

EUROPEAN SELF-CENTEREDNESS: THE DRAMA OF AFRICAN AND OTHER MIGRANTS

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ABSTRACT

On December 1, 2015 David Pryce-Jones, a British author, commentator, and senior editor of *National Review* offered his comments on what is today perceived as the immigration crisis in Europe, under the following headline: "Can the European Nation-State Survive the Current Wave of Mass Migration?" With the same centuries old self-centered perspective European governments seem unable to contemplate this monumental human crisis except from the threat that it may represent for the unmovable center of their citizenship rights in the so-called really civilized nations of the world, their values, economic stability, and moral and cultural standards. This paper departs from a different question: Can current waves of 'migrants' survive in Europe? to expose some of the Western-based ideologies that perceive everybody outside of dominant European ancestry as the "other" and their impact on the nature of global relations, peace, human ethics and responsibility.

RESUMO

Em 1 de Dezembro de 2015, o autor inglês David Pryce-Jones, comentador e editor chefe da *National Review* escrevia sobre o que se diz ser hoje a crise da imigração na Europa sob a seguinte caixa: "Can the European Nation-State Survive the Current Wave of Mass Migration?" Imbuídos das mesmas perspectivas egocêntricas, características do pensamento europeu ocidental com mais de cinco séculos de arreigada existência, os governantes europeus não parecem capazes de abordar esta monumental crise humanitária que não seja do ponto de vista de uma hipotética ameaça que estas consecutivas vagas de novos migrantes possam representar para a centralidade dos seus direitos de cidadania nestas suas auto-denominadas nações mais civilizadas do mundo, os seus valores, a sua estabilidade económica, os seus padrões morais e culturais. O presente estudo aborda a questão de uma perspectiva diferente: "Can current waves of 'migrants' survive in Europe?" a fim de expôr algumas das ideologias ocidentais que transformam num "outro" todo aquele que não pertença ao grupo dominante de origem europeia, com todos os inerentes efeitos de exclusão e seu impacto negativo sobre a natureza das relações globais, a paz, e as responsabilidades éticas e humanitárias.



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September 11th, 2001 combined attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon in the United States should have been reason for deep reflective analysis of the consequences of the American predatory oil policies at a global scale on the African and Asian continents and peoples.

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On the contrary, a rhetoric of fear, hysterical victimization, and aggression propelled the western world into a unified voice of condemnation of the viciousness of such terrorist attacks.

Madrid, London, Paris, and Brussels more recent massive explosions have shown the same quick confluence of Western cooperation declaring a united front of open warfare against the outrageous destruction of innocent civilians. George Bush and Nicolas Sarkozy, David Cameron as well as Barack Obama, they all spoke at one voice. François Holland declared in November 2015 that 'France is at war,' while requesting for "new laws that would allow authorities to strip the citizenship from French-born terrorists"² while Charles Michel, Belgian Prime Minister recently declared: 'I don't accept that an attack makes us 'a failed state'³ referring to Belgium's potential of aggression similar to any other European nation.

While I am not disputing the vehement condemnation of terrorist attacks, I do regret its inherent, declared or implied, aggression. Terrorism is never justifiable, either private or institutionalized led by revolutionary or extremist groups; neither most certainly when it is perpetrated by nations or states under the banner of defensive rights.

However, the West persists in its historical denial, unwilling to take responsibility for this undisputable reality: twentieth and twenty-first century humanitarian crises in Africa and Asia - especially now in what is called Middle East, Palestine, Syria, Libya, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan – are the result of long-term conflicts created, supported, and fed by both Europe and the United States of America.

Centuries of colonial and imperial domination, followed by economic market globalization and financial neo-colonial strategies have spun out internal conflicts, famine, and massive dislocations of populations, migrants, and increasing numbers of refugees.

² <http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/16/world/paris-attacks/> November 16, 2015

³ <http://www.cnn.com/2016/04/06/europe/belgium-michel-amanpour/> April 6, 2016.

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These crucial challenges are met in Europe, even today, with the same old rhetoric and praxis of arrogant indifference for humanitarian disasters when they do not immediately disturb its front garden. Unlike the U.S.A. European countries never had to confront practices of resistance and organized mass movements within their borders that question both the ideological bases of white racism and privilege, oppression, segregation, and denial of citizenship rights. Europe in general, has systematically ignored and certainly not learned from Colin Powell's and the U.S Department of Defense's estimation that "terrorist attacks are often the result of U.S foreign policy" as well as European global tentacular colonial and imperial grip⁴.

As history teaches us, the persistent design of colonial policies left former colonized territories, after political independence, with a paucity of economic and educational infrastructures that represented doors opened ajar to internal warfare promoted by the continuation of international interference. Former or new colonial powers with direct or indirect interests in the control of regional resources, established important multinational explorations in order to secure extraction and acquisition of mineral sources, especially fossil energy like oil and natural gas at the expenses of huge depletion of means of survival for local populations. Years of endless war and local conflicts impact peoples' lives and sustainability

⁴ Jeremiah Wright clearly understood the dangers conveyed by the world's proclaiming, "God damns America" (Asante, 2009: pp. 60-65).

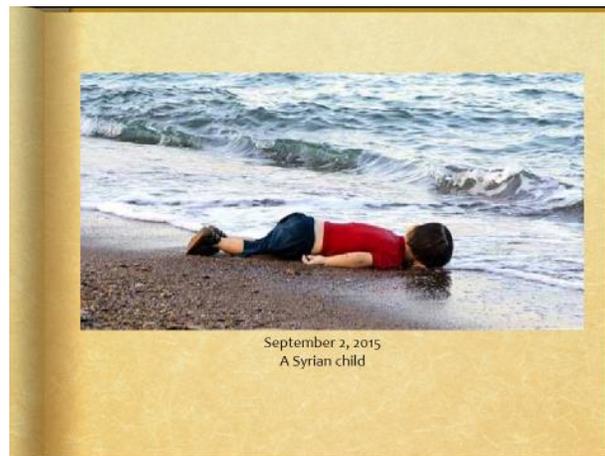
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in many different catastrophic ways: Rwanda/Mali/Sudan/Somalia/South Africa/Nigeria/Angola... are some examples of massive dislocations, flows of refugees, entire fleeing populations who have lost everything and are now desperately seeking a safe refuge and roaming Europe against all the odds.

BRIEF HISTORICAL RETROSPECT

Massive flows of peoples from the African and Asian continents to European countries are very diverse, and we can roughly say that since 1950s Europe has witnessed at least three different categories of influx movements: citizens from former colonized territories with a European nationality; asylum seekers/migrant laborers; and refugees. Different national policies dictated the different ways in which European countries have dealt and are dealing with each of these waves but there are certain persistent attitudes that draw a common pattern towards incoming populations.



First, colonial European countries received an unusual great number of people from their former colonies who chose to take advantage of their European nationality after political independence of their territories. Either because they had British, French,

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Portuguese or some other European ancestry or because they were members of the local colonial administrations, many took the opportunity offered by their nationality to move to Europe. The phenomenon in Great Britain with Indian and Pakistani populations in the 1950s is similar to that in 1960s France with great numbers of Africans from North and West Africa as well as in Portugal with numerous groups from Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde entering the country after 1974.

The social composition of these first in-coming groups also shows similarities: they possessed generally above average professional skills and education that, together with their recognized European nationality predicted the possibility of keeping their former social status also in Europe.

Nonetheless, this was an idle dream that quickly reverted to a nightmare. In Great Britain, for instance, Indians and Pakistani were met first with considerable hesitation and occasional hostility, but ultimately with outright opposition and racist laws as the infamous Notting Hill race riots of 1958 testify⁵.

An outbreak of smallpox, allegedly brought into the country with the newcomers branded Pakistan and India as 'endemic home of the disease' and produced hysterical headlines such as: 'KEEP OUT THE GERMS', in a front page editorial of the London-based national tabloid *Daily Mail* on 1 January 1962.

In France massive migration started with the formal independence of Mali in 1960.

Although between 1955 and 1965 for citizens of the former French colonies neither residence nor work permit was required (Trauner, 2001) restrictive laws were soon

⁵ Increase in Caribbean migrants to Britain by the 1950s prompted white working-class "Teddy Boys" to display hostility towards the black families in the area, a situation exploited and inflamed by far-right groups who urged disaffected white residents to "Keep Britain White". Cf. Bivins R.,

"The people have no more love left for the Commonwealth': Media, migration and identity in the 1961-2 British smallpox outbreak", *Immigr Minor*, 2007 Nov 1; 25(3): 263-289.

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implemented. By 1970s, restrictions in immigration policies were applied, and Sahelian migrants started either to move to other destinations like Italy, Spain, Belgium, Germany and Portugal (Adepoju 2004, 2) or seek unofficial networks to make their way into the country. Since the mid 1980s, African migrants have increasingly been at the center of public and political debates on immigration in general and undocumented immigrants in particular, *les sans papiers*.

Protest against stringent immigration laws and segregated conditions under which Africans lived in France inevitably erupted in violence with 'blaming the victim' headlines in the national press:

Les violences qui ont secoué la France ces dernières semaines - 2200 voitures brûlées en l'espace d'une dizaine de jours - ont été révélatrices de la méfiance et de l'incompréhension entre certains habitants des banlieues des grandes villes et les forces du gouvernement. (*Seine-Saint-Denis matin*, Samedi 25 Octobre 2003).

In the aftermath of independence, civil wars and religious antagonism escalated in the African and Asian battle-fields of Cold War, followed by the plundering effects of international corporations that continued to displace entire populations throughout the African and Asian continents forcing large numbers to move to Europe. These were indistinctly asylum seekers and migrant workers.

While former incoming groups might have benefitted for a short while⁶ from their European nationality, less qualified migrants who roamed European countries either to escape from starvation, war, religious cleansings, or refugee camps in Africa and elsewhere were systematically received with downtrodden policies of the all-powerful political, social,

⁶ In Great Britain a very quick reversal of initial acceptance turned into aggressive xenophobic and exclusionary reactions of public opinion and restrictive laws; in France and Portugal “les banlieus de Paris” and “os bairros de lata de Lisboa” (ghettos and shantytowns) clearly demonstrate the same level of social and economic exclusion and deprivation to which former colonized citizens have been/are unwelcome.

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and cultural laws of host countries. Even if they were entering Europe legally, bureaucracy was certain to make relocation, let alone acceptance, become a haunting task. From quarantine quarters to health screenings, to segregated neighborhoods and unqualified jobs when they were finally cleared for work, almost always respect for their human rights had largely been repeatedly violated.



In the meantime, Germany, Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands created a protectionist front in 1957 - the European Economic Community (EEC) - and by 1973 Denmark, Ireland, and United Kingdom also joined what would become the European Union, now with 28 member countries and concerted policies especially in what concerns free movements of peoples and capital. With the Schengen Treaty in 1985 and the unification of Germany in 1989, a huge spectrum of possibilities offered by the permeability of boundaries seemed to present improved opportunities for moving populations. However, lack of clear immigration laws and ambiguity as to conditions of acceptance in host European countries, left many people in the same unstable, often illegal position that did not distinguish between migrant laborers, asylum seeker, and refugees all at the mercy of unscrupulous traffickers.

The scope of the Schengen treaty:

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The basic idea was to eliminate border controls, abolish import/export tariffs, and allow for free circulation of peoples within the member states of the European Union. While some countries advocated that free circulation of peoples should not be restrictive to nationals of the member states, others were strict about this issue. Finally, common laws and procedures were adopted by the countries that signed the treaty regarding specifically short-term visas and political asylum-permits controlled by and at the first point of entry in the Schengen space.

Almost every country of the European Union adopted Schengen protocols, now with 26 members of the European Union plus Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

Exception were Great Britain, Denmark, and Ireland who compromised only partially and only if they considered that there was no *long-term social consequences of the presence [...] of large and growing coloured [sic] communities that are unlikely to be assimilated.*⁷

On the other hand, all European Union member countries' population is ageing at a quick pace that, according to Eurostat estimates, will mean that by 2030 with zero immigration EU will lose 15 million inhabitants or 3% of its population. The same source projections also demonstrate that even if immigration rates in Europe will increase by 1.5% up to 2030 – around 8 million inhabitants – many European countries will be still very short in their work force since by that time Italy may have lost 2.6 million inhabitants; Poland 2.3 million, and Germany 1.2 million. Which means that to maintain the working population at an acceptable level the entry of at least 43 million migrants would be necessary.

This is the reason that Germany opened her borders to massive Turkish and other migrant laborers in 2000. However, other countries like Great Britain, France, and Ireland maintained restrictions to the movement of labor increasing the potential for illegal entries and human trafficking with all the inherent humanitarian disasters to which European governments and public opinion have consistently turned a blind eye.

⁷ TNAPROHO 344/14, "Report to Ministerial Committee" July 1961 in Bivins, R., *op. cit.* p. 268.

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Until recently... when the conflicts in the so-called Middle East escalated to unsustainable conditions for human survival and increasing numbers of refugees and asylum seekers started crossing Turkey in direction of northern and western European countries.

Some numbers will better illustrate the challenge:

During the first six months of 2015 only, a total of 438,000 refugees sought asylum in the European Union as compared to 571,000 during 2014. In 2015, over 350,000 people were also registered as migrants on the European borders. It is estimated that around 235,000 entered through Greece; 115,000 through Italy; and 2,100 through Spain⁸.

Since 2014, an escalation of conflicts, constant violence, and almost total destruction in Syria, Afghanistan, and Eritrea have amplified the so-called migratory crises in Europe with world's public attention to the drama triggered by pictures of a Syrian child washed ashore Turkish seacoast as almost the entire family perished in the Mediterranean (September 2, 2015).

This was not a new fact, though. But it was a white child/family. The Mediterranean sea has long been a huge cemetery for desperate Africans – whole families - fleeing from war zones and starvation, but no real attention was paid, at least no consistent policies implemented, to address the inhuman conditions under which they have been smuggled into Europe or left adrift to perish in the sea. Until.

With European authorities dealing with more than five thousand deaths in the Mediterranean crossing since the beginning of 2014 as merely a "migrant boat" problem due

⁸ "Refugiados na Europa: a crise em mapas e waves of Syrian refugees brought another dimension to the problem and numbers almost duplicated gráficos", *BBC BRASIL*, 6 Setembro, 2015. http://www.bbc.com/portuguese/noticias/2015/09/150904_graficos_imigracao_europa_rm#share-tools.

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to an expanding reckless and unscrupulous "multi-million-euro business"⁹, European countries unwillingness to take measures to prevent the fundamental problem became clear. The rigid enforcement of visa requirements on Non-European nationals regardless of the condition through which they are fleeing their homes, makes it virtually impossible for refugees and asylum seekers to legally enter Europe. Unable to get a visa and/or any legal documentation in war zones, they are left at the mercy of unscrupulous smugglers that from Turkey, the Balkans, and North Africa carry them into clandestine routes in the most dangerous and inhuman circumstances¹⁰.

Once again European Union politicians' and governments' inability and unwillingness, actually centuries-old racist and xenophobic mentalities and policies, immediately took hold of illegal migration as justification for imposing, against the grain of the Schengen Treaty, strong-armed police border security with tear gas, water cannons, and pepper spray attacks on refugees.

Against the strain placed by thousands of asylum seekers on Germany, Sweden, Turkey, and Hungary; the agony of refugees' journey across Hungary and Austria; and the lack of adequate responses to refugees' needs on the part of the Turkish, Greek and Italian governments, Europe's response was one of fear, closing-doors, and retaliation. Examples abound: Great Britain shut them out on the French side of the English Channel; on September 15, 2015 Hungary closed her borders with Serbia and built a 200km barbed wire barrier to prevent refugees from entering the country, patrolling the area, charging over them with police brutality, and arresting those who dared cross over. Spearheaded by Great Britain's attitude that "any accommodation of asylum seekers would only encourage more to come"

⁹ In 2014 deaths in the Mediterranean ascended to 3,279 while death toll in 2015 up to August was already 2, 373. (Frontex in Eakin, H. (2015). "The Terrible Flight from the Killing", *The New York Review of Books*, October 22, 2015 Issue).

¹⁰ Between January and July 2015, European officials estimate that illegals entering Europe through central and eastern Mediterranean, and the Balkans amounted to 450.000 a number far beyond the 300.000 for the whole 2014.

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(Eakin, 2015) several countries rejected September 9, 2015 European Union President Jean-Claude Juncker's proposal to establish a balanced system of quotas among its member states to alleviate the strain placed on more appealing destinations. In the meantime, Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey were already strained with millions of Syrians when thousands of Afghans joined them last summer trying to enter Europe as well. As soon as the World Food Program drastically reduced the already underfunded food aid, countries that had so far absorbed these refugees like Iran and Pakistan joined Turkey in taking aggressive measures to repatriate them.

While Eastern European countries treated massive waves of refugees as a security problem the threat of an "Arab invasion" determined governments' and public's acceptance of Christian refugees only, for example in Slovakia; police in the Czech Republic replicated ill-omened nazi-like practices by dragging refugees off trains, detaining them, and number-marking their arms (*op. cit.*). Even the wealthiest countries bound by the Schengen Treaty like Germany and Denmark ignored Schengen norms by cutting support for refugees and implementing border controls. The precedent was quickly followed by Austria, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Croatia which had suddenly become alternate routes into the EU while, outside of the Schengen space, Macedonia, Serbia, Albania, Montenegro, and Bosnia/Herzegovina also closed their borders leaving thousands of refugees now amassed against EU's borders, many lacking any form of shelter.

Given the fact that most European countries undoubtedly need to rejuvenate their population and labour force for which they heavily depend on incoming movers, why do European leaders seem so ambivalent about helping solve the manifestly urgent needs both of those now arriving and their own? Even when the current head of the International Rescue Committee and former foreign secretary of Great Britain David Miliband recently recognized that newcomers certainly do not represent a threat or "a demographic time bomb", why can't they all speak at one voice now, why is the political response of EU heads of state so closely tied to border security and strong-armed police tactics?

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The real problem lies in Europe itself; in its inability to undergo a serious and honest critical analysis of its persistent and undying philosophy of the 'undisputable superior European civilization model' in every consideration: from its political to its religious institutions, to its social organizations and laws.

Some speak of newcomers as refugees, others call them asylum seekers, while others refer to them indistinctly as migrants or illegal migrants. Legislation to integrate them is unclear thus creating all sorts of inconsistent approaches to deal with the demands placed by cultural and religious diversity, language barriers, traumatic after-effects of war, dislocation, uprootedness, and loss. Instead of respect for humanitarian crisis Europe claims issues of national security created by present "migration crisis" and "the Islamic invasion" giving evidence to many xenophobic and racist inclinations of right wing and social democratic European governments like those of Great Britain, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands, France, Austria, Poland, and Hungary. Anti-immigrant and especially anti-islamic parties and groups have intensified their attacks on refugee camps and asylum centers in Germany and in the British and the Dutch national parliaments voices have been heard against the Islamic threat in a clear demonstration of an unabated fear of difference in a self-centered and self-congratulatory Europe as the epitome of the civilized world.

All these alarming and otherness-tagged comments, simultaneously defensive and offensive, that have been making headlines in the media as if Europe were under siege have to be put in perspective. One million refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers, aliens to the European "civilized" nation states 'haunting' Europe is ONLY 0.2 percent of the European population, eventually a number inferior to the European necessity of a young labor force to compensate for its aged population.

In fact, African migrants are primarily seeking asylum within the African continent, in Israel, and many other places.

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They do not represent a threat. No, they don't, except for a Europe blinded by such ostentatious arrogance that it fails to understand that only fundamental human and basic common sense rules work in its own benefit and that of a sustainable world.

Violence is a spun glass; disrespect and hostility generate resentment.

Europe needs to face this reality: its imperial policies are stale-dated. The world needs compassion, cooperation, and respect for human lives.

For the sake of peace, it is time for Europe to be responsible for the consequences of its failed policies (past and present); to stop its xenophobic rhetoric and material racism; to stop demanding outright copy-paste assimilation of the European models; to establish clear incoming policies protective of human life and dignity; to promote integration of the dislocated populations with respect for values, cultures, religions, and life styles.

It is time for Europe to stop the chaos.

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