophobic and racist attitudes are easily mobilised by radical right populist leaders and other actors, such as media and campaigners. The related issue of those fleeing conflict or oppression as refugees also motivates such politicians, particularly when a rising tide of conflict in Syria, Libya, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Palestine, and elsewhere creates increasing numbers of those in need of asylum. The legal infrastructure, usually of international origin but implemented domestically, provides both an exemplification, to populists, of the skewed priorities of the elite and opportunities to transgress institutional boundaries in the name of the 'people'. Therefore, we might ask what happens when radical right populist figures become key players in immigration policy – and particularly when they take 'control' of immigration portfolios?

The UK case: the Rwanda Scheme

While not on the face of it an obvious case for an analysis of radical right populism in government, given the country's longstanding two-party centre right/left duopoly, the UK's recent experience is highly relevant. Despite the Conservative Party's reputation as a mainstream centre-right political party, the post-Brexit period saw a considerable embrace of rhetoric and policies associated with

3 N. Bermeo, 'On democratic backsliding', *Journal of democracy*, 27, no. 1 (2016): 5-19.

the radical right, often under pressure from more straightforwardly radical right parties such as UKIP and the Brexit Party/Reform UK. In 2022, the Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who took inspiration from Donald Trump in his political approach, announced the creation of a new partnership agreement with the government of Rwanda.

The plan was to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda, where their applications for asylum would be processed. If successful, however, they would remain in Rwanda, and not return to the UK. While initially piloted by the right-wing Priti Patel, under the premierships of Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak, Suella Braverman served as Home Secretary. Braverman, in her rhetoric and approach, more closely fits the bill of a radical right politician than a mainstream Conservative and became closely associated with the scheme. She would emphasise the importance of the scheme in fulfilling the government's agenda to 'stop the boats' – a reference to the countless 'small boat crossings' via France made, at incredible personal risk.

There were legal and political obstacles to its implementation, as acknowledged at the outset of the scheme's introduction by Boris Johnson. Indeed, successive legal challenges would demonstrate this with the UK Supreme Court ruling in 2023 that due to concerns over *refoulement* – the potential for the Rwandan government to return asylum seekers to their (unsafe) countries of origin – the plan should not be allowed to go ahead. Braverman resigned in anticipation of the judgment, citing the Government's insufficient willingness to see the scheme through to fruition. She has since toyed with joining Nigel Farage's Reform UK. In 2024, the Conservatives were running out of time politically, but the government, by this point led by Rishi Sunak, legislated to designate Rwanda, for the purposes of UK law, a 'safe country'. Even this did not clear the way for the scheme to be enacted.

The 2024 General Election brought down the curtain on 14 years of Conservative government, and at least 8 while the party had been

transitioning into what Tim Bale has described as an *ersatz radical right party*.[4] Not a single flight to Rwanda – an event that had developed a totemic quality, as if its occurrence would magically equate to a renaissance of Conservative popularity – would ever take off. Labour cancelled the scheme as one of its first acts in office. Braverman would blame "foreign courts" and the UK's politically independent Civil Service for its failure.[5] The ultimate political benefactor was not the Conservatives; rather, it was Nigel Farage's Reform UK, which was seen as the more credible party on anti-immigration policy, and which performed very strongly at the General Election in 2024.

The Italian 'Closed Ports' Policy

The Italian example provides a more textbook case of radical right populism in action. Matteo Salvini became Italy's immigration minister following the country's parliamentary elections in 2018, which saw the formation of a 'double populist' government incorporating both his Lega party and the Five Star Movement. The government emerged following a process of negotiation. While the government was led by Guisseppe Conte, a member of neither party, Salvini was given, in addition to the Deputy Premiership, the immigration portfolio.

The Lega had become well known for its nativist rhetoric and uncompromising anti-system style, and had gained popularity in part due to its tough stance on immigration policy, itself in turn buoyed by a perceived and actual increase in immigration, Italy's geographic position as one of the first 'ports of call' for

4 T. Bale, *The conservative party after Brexit: Turmoil and transformation* (Cambridge 2023: Polity Press).

5 M. Savage, 'Suella Braverman makes fresh attack on European court of human rights', *The Guardian*, 24 September 2023, online at: https://www.theguardian.com/law/2023/sep/24/suella-braverman-makes-fresh-attack-on-european-court-of-human-rights

Mediterranean crossings, and longstanding public dissatisfaction with the established parties of the country's political mainstream. Growing its appeal and broadening its geographical focus, the Lega had begun life as a vehicle for Northern Italian resentment against the poorer, less industrialised south, but has increasingly become a vehicle for political discontent and nativism on a national scale. Immigration was the issue that clinched its emergence as a serious competitor for power, in part owing to its agenda-setting power within the party system as the voice of the disenfranchised and disenchanted.

Shortly after his appointment to office, Salvini announced a 'closed ports' policy, whereby Italian ports were banned from allowing vessels that had rescued migrants from disembarking. This was done in the name of security, but also, ostensibly, to save the lives of those who made the journey. The decision created a scenario whereby vessels such as the *SOS-Mediterranée's Aquarius*, which had rescued over 600 seaborne migrants, were left stranded at sea. One rationale was to create pressure for other countries to shoulder a greater share of the 'burden' caused by attempted crossings, most notably Spain and Malta. Such efforts had a moderate degree of success, at least on one crude metric, with Spain's Prime Minister unexpectedly agreeing to receive the vessel. However, the move also caused extraordinary controversy, with kickback from the country's military and civil services, and a chain of political and legal resistance which would end up with Salvini being placed on trial for kidnapping in 2024 for refusing to allow a vessel operated by the charity Open Arms to dock in Sicily back in 2019.

The ports policy was enacted as part of the 2018 *Salvini Decree*, legitimised in Parliament. Most notably it abolished humanitarian protection status, reducing the number of migrants eligible to stay in Italy legally. It also tightened citizenship laws, increased the speed of deportations, and reduced funding for local reception centres. Salvini would lose office following the dissolution of the

agreement between his party and M5S (with Conte continuing as Prime Minister). Under his successor, Mario Draghi, a more conventional approach would predominate. However, Salvini returned to office, again as Deputy Prime Minister (but without the immigration portfolio) under the premiership of Giorgia Meloni, the leader of a different radical right populist party, the Brothers of Italy. Under Meloni and Salvini, the government has again introduced 'tougher' measures, including limiting accessibility to ports by rescue vessels. Meloni's government, too, has sought to negotiate deals with third countries, such as Tunisia, Libya, and Albania (all countries well represented amongst those who travel to Italy).

Radical right populism and policy failure

Both innovations are clear examples of policy failure – though there are nuances. Marsh and McConnell's framework provides a straightforward means of exploring the dimensions of policy success, broken down into the 'process', 'programme', and 'political' dimensions. 'Process' relates to the ability of the government or actor in question to enact their policy measure in line with their original intentions.[6] 'Programme' relates to the policy's success in achieving its substantive goals. 'Political' refers to the effect it had on the political fortunes of the party, individual, or groups most associated with it. The framework provides a useful means of exploring the unusual interplay of success measures and political fortunes, and in particular the way that apparent failure can actually represent a twisted form of success, when populists are in power.

In the case of the UK, the Rwanda scheme undoubtedly marks a particularly stark case of policy failure on the 'process' and 'programme' dimensions. As regards 'process', the policy was simply never enacted. This was due to a number of factors,

6 D. Marsh and A. McConnell, 'Towards a framework for establishing policy success', *Public administration*, 88, no. 2 (2010): 564-583.

some logistical, but mainly related to the obvious illegality of the scheme, which stood in direct contrast to the UK's domestic and international legal obligations. As a result, not a single asylum seeker was sent to Rwanda for processing under the scheme. Further, in anticipation of the scheme being implemented, an enormous backlog of asylum seekers built up, at large fiscal cost. 'Programme success' was therefore impossible, other than as a hypothetical deterrent, where it was not remotely successful.

As regards 'political' failure, the situation is more complex. While the Rwanda scheme was never overtly popular (based on opinion polling) it did achieve some popularity in political target areas, known colloquially as the 'red wall', where voters had backed Brexit in 2016 and 'come over' to the Conservatives in 2019. While Braverman's reputation would be damaged by the fiasco, and the Conservatives would lose office in dramatic and decisive manner in July 2024, it did have two consequences that are notable here: firstly, the embrace of radical right populist anti-migration policy could be blamed on 'liberal' constraints, such as the UK's Human Rights Act and international law. Further, the country's civil service was blamed for many of the setbacks. Therefore, failure could be blamed on a corrupt elite, who stood in the way of the people's will for a tougher policy (and an end to small boat crossings). Secondly, failure here also arguably helped to pave the way for a record showing from Reform UK, who strongly supported the Rwanda scheme and embodied an even more fulsome advocacy of anti-asylum, refugee, and migrant policies.

A similar dynamic can be identified in Italy. In 'process' terms, the policy was approved by the Cabinet and enacted as legislation before it was subject to innumerable legal challenges, and eventually saw Salvini placed on trials. In 'programme' terms, a slight reduction in landings did follow, but thereafter, organisations who facilitate such journeys adapted their tactics. 'Illegal' migration continues on a similar scale to before. More so than in the UK, however, the policy represented an instance of 'political' success,

with high popularity for the scheme, and subsequent strong election results for the Lega party, specifically in the 2019 European Parliament elections. Though Salvini would lose his status as the leader of the radical right in Italy to Meloni and his star would fall somewhat, he would take office as her Deputy Prime Minister. In each case, other political parties on the right benefited from the heightened salience of the issue, even if they themselves did not. Thus, in each case, there is a form of vindication, and the populist immigration minister can argue that their attempts to speak for the people by stopping immigration were thwarted by a corrupt elite and system.

An unvirtuous circle

Radical right populists gain power because they promise to enact nativist policies on immigration, struggle to achieve anything substantive, but vindicate their own rhetoric of elite failure. Opposition to immigration is cultivated by radical right parties and figures, who benefit politically. Over time, they enter government, often with a perceived mandate to act in draconian and semi-legitimate ways. Their policy approaches do not succeed, typically due to the highly contested legal and political factors at play. This seems to confirm populist rhetoric directed at corrupt elites, 'blobs', foreigners, and courts.

This apparent vindication helps to fuel support for populist right parties and rhetoric (even if not the self-same actors), locking contemporary political systems into a destructive cycle whereby mainstream parties compete with their anti-system competitors in a contest they cannot easily win. Breaking this cycle will require bravery on the part of establishment parties, and particularly those which have historically sought to advocate for marginalised groups and for international law. However, the political incentives not to do this are strong. Indeed, the best we may realistically be able to hope for is competent administration of a restrictive but humane

system, whereby countries abide by their obligations without great fanfare, and seek to divert attention to more mundane, bread-and-butter issues, and in doing so, help to address some of the substantive drivers of this kind of politics.

Can We Be Optimistic for Our Grandchildren?

Constantinos Repapis

Pessimism rules the day

The world today is dealing with a polycrisis. Our economic and environmental systems are reaching limits we have not crossed before in human history. We can group these crises/emergencies in the following broad categories: A) population and migration, B) climate and sustainability, C) inequality and democracy. Sometimes these crises are seen as distinct problems that have little in common other than the

chance occurrence of happening at the same time. Politicians and a number of social scientists prefer to see each field of problems by itself, each requiring handling without reference to any overarching issues or uniting themes. However, what is becoming increasingly apparent is that there is a common thread of which these are all specific manifestations—the workings of our current economic and social system. To put it more emphatically, the underlying cause is the capitalist order of society in its current stage of development.

In this short article I will try to address the issue of the polycrisis from an optimistic angle. Focusing on J.M. Keynes's *Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren* I will try to see how we can use the crisis as an opportunity for blue-sky thinking for a better future. The established practices our current order has come up with are inadequate for even starting to chart a viable solution—new ideas, radical rethinking, is necessary. Keynes gives a description of the state of capitalism in the 1920s which, although 100 years ago, seems astoundingly modern in its depiction of the problems and possibilities that we are faced with today. In another of his tracts, *How to Pay for the War* (1940), in which Keynes discusses the issue of preparing the UK economy for WWII and its economic demands, we find tools that can help with a transition economy. Speaking on the 23rd of May 1939 about how preparations for the war created the need for increased employment, Keynes memorably said "Good may come out of evil. We may learn a trick or two, which will come in useful when the day of peace comes, as in the fullness of time it must".[1] Today as humanity, and with it the planet, moves into uncharted waters, we should hope again that good will come from the destruction we have already created and that opportunities to make good the wrongs of the past will become the pressing priority that they are.

1 J.M. Keynes, 'Will Re-armament Cure Unemployment?', in: *Keynes on the Wireless: John Maynard Keynes*, ed. D. Moggridge (London 2010 [1939]: Macmillan), 193.

Polycrisis Redux

Is it alarmist to call the current state of the world a polycrisis? Let us briefly review the evidence. First, we should consider the question of population growth and migration. In what is a new occurrence since the advent of the Industrial Revolution, the world may soon be moving into negative population growth. The 2022 UN report, World Population Prospects, expected the global population to crest before 2100 and to start declining rapidly afterwords. The 2024 projection revised the figure downwards, expecting the world population to reach a lower maximum sooner and start decreasing faster.[2] Population decline is the reality in most countries with a high GDP per capita and will soon be the case in most middle- and lower-income countries. Europe is already declining, soon to be followed by Asia and Latin America. Only Africa retains a strong population growth and even there, there are regions where the rate of growth is declining fairly fast.

At the same time migration is reaching new global heights. The 2024 World Migration Report noted the planet had 150 million international immigrants in 2000, with this number rising to 281 million by 2024. This is not only an absolute increase but also an increase in the proportion of the world's population who are immigrants – from 2.8% in 2000 to 3.6% in 2024.[3] These figures represent not only a rise in international refugees but also an increase in internally displaced persons. The reasons for this change are complex, but climate change and war/conflict conditions stand out as the main sources. A main reason is that extreme environmental events have contributed to food insecurity globally. The report notes that the number of people worldwide

2 See United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects 2022: Summary of Results* (New York 2022: United Nations), UN DESA/POP/2022/TR/NO. 3; United Nations, *World Population Prospects 2024: Summary of Results* (New York 2024: United Nations), UN DESA/POP/2024/TR/NO. 9.

3 M. McAuliffe and L.A. Oucho (eds.), *World Migration Report 2024* (Geneva 2024: International Organization for Migration), 8.

considered to be experiencing food insecurity and in need of urgent assistance rose to 257 million in 2022, a 146% rise since 2016.[4] Climate change drives both short-term bursts in migration movement and long-term migration trends, since both sudden events and the slow onset of climate hazard create conditions for migration.

In fact, migration can be seen as the good news, a positive response to crisis and food insecurity. It shows people have enough savings to finance a hazardous and expensive trip to find a new home. In more deprived regions that are more heavily impacted by climate change, lack of funds may make migration impossible. A local crisis can develop into one of far worse outcomes for the population, as we are currently observing in Sudan and its humanitarian crisis.

This increased migration movement coincides with a right-wing turn in most western democracies. Populist politicians blame decreasing incomes for middle and working classes to immigration. If at one end, western societies are ageing rapidly, something to which immigration is the obvious solution, at the other they are exhibiting new levels of inequality. Inequality within-country has increased since the 1980s and now accounts for most inequality globally. As the 2022 World Inequality Report indicated, inequality is not as much as before attributable to differences between advanced capitalist countries and developing ones, but is, to a large part, derived from the widening income differences within countries.[5] There is clear evidence that a global elite is amassing huge wealth, increasing inequality within all countries and forming a global class of its own, detached from national boundaries and local communities.

4 Ibid., 197.

5 L. Chancel, T. Piketty, E. Saez, G. Zucman, E. Duflo, and A. Banerjee, *World Inequality Report 2022* (2021: World Inequality Lab), available at: https://wir2022.wid.world/.

All this at a time in which global CO_2 emissions, and with it the global climate, is moving into uncharted territories. Huge swathes of the planet are affected both by extreme weather events (like the January 2025 fires in California) and an increase in the median temperature prolonging heatwaves in areas that are already vulnerable, making them almost unliveable. The world is caught in multiple spirals: needing more energy consumption to fight climate change through the use of air conditioning units and, by this means alone, making the planet less liveable.

But it isn't only that the planet's ecosystem is fragile and at a tipping point; the financial structure built by western democracies after WWII is not ready to deal with these new realities. For example, the US housing market depends on private insurance against natural disasters to secure mortgages and safeguard properties. Now private insurers are abandoning in droves even affluent crisis-prone areas like California and Florida, making lower- and middle-class owners there vulnerable to increasingly destructive events.

This points to the very nature of our current troubles and the core issue of the polycrisis. Our democracies together with the current financial system are as fragile as the planetary environmental system. All these different systems appear to be robust and able to withstand any shock, but in reality they have reached their limits. These problems are inevitably aspects of the same root cause: a social and economic system that has lost its purpose and adds at an alarming rate to the problems it has itself created.

Can we still be optimistic?

From Keynes's perspective, being fatalistic is a luxury we cannot afford. So what alternatives are there? At one end there is a kind of optimism that runs in the face of all current evidence: the belief that capitalism will solve our problems through technical

innovation and market competition, a conviction that for many of the economists who believe it is based on the fact that the market system has produced the unprecedented growth of the last two hundred years. But this growth hasn't come at zero cost nor can we expect that technical innovation will always be there, in time, to save the day. Furthermore, there is no established natural tendency for technical innovation to solve other social problems, such as inequality.

Here Keynes's perspective is valuable. He argued that we need to start thinking afresh, leaving aside old modes of thought and established viewpoints. He memorably noted:

> For I predict that both of the two opposed errors of pessimism which now make so much noise in the world will be proved wrong in our own time. The pessimism of the revolutionaries who think that things are so bad that nothing can save us but violent change, and the pessimism of the reactionaries who consider the balance of our economic and social life so precarious that we must risk no experiments.[6]

As we return to questions on the fundamentals of social life it is important to rethink our priorities both as individuals and as a society. Our society is built on the demands of consumers without any overarching principle that classifies these demands or puts them in any hierarchy, other than individual willingness to pay. But this is part of the problem. Keynes wrote:

> Now it is true that the needs of human beings may seem to be insatiable. But they fall into two classes—those needs which are absolute in the sense that we feel them whatever the situation of our fellow human

6 J.M. Keynes, 'Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren', in *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes, vol. IX Essays in Persuasion* (London 1972 [1930]: Macmillan): 321–334, 322.

> beings may be, and those which are relative in the sense that we feel them only if their satisfaction lifts us above, makes us feel superior to, our fellows. Needs of the second class, those which satisfy the desire for superiority, may indeed be insatiable; for the higher the general level, the higher still are they. But this is not so true of the absolute needs—a point may soon be reached… when these needs are satisfied in the sense that we prefer to devote our further energies to non-economic purposes.[7]

Once we realise that absolute and objective needs for comfortable survival have been fulfilled and that what we labour to fulfil is artificial needs created by our societal structure and mores, we realise something even more fundamental, namely that "the economic problem is not–if we look into the future–*the permanent problem of the human race*."[8]

From a resource perspective, Keynes noted that we will soon reach a point of sufficiency for the world population, but this doesn't mean that the system will naturally stop expanding, as it will focus on artificial needs. Nor does it mean that reaching that point of sufficiency will immediately change human society. Humans have been conditioned to think of the problem of insufficiency of resources to fulfil basic needs as the perennial individual and social problem. Even when the problem of sufficient resources to cover needs is solved, we will keep going on as before, as our mind frame will latch on to what it knows from experience. As Keynes puts it "if the economic problem is solved, mankind will be deprived of its traditional purpose."[9] This leads to an existential crisis. It is natural for the system to continue in its current logic and put artificial needs in the place of necessities for life. The

7 Ibid., 326.

8 Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

9 Ibid., 327.

system will continue, for some time, to operate as if needs are yet to be fulfilled and individuals will labour on the personal struggle for success or survival based on their position in society. And even if capitalism can produce enough to fulfil the basic needs of every person, there is no natural tendency for it to gravitate towards a fair distributional outcome. Distributional issues will always cloud this demarcation line between having as a society approached a solution of the economic problem (as Keynes saw it) and the private struggles of individuals to fulfil basic needs in an unequal system.

Keynes noted that we would reach a time when we would need a change to social mores. The mores of avarice that have guided capitalism thus far will stop being useful and the return to older moral values, those of living a life of restraint and intellectual pleasures, should become again the basis of our social system. He writes, pining for a past that was not as ideal as he paints it, but which has features that we need to return to today:

> I see us free, therefore, to return to some of the most sure and certain principles of religion and traditional virtue—that avarice is a vice, that the exaction of usury is a misdemeanour, and the love of money is detestable, that those walk most truly in the paths of virtue and sane wisdom who take least thought for the morrow. We shall once more value ends above means and prefer the good to the useful. We shall honour those who can teach us how to pluck the hour and the day virtuously and well, the delightful people who are capable of taking direct enjoyment in things, the lilies of the field who toil not, neither do they spin.[10]

Keynes was optimistic that this change will happen by itself over time, as society will naturally evolve to respond to the new needs

10 Ibid., 330–331.

and possibilities of reality. But perhaps he was too optimistic. It is possible that society destroys itself and the planet with it before this natural and gradual transformation takes place. What can be done to avoid this?

Keynes dealt indirectly with this problem in his pamphlet on *How to Pay for the War*, written at the dawn of WWII. There he poses the question, what happens when the feelings of the individual and the needs of society at large are in conflict? The answer is that the two are only superficially in conflict, as the survival of society is the survival of the individual. In situations such as these a plan in common would mean gains in common:

> What is to the advantage of each of us regarded as a solitary individual is to the disadvantage of each of us regarded as members of a community... Here is the ideal opportunity for a common plan and for imposing a rule which everyone must observe.[11]

What is necessary is to start changing individual behaviour by impacting social mores, and at the same time finding the resources necessary to foster a cleaner, safer environment through a green transition. This transition could be organised on the same lines to that of a war economy, where the pressing social needs for armaments take precedent over the individual consumption of luxuries. In our current state, the focus would be a war on wasteful luxuries and the habits of the past, and the creation of capital that is safe, clean and can provide for a sustainable planet.

Thus, what is needed is change in the financial system to prioritize and fund green production technologies and consumption patterns that align with this social agenda. There is a very good reason why this process of transformation should be funded through government-led schemes and social types of investment

11 Keynes, "How to Pay for the War," 375.

with wider participation: it is that the benefits of such a green transition would also lead to less unequal societies. It is important to connect gains from this transition to the issue of inequality. For the green transition to be lasting and successful the problem of inequality and the change of social mores must happen hand in hand with the transformation of society towards greener energy. If this transformation happens through our current market system, where the concentration of wealth is substantial and this determines the shape of future growth, it will increase inequality and at best, only delay the instability that the system is naturally prone to. Keynes's message at its core is that capitalism as practiced from the middle of the 18th century had a birthday and also has an expiry date. We wouldn't be where we are today without the phenomenal growth that the system of avarice created. However, this doesn't mean it is going to solve our future problems or can deal with today's social and environmental needs. Time for the drawing board and, time for change.

On Refugees

Polish Imaginaries and Practices

Artur Kula

This paper is based on my presentation given in October 2024 at the ISRF Conference in Warsaw. However, given that the issue of refugees and asylum seekers became a crucial part of Polish political debate between October 2024 and March 2025, I have decided to structure my contribution in two parts. The first part is based on my original conference presentation and seeks to depict the historical context of the relationship between Polishness, exile, and foreignness. The second part, an appendix, concerns the last few months and comments on the most recent legal developments. This paper arises from my dual background: as a historian studying Polish nineteenth-century imaginaries and as a lawyer representing activists acting at the Polish-Belarusian border.

Part I

The concept of Polishness remains a focal point of public debate in Poland, permeating political, cultural, and historical discourses. These discussions are largely shaped by collective memory or efforts to construct it, often through historical arguments presented as objective truths, with formal education serving as a primary vehicle for their dissemination.

The narrative of a glorious Polish nation, which has faced various adversities, yet always with dignity, is upheld by certain strands of contemporary historiography. The work of Andrzej Nowak, a professor from Kraków whose monumental *History of Poland* contains a Polish cosmogonic myth, serves as a prominent example of this right-wing perspective.[1] According to his narrative, the Polish nation originated with its baptism in 966, making it impossible to speak of Poles or Poland without reference to Catholicism. This fusion of nation and religion, Nowak argues, created a community with distinct, if not unique, characteristics that persist to this day. Using sociologist Michał Łuczewski's concept, one could describe this as a belief in an 'eternal nation.'[2] In this vision, 'we' have always existed as Poles (or at least for more than a thousand years), and our ancestors – our fathers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers – were as Polish as we are.

In this narrative, the role of non-Polish elements is minimized. If they are acknowledged at all, it is usually to highlight the supposed virtues of Poles. Examples include Poland's alleged tradition of tolerance (linked to the Warsaw Confederation of the sixteenth century, which supposedly made the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth 'a state without stakes') or heroism (exemplified

1 So far six volumes were published: I (until 1202) in 2014; II (1202–1340) in 2015; III (1340–1468) in 2017; IV (1468–1572) in 2019; V (1572–1632) in 2021; VI (1632–1673) in 2023.

2 Michał Łuczewski, *Odwieczny naród. Polak i katolik w Żmiącej* (Toruń 2012).

by the rescue of Jews during World War II, which even has an institution dedicated to it: the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II in Markowa). However, this narrative largely lacks a reflection on foreignness, exile, or otherness in its broadest sense.

These observations are not just historical curiosities or critiques of contemporary memory politics. They have significant implications for Polish society today, which is undergoing substantial demographic transformations. The ongoing mass migrations caused by the war in Ukraine and the humanitarian crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border are only part of a broader phenomenon. What is needed, therefore, is a migration policy, an integration model, and a holistic debate addressing these issues. Poles need comparisons, reports, and analyses. However, it is evident that this debate cannot be based solely on data. Its second level, which is equally, if not more, important, is emotional. It plays on public perceptions, hopes, and fears. Currently, it involves discussions of "no-go zones" and the circulation of viral footage. This debate is already taking place, with history playing a key role in it. Often, 'historical facts' are invoked as proof that civilization must be defended.

I would like to propose some historical arguments that present Polishness in a different way, by emphasizing the role of Polish exiles, particularly in the nineteenth century. Perhaps these counter-narratives will help us better understand ourselves and create more space for refugees and foreigners in Poland today.

Between Truth and Narrative

Before presenting specific examples, I would like to briefly consider the nature of history itself. History is a social science that constructs narratives about the past. We do not have direct

access to the latter. Instead, we rely on historical sources. On this basis, we (re)construct historical events and processes. However, this does not mean embracing total relativism. Historical sources provide a framework within which historians operate. Nonetheless, the conclusions they draw and the narratives they present often differ. Sometimes they complement each other, while at other times they are entirely contradictory. No single narrative has a monopoly on the truth.

The competition between historical narratives and the necessity of selecting among them is often referred to as the politics of history or memory politics. Formal education plays a crucial role in shaping collective historical consciousness. In Poland these typically adhere to a conservative model that centres on the Polish nation and emphasizes moments of national triumph, such as the Battle of Grunwald or the victories of the Polish Hussars. Literary education further reinforces this narrative, drawing heavily on the works of Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846–1916) whose novels were written 'to lift up the hearts.'[3] His works are frequently treated not as nineteenth-century fantasies about the past, but rather as historically accurate representations of specific events.

The early twenty-first century saw attempts to reform Polish historical education, including the introduction of courses like 'History and Society' and the establishment of cultural institutions such as the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk and the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, which sought to provide a more nuanced perspective on Central European history. However, these efforts were curtailed by right-wing government policies that reinforced national-patriotic interpretations of history, fostering a climate in which historical narratives served political ends. These shifts did not provoke much public resistance. This is not surprising; in addition to institutional changes, grassroots initiatives, often dominated by right-wing communities, also played

3 The quotation comes from his own words concluding the *Trilogy*, often considered his opus magnum.

a role. The left attempted to offer a counter-narrative but with limited success.

Reclaiming Polishness

The humanitarian crisis of 2015 revealed a strong correlation between nationalist historical consciousness and opposition to refugees, despite Poland's limited direct involvement in the crisis. Historical references to figures such as Jan III Sobieski and the Battle of Vienna reinforced the notion of Poland as a bastion of European civilization – a bulwark of Christendom against perceived external threats.

Today, similar rhetoric persists, as evidenced by the construction of a border fence at the Polish-Belarusian border, ostensibly to protect the nation from an influx of migrants. Fear plays a key role in this debate. While the argument of a potential Russian threat has become more prominent, the border fence was initially framed as a defence against a 'deluge' or 'waves' of migrants. The presence of even a few thousand people from Middle Eastern countries was portrayed as a serious threat to Polishness.

However, these discussions often leave the concept of Polishness undefined. This is a mistake. National identities are not immutable. They are historically constructed. Most emerged in the nineteenth century as political entities that replaced former monarchical and aristocratic structures. Consequently, the origins of Polishness should be examined within this historical framework, recognizing that national myths and symbols, such as the baptism of 966, are fluid and contingent.

Rediscovering the history of the nineteenth century and the nation-building process associated with it is therefore essential. This period was not only about heroic national uprisings but also

about the gradual inclusion and empowerment of previously excluded groups. Understanding this history could help present a more progressive vision of Polishness. For now, I propose to briefly focus on three examples: the impact of statelessness on Polish identity; the significance of the Great Emigration; and the development of national literature.

The nineteenth century in Polish history is defined by the absence of an independent state, spanning from the third and final partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795 to the re-establishment of Polish sovereignty with the founding of the Second Polish Republic in 1918. Political efforts aimed at national restoration took place both within the partitioned territories and in exile, fostering diverse expressions of Polish identity. Despite the existence of extensive autonomies, particularly in the second half of the century, and the presence of semi-independent statehoods between 1807 and 1846, the ultimate goal remained unchanged: regaining full self-determination.

In historiography, this period of statelessness is often described using the term 'Polish lands,' though its meaning is ambiguous. It can refer to the pre-partition borders, to all territories inhabited by people who identified as Polish, or to any lands that historically belonged to the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. However, such notions should not obscure the constant precarity and ever-shifting legal and political realities that Poles faced throughout the nineteenth century. Polish identity was shaped by a pervasive sense of uncertainty.

One of the most striking examples of this uncertainty was the period of the so-called Great Emigration, triggered by the collapse of the national uprising in 1831. The elites – fearing tsarist persecution – relocated primarily to France, which became the centre of national development for nearly two decades. However, this was neither a simple nor a linear process. The aristocracy, convinced of its superiority and a mission derived from its noble

lineage, frequently clashed with democratic organizations. The latter were largely composed of officers stationed by the French authorities in various institutions across the country. In its 1836 manifesto, the Polish Democratic Society declared: 'We will not sacrifice the happiness of twenty million for the sake of a privileged few, and the shedding of fraternal blood will fall only on the heads of those who, in their ignorance, place their own selfish interests above the common good and the survival of the Fatherland.' Meanwhile, Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, a leader of the aristocratic faction, supported French plans to send some Polish refugees to Algiers to assist French forces. This led to him being labelled an 'enemy of Polish emigration' by the vast majority of exiled Poles. Democratic organizations, however, did not confine their efforts to France. They sent emissaries across the partitioned territories to spread national ideas. Moreover, Polish exiles were not alone in their struggles. Other stateless nations faced similar fates, leading to expressions of solidarity, such as the slogan 'For our freedom and yours.' In other words, the nations of that era fighting for sovereignty and independence were, in many ways, refugee nations.

The Great Emigration also included artists who produced foundational works of Polish Romanticism – works that continue to shape the Polish collective imagination today. The compositions of Frédéric Chopin and the literary works of Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki, among others, were meant to educate and inspire future generations. Notably, exile is a recurring theme in their works. This motif predates Romanticism. Even Mazurek Dąbrowskiego (the Dąbrowski Mazurka), Poland's national anthem written in the 1790s, was inspired by the experience of exile. Its opening verse offers a glimmer of hope: 'Poland has not yet perished, as long as we live.'

To the South of Lampedusa

Polish identity, historically shaped by exile and the aspiration for self-determination, was fundamentally built on hope and solidarity with other displaced nations struggling for sovereignty. To reject this legacy of empathy would be to deny a crucial aspect of Polish history.

In this contribution, I have only outlined the historical arguments, indicating where they can be further explored. In reclaiming Polishness, we must not lose sight of the regional perspective. Today, just as in the nineteenth century, Poland's situation is not unique. The challenges of demographic shifts and necessary redefinitions of identity are at least European in scope. The construction of Fortress Europe extends far beyond the fence at the Belarusian border. It is not merely a matter of physical infrastructure.

I propose that the ongoing Polish debate, one that will only intensify, should connect the local with the regional. It should highlight the pivotal role of the refugee experience in shaping Polishness while emphasizing the need for transnational action. This perspective is already emerging in popular culture. Polish rapper DonGURALesko, for example, draws parallels between the plight of refugees in the Mediterranean and those at the Polish-Belarusian border.[4]

Part II – Appendix

One week after the ISRF Conference, the Polish government announced a new migration strategy. A key element of this policy was the decision to 'suspend' the right to asylum. This proposal was eventually formalised into a government bill, which passed

4 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZoekMEvItR4; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NVHLIxr-b6° [access: 13.03.2025].

with overwhelming support: on 21 February 2025, nearly 85% of MPs voted in favour, and on 13 March 2025, the Senate endorsed it just as enthusiastically. On 26 March 2025, the President signed the act. On the following day, the government issued a regulation suspending the right to asylum 'at the border with Belarus.'[5]

While the bill worked its way through parliament, various NGOs, the UNHCR, bar associations, and even the Senate's own chancellery published explicitly critical opinions.[6] They observed that the proposed bill violated Polish constitutional provisions as well as international agreements, such as the 1951 Refugee Convention.

For the legislature, however, these voices were irrelevant. The current government, while presenting itself as a restorer of the rule of law, introduced legislation that fundamentally undermines it. Nonetheless, the bill was also supported by public opinion, with polls indicating that over 50% of Poles favoured suspending the right to asylum.

As I mentioned in the main part of this article, the Polish debate on refugees is increasingly dominated by the argument of the Russian threat. Consequently, the fence at the Polish-Belarusian border is no longer just a symbol of anti-migrant policies but is now being framed as part of military preparations against potential Russian aggression. I assume that this shift has also contributed to the soaring support for measures such as the government's ban on the right to asylum.

The argument of the Russian threat does not invalidate my findings from the ISRF paper – quite the contrary. The current European climate, shaped by security concerns, reinforces nationalistic narratives. This makes it all the more necessary to construct

5 Regulation of the Council of Ministers of 27 March 2025 (Dz. U. z 2025 r. poz. 390).

6 The UNHCR's opinion is available in English: https://www.refworld.org/legal/natlegcomments/unhcr/2024/en/149257 [access: 13.03.2025].

counter-narratives based on solidarity and regional perspectives. The former is particularly urgent given the consequences of the securitization of public discourse. In Poland, one of these consequences appears to be a rise in anti-Ukrainian sentiment. The ongoing presidential election campaign, unfortunately, provides evidence that such exclusionary rhetoric can be an effective tool for candidates seeking to boost their poll numbers.

Nonetheless, these developments are not of teleological nature. It is therefore crucial to resist them and to create alternative narratives, both about Polishness and its relationship with the 'Other.'

‘Stress Testing Democracy’

A Brief History of Poland and Migration

Adam Balcer

As of today, the ethnic structure of Poland is changing rapidly and substantially due to migration. The “security first” manner in which this issue is managed by political elites presents a fundamental challenge to the future of the country’s democracy and EU membership, both of which are closely interrelated.

Until the middle of the 20th century, Poland – or at least the territory perceived by Poles as historically Polish – had been ethnically and religiously heterogeneous for around 600 years though, of

course, there were some important exceptions, namely rather homogeneous regions in the centre of the country. However, the composition of the country changed dramatically because of the Second World War, which transformed Poland from one of the most ethnically diverse countries in Europe to one of the most homogeneous. Today, due to a huge inflow of migrants and refugees, mostly Ukrainians, Poland's ethnic composition is undergoing a rapid and profound transition, as the nation state is transformed into a truly multicultural country.

This process has already provoked considerable social tensions and has been instrumentalised by many Polish politicians, including those of the mainstream in recent years. These politicians have created a negative correlation between migration and alleged threats to social-economic and national security, invoking the spectres of criminality, terrorism and poverty. As a worst case scenario, it's possible to imagine that Poland's democracy may not survive this politics of fear and moral panic.

The strength of fear around migration stems from a rather closed, ethnically-driven conception of national identity, which has been thrown into question amid the rapid secularisation which is simultaneously taking place in Poland.

'The great replacement'

In Poland, religion has been strongly intertwined with identity. Modern Polish nationalism developed in the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, promoting a vision of the nation as a homogeneous ethnic community. This was based on an imagined set of common roots stretching back to ancient times, with a conception of one culture (conservative), one language (Polish) and one religion (Roman Catholicism). Consequently, ideas such as civic nationalism, which promotes the centrality of citizenship and state, or multiculturalism gained ground only among

a minority of Poles (mostly urban dwellers, better educated, liberal and left).

Since then, ethnic identity has retained its predominance over civic and multicultural identities, despite the secularisation of recent years. Certainly, Polish society can still be distinguished from much of Europe due to a higher level of conservatism and religious practice, though recently it has become decisively less religious, as well as more liberal in terms of social values.

The rise of secularisation has caused something of an identity vacuum in Polish society. And though many experts assumed that this would lead to a more politically liberal society, this has not necessarily been the case. Instead, this vacuum has been filled in to a large degree by ethnic nationalism.

Between 2015 and 2024, far-right parties have performed very well in national, presidential and European elections gaining around 50% of votes. Moreover, in recent years Civic Coalition (KO), the big-tent political alliance currently ruling in Poland, which is aligned with the European People's Party (EPP), has started to flirt with a soft nationalism and xenophobia, directed particularly towards Muslim and African immigrants, though also against Ukrainians, albeit to a lesser degree.

Migrants and refugees

In the most recent census of 2021, out of Poland's population of just over 38 million people, 3.5% of citizens declared a different nationality or ethnicity as their primary or secondary identity. However, the census did provide an estimate for the number of immigrants and refugees, whose presence has increased radically in recent years. The highest estimates for the number of all immigrants and refugees – including those who reside permanently in the country, as well as those who come on a

temporary or seasonal basis, and illegal ones – sit around 3 million people. The great majority of these are Ukrainians, with the rest of the number mostly composed of citizens from Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia, particularly neighbouring Belarus. The sizable Ukrainian diaspora began to grow more than 10 years ago, first through economic migration which was then followed by a massive influx of refugees after the Russian invasion of 2022. Indeed, after Germany, Poland is now home to the largest community of Ukrainian refugees in the EU, numbering almost one million people. When it comes to EU nations, Poland's Ukrainian refugee community is second only to Czechia, when measured as a proportion of the overall population.

At the beginning of the conflict with Russia, Polish support for Ukrainian refugees was enormous, but today the honeymoon for this particular relationship has come to an end. For a rising number of people, the permanent presence of Ukrainians represents a challenge to Polish identity, as well as the economy and society at large.

In fact, when it comes to migration, it appears the Polish state, as well as the population at large, wants to "have its cake and eat it too". Although liberal in terms of giving work permits, permanent residence remains rather difficult to obtain in Poland – with receiving citizenship even more challenging. Generally, people can come to work but they are not very welcome to settle. This exclusiveness and reluctance to accept people as Polish citizens especially concerns Muslims and to a lesser degree Black people, with Ukrainians also affected but in a considerably softer version because they are white and Christian.

'War of the worlds'

In 2001, Law and Justice (PiS) was founded. This "soft" far-right party, which has clear authoritarian inclinations, ruled Poland in

coalition between 2005 and 2007, and as the party of government from 2015 to 2023. Since 2014, its political identity has been based on a policy of fear, shaping and reinforcing stereotypes, anxieties and prejudices to create a moral panic of the kind seen in the 1938 radio drama of *War of the Worlds*, the science fiction novel by H. G. Wells.

The main scapegoat of this moral panic over the Other has been Muslims, even though they are in fact a very small group in terms of the overall population. This phenomenon is most pronounced when you compare the attitude towards people who have come to Poland from Ukraine to those who have arrived from Africa and the Middle East. After Law and Justice became the single ruling party in Poland in 2015, there has been a shift in the public acceptance of refugees from the Middle East and Africa. In 2015, almost 50% of the population said no to accepting refugees from these regions – since then opposition has grown to almost 75%.1 Moreover, around two thirds of the population now say they do not like Muslims living in Poland, though the actual issues caused by their presence are clearly limited.[2]

In the summer of 2021, Islamophobia and racism assumed a key place in the political identity of Law and Justice, as Belarus and Russia provoked a humanitarian crisis on the border by attracting people, predominantly from Africa and the Middle East, and pushing them into Poland. The Polish state reacted with the use of force on a massive scale, denying these people entry into Poland and using "push backs" to force them back across the border, often leaving them stranded and stateless. In denying these people the opportunity to make applications to be treated as refugees, this policy violates Polish, international and EU law. It has also, indirectly, resulted in dozens of people losing their lives.

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1 See BDOS, *Stosunek Polaków i Czechów do przyjmowania uchodźców* (Warsaw, 2018), 4. Accessible at: https://cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2018/K_087_18.PDF.

2 For recent figures see BDOS, *O sytuacji na granicy polsko-białoruskiej* (Warsaw, 2024). Accessible at: https://cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2024/K_081_24.PDF.

Why Xenophobia is the new normal

In Autumn 2023, Law and Justice lost power to a diverse coalition of parties, including those from the left and the center right. Despite criticism of Law and Justice's authoritarian policies, former European Council President Donald Tusk ran an electoral campaign which exhibited many characteristics of soft xenophobia, often targeting people from Muslim and African countries. The government which Tusk established in December 2023 has to a large degree continued the xenophobic policy of their predecessors concerning the Polish-Belarussian border, though in a softer version. Overall, it has greatly exaggerated the scale of the illegal immigration, presenting it almost exclusively as a threat to Polish security.

In 2024 around 30,000 attempts of illegal border crossings were recorded – a figure which includes multiple efforts by single individuals – yet Polish government and the media, including a majority of liberal platforms, give the impression that this is the gravest crisis imaginable within the EU. In fact, according The European Border and Coast Guard Agency, or Frontex,

> In 2024 illegal crossings on the entire Eastern border of the EU, nearly stretching almost from the Barents Sea to the Black Sea accounted for just 7% of all crossings of this kind on the EU's external borders.[3]

As a result of the politics of fear, which has been pursued to a various degree by almost the entire political elite, opinion polls currently show that almost 75% of Poles no longer believe that people trying to cross the border have the right to asylum, something which is guaranteed in international and domestic law. The number of Poles rejecting these legal obligations increased

3 Frontex, 'Irregular border crossings into EU drop sharply in 2024', 1 January 2025, accessible at: https://www.frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/irregular-border-crossings-into-eu-drop-sharply-in-2024-oqpweX.

by 20% since the beginning of the crisis on the border in 2021. Moreover, the most recent polls show that around two thirds of Poles accept "push backs".[4] Indeed, approval for this policy has increased by 15% since 2022. The rise in both of these figures may be accounted for by supporters of the current government endorsing positions and policies first introduced by the far right.

However, Tusk's government has also gone further than its predecessors. In July 2024, Polish parliament passed legislation with a vast majority removing criminal liability from uniformed personnel who use weapons on Poland's eastern border. This legislation, which risks violating Polish, international and EU law, has not been endorsed in any EU member state. What is the most concerning is that surveys show that this law has gained support from around 85% of Poles.[5]

The government has also responded to refugee fatigue concerning Ukrainians sheltering in Poland – alongside economic tensions with Ukraine and historical Polish-Ukrainian disputes – by again mimicking the far right, adopting a softer version of its tough approach. In opinion polls, the number of Poles rejecting even modest social benefits for Ukrainian refugees has increased by more than three times to above 60% since the beginning of the full scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. In Spring 2022, more than 75% of Poles believed that the continued presence of Ukrainian refugees was a good thing. After two years, this number decreased to 45%.6 Finally, these trends have been accompanied by a considerable rise in antipathy from Poles towards Ukrainians who now enjoy sympathy from only a minority of citizens.

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4 BDOS, *O sytuacji na granicy polsko-białoruskiej.*

5 Ibid.

6 Piotr Pacewicz & Christina Garbicz, 'Odwracamy się od Ukraińców. Niechęć młodych i kobiet. Zaciekłość Konfederatów,' *OKO.press* 1 March 2024, accessible at: https://oko.press/odwracamy-sie-od-ukraincow-sondaz-ipsos.

EU as a scapegoat

Migration and refugees has become a hot issue for Poland's relationship with the EU, especially in regard to people of African and Muslim backgrounds, though to a lesser extent Ukrainians as well. When Law and Justice was ruling the country, the government attacked the EU, accusing its asylum policies of being an attempt by the EU's strongest countries, including Germany, to subjugate Poland, violating its cultural identity and political sovereignty, as well as undermining its social and national security.

The opinion polls show that these ideas resonate among the great majority of Poles, indirectly entrenching a sense of Euroscepticism.[7] Tusk's government has not tried to counter this narrative. In fact, it has decided to pursue it in a softer version. Here, it is playing with fire because membership of the EU constitutes one of a few key anchors for a fragile and vulnerable Polish democracy. EU membership did not stop the democratic backsliding of Poland between 2015 and 2023, but it considerably slowed down this process. Yet the continued rise of such Euroscepticism may substantially weaken the role of the EU in the Polish political system.

A bell-turn?

When Poles cast their votes on 15 October 2023, it's no exaggeration to say the country was at the edge: if Law and Justice had stayed in power and formed a far-right coalition with the even more radical Confederation party then the de-democratisation of Poland would have accelerated greatly.

Tusk's government is certainly at least the lesser evil in comparison to its predecessors, though it has intentionally chosen to play with

7 'Polacy nie chcą już przywilejów strefy Schengen. Nowe badanie,' *Business Insider*, 2 February 2025, accessible at: https://businessinsider.com.pl/wiadomosci/polacy-popieraja-powrot-kontroli-na-granicach-ue/gsr2m7f.

the politics of fear, "soft" xenophobia and moral panic concerning Muslims, Africans and to a lesser degree Ukrainians.

In recent decades, results of elections in the great majority of European countries have confirmed that the mainstream mimicking ideas of the radical right in a softer version has not brought about a fall in the popularity of the far right. To the contrary, it's often facilitated its rise by an increasing normalisation of xenophobia – yet still the government is pursuing this strategy.

Indeed, when we look at the polls, what we see in Poland today is actually that there has not been a major decrease of support for radical parties since the last national elections in the Autumn of 2023. Law and Justice and Confederation went on to get around half the vote at last year's European elections (June 2024). If these results had been mirrored in the national vote then we would have had a far-right coalition in power. The rise of the more radical Confederation party, which in the most recent opinion polls received the backing of around 15% of decided voters, is all the more worrying.

The ruling coalition cannot hide behind the claim that its strategy is just about reflecting the social mood because to a large degree it has radicalised its own electorate by normalizing xenophobia in a softer version. There is a huge group of Poles who in opinion polls describe themselves as being "rather" against migrants, refugees, Muslims, Africans, Ukrainians, instead of "absolutely". However, the main parties of government have never tried to convince these citizens to change their minds and become "rather" for. Instead, by promoting soft xenophobia they have created favourable conditions for some of their voters to slide to the far-right.

At the same time, the far-right opposition has grown ever more radicalised in an attempt to differentiate themselves from the government. The upcoming presidential elections between May and June this year are crucial for Poland's future due to the

considerable powers which will be held by whoever is elected. Victory of a far-right candidate may result in the fall of our current government and the establishment of a new one which will include radicals. There may even be snap parliamentary elections.

Rafał Trzaskowski, a candidate for Civic Coalition, the strongest political force in the current government, continues the strategy of soft xenophobia and "light" mimicry of certain ideas of radical right. If this strategy fails, Poland will most probably face the scenario of a "bell-turn," which is described by the Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem) as when democratisation fails and a country increasingly falls ever further into autocratisation.[8]

8 V-Dem Institute, *Democracy Report 2024: Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot* (Gothenberg, 2024), 25.

This ISRF Bulletin speaks to the links, tensions and affinities between migration and issues of climate and politics. Based on papers presented at the ISRF's 2024 annual conference, contributions aim to recalibrate existing categories of analysis in the face of escalating political, humanitarian, and environmental crises.

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