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The Politics of Pests: immigration and the invasive other

Bridget Anderson

Centre on Migration, Policy and Society

58 Banbury Road

Oxford

OX2 6QS

UK

Email: bridget.anderson@compas.ox.ac.uk

Tel: 44 1865 274719

Bridget Anderson is Professor of Migration and Citizenship at the University of Oxford, and Research Director of the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS). She has worked closely with migrants' organisations, trades unions and legal practitioners at local, national and international level.

In 2015 more than one million people entered the European Union, many fleeing wars in the Middle East. There was a strand of hostile media coverage that represented migrants as vermin or insects. This paper examines the context of this representation and argues that that association of vermin – waste, numbers and threats to the home – provides useful insights into the anxieties underpinning negative responses to asylum seekers. Analysing these representations offers insights into the kinds of political questions that must be tackled in struggling for more positive responses.

The Politics of Pests: immigration and the invasive other

'We are a disturbance... because we show you in a terrible way how fragile the world we live in is'

The UNHCR estimates that more than one million people entered Europe by sea in 2015 and at least 3,700 drowned. The vast majority of entrants were from the world's top ten refugee producing countries including Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Like the apocryphal story that the Haitian slave revolutionaries greeted the repressive French army by singing the Marseillaise, so some of the people walking along the motorways of Hungary and Austria were carrying the European flag. We share your respect for justice, freedom and human rights and here we are! We belong!

The situation was labelled a 'crisis' and the response was schizophrenic. Widespread 'Refugees are Welcome' demonstrations were met with nationalist counter demonstrations and fire bombings. As autumn arrived, amidst mutual recriminations of xenophobia and hypocrisy Europe re-bordered: checkpoints were instituted between Austria and Germany, Italy and France, Sweden and Denmark, Croatia and Austria, Macedonia and Greece. Thus the crisis brought into question not only the principles of asylum and of free movement within the European Union but Europe's very idea of itself as a space of liberal values, freedom, moral equality and human rights. This could be seen as prefiguring political shifts of 2016 with the UK's vote to leave the European Union ('Brexit'), and the mainstreaming of what had been regarded as the 'far right' across the EU. As well as a migration crisis confronting Europe, what started to unfold was a *European* crisis confronting migrants: A multi-dimensional European crisis of solidarity between member states, many of which are struggling with austerity and with rapidly diminishing state capacity. This crisis was effectively called out by migration (Kriss 2015).

The media coverage of these events and their consequences reflected these tensions. Hostility towards mobile people, concerns about security and demands on resources, collided with the unavoidably human face of catastrophe, and for a time negative responses were mitigated by the photograph of drowned toddler Aylan Kurdi. The temporalities inherent in this contradiction were encapsulated in an editorial in *The Times* of 21st January 2016: "Compassion is the right response but unconditional welcome is the wrong way to express it".

The relation between media coverage, policy and public opinion is highly complicated, particularly in cases that are depicted as some kind of 'crisis'. Press coverage is not a neutral mirror of public opinion, but neither does it simply shape public attitudes – news organisations are businesses, concerned to build relationships with their readers not to challenge their views. The relation between media, public attitudes, and policy-making is complex and mutually constitutive and there has been some interest in this triangular relation in the case of migration and asylum (Matthews and Brown 2012). This issue has received increasing attention post 2015, and there continues to be considerable debate about the role of the media in the representation of migrants/refugees, and its relation to public opinion. Several studies were commissioned. The Ethical Journalism Network found that press coverage was fuelling sensationalism, anxiety and intolerance (Morrison 2016), while research commissioned by the UNHCR found representations of migrants as cultural or welfare threats were prevalent in several EU states.

Attention to media depictions of the migrant/refugee inevitably foregrounds questions of race and racism. The fixing of race and ethnicity was and continues to be related to control of mobility, and to ideas of the nation. In public discourse there is some recognition of a potential relation between hostility to migration, xenophobia and racism – even if this is expressed in the *denial* of an actual relation. This is reflected in the competing claims that immigration/asylum policies are necessary to forestall racism, or that they are irrelevant to issues of race, or that they are inherently racist. Yet in academic research the migrant as racialized other, and what this means for ideas of the constitution of the racialized other has tended to either be assumed or ignored (Solomos 2014). The representation of the migrant as invasive other indicates the need for more attention to be paid to the relation between hostility to migrants and racism. It is important to uncover how ideas about migration play a complex and often contradictory role in racialisation processes: simultaneously evidence of tolerance and threatening tolerance, a new political subject and a threat to the polis, shaping ideas of shared identity by incorporation and rejection.

Coverage in Context

For over twenty years the outsourcing of migration controls, agreements with source and transit countries, readmission agreements, the creation of migration management policies and facilities in countries of origin and so on have kept the consequences of war and global inequalities largely out of sight. European publics have largely been protected from the practical reality of forced displacement and economic desperation that is now showing up on holiday beaches. In 2015 tourists began to complain about sharing beaches and pavements with homeless refugees: 'It's really dirty and messy here now. And it's awkward. I'm not going to sit in a restaurant with people watching you' (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3099736/Holidaymakers-misery-boat-people-Syria-Afghanistan-seeking-asylum-set-migrant-camp-turn-popular-Greek-island-Kos-disgusting-hellhole.html#ixzz2IEzd91gT>).

The long tail of the movement to Europe is easy to trace. Even before the Arab Spring the Middle East and North African region was being singled out as a potential source of migrants, and 'unresolved conflicts' and political unrest suggested as potentially motivating emigration to Europe. By the mid-2000s there were warnings that Middle East's states of reception were under considerable pressure from the challenges of coping with displacement, and it was suggested that people might start moving on. Notably this was even before the war in Syria, and the collapse of Libya which had functioned as an effective migration buffer zone. Colonel Ghaddafi was well aware of the importance of this to Europe. When his regime was being challenged by Western powers, he told the France 24 television station: "There are millions of blacks who could come to the Mediterranean to cross to France and Italy, and Libya plays a role in security in the Mediterranean" (cited in BBC News 7th March 2011 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12663513>). His son also warned "Libya may become the Somalia of North Africa, of the Mediterranean. You will see the pirates in Sicily, in Crete, in Lampedusa. You will see millions of illegal immigrants. The terror will be next door".

Even before 2015 anxiety about asylum, migration and terrorism had been on the increase across the European Union. How this was expressed, and in particular the tone of the media coverage, varied significantly, both between outlets, and also across states (Berry et al. 2015). In 2014 there

had been large numbers of deaths in the Mediterranean. Displacement from the Syrian war, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, poverty and environmental degradation in Niger, Senegal, and Gambia was pressing ever more urgently at the borders of Europe. By the early Spring of 2015 the main route from Africa to Europe shifted from Libya/Italy to Turkey/Greece. Those on the move included a significant proportion of Syrians often with young children, reluctant to remain in Turkey with its limited health and education and the long term prospect of living with precarious status. Faced with tens of thousands of people heading towards Germany, on 10th August 2015 German Chancellor Angela Merkel ordered the suspension of the Dublin Regulation for Syrian nationals. The Dublin Regulation requires asylum cases to be heard in the first EU state that the applicant arrives in. If they move on and claim asylum in another EU member state, that second state can return them to their point of arrival for their case to be heard there. It places considerable pressures on countries at the borders of Europe to the benefit of Northern European states (if one assumes that having fewer asylum seekers is a benefit). It is worth noting in the light of subsequent events that in January 2011 the European Court of Human Rights had halted Dublin removals from other EU member states to Greece on the grounds that detention conditions in Greece were so inhumane that they constituted an abuse of human rights.

In September 2015 EU member states had committed to resettling 160,000 refugees in order to relieve some of the pressure on member states at the edges of Europe. Even this extremely modest target proved too much: by July 2016 they had resettled only 3,056. However, the EU had trebled spending on border defence and, in December 2015, the establishment of a European Border and Coast Guard to defend Europe's borders was announced. Alarmed by numbers and the refusal to 'burden share' the European Commission struck a deal that provided the framework for the mass return of migrants from Greece to Turkey. This was agreed despite multiple concerns including claims from Amnesty International that Turkey was conducting illegal mass returns of Syrians to Syria on a daily basis.

There was uncertainty about the words used to describe what was happening: was this a 'refugee crisis' or a 'migrant crisis', or indeed, was it a 'crisis' at all? The debate about 'refugee' versus 'migrant' was not about accurately conveying the legal status of those who are moving, (which depends on their nationalities, personal histories and claims), but rather on the moral value of the entrants: helpless victims of war, - refugees; potential terrorists, the undeserving wealthy, those in search of a good life, - migrants. Despite nearly two decades of negative publicity, 'refugee' (unlike 'asylum seeker') does still retain connotations of deservingness and human rights. When applied to groups moving in 2015 it often facilitated comparisons with the Europe of Second World War, both the movement of Jewish people during the war, and the situation of displaced people after it. This was used to emphasise the scale of the 'crisis' but also the ethics of the political response. For example, Prime Minister Cameron described the offer of admitting 4,000 Syrian people a year for five years with particular focus on vulnerable children as 'the modern equivalent of the Kindertransport'. Critics compared Denmark's policy introduced in January 2016 to demand the handing over of money and assets to pay for the cost of their accommodation and maintenance with Nazi treatment of Jews. Swedish MEP Cecilia Wikström campaigning for safe passage to Europe from conflict zones compared the contemporary response to refugees to the policy of appeasement in the Second World War warning that Europe would be judged negatively by future generations: "Swedes will compare this to the Holocaust". Indeed the German response of opening its borders was

welcomed by liberal commentators as a kind of reparation for its Nazi past and only months after the hostility invoked by the Eurozone crisis with Greece calling for Nazi war reparations Angela Merkel was in the frame for winning the Nobel Peace Prize.

The flipside of the invoking of sympathy for the 'refugee' was that 'migrant' became overtly pejorative. The negativity of this ostensibly neutral term had been apparent for some time. 'Migrant' and its equivalents in contrast are increasingly associated with the low skilled, the low waged and the global poor. Notably it is a term rarely used to describe the professional or those moving from North Europe and North America, who are more likely to be known as 'expats'. In August 2015 the broadcaster Al Jazeera announced that it was no longer going to use the term 'migrant'. It is worth quoting their reasons in full:

The umbrella term migrant is no longer fit for purpose when it comes to describing the horror unfolding in the Mediterranean. It has evolved from its dictionary definitions into a tool that dehumanises and distances, a blunt pejorative.

It is not hundreds of people who drown when a boat goes down in the Mediterranean, nor even hundreds of refugees. It is hundreds of migrants. It is not a person – like you, filled with thoughts and history and hopes – who is on the tracks delaying a train. It is a migrant. A nuisance.

It already feels like we are putting a value on the word. Migrant deaths are not worth as much to the media as the deaths of others - which means that their lives are not. Drowning disasters drop further and further down news bulletins. We rarely talk about the dead as individuals anymore. They are numbers.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/blogs/editors-blog/2015/08/al-jazeera-mediterranean-migrants-150820082226309.html>

UK press coverage

The UK press coverage has been found to be the most polarised, aggressive and negative towards those seeking asylum across the European Union (Berry et al. 2015). In contrast with Germany where the mobility of 2015 was routinely labelled refugee (flüchtling(e)/ flykting) or asylum seeker (asylsuchende(r)/asylsokande) in the UK the dominant term was migrant. The UK press has a 'pathologically present anti-Nazi past' (Gilroy 2012) but is nonetheless infamous in its hostility to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. A 2003 study on asylum coverage found that media reporting was characterised by inaccurate and provocative use of language, and an overwhelming focus on numbers which were often unsourced and exaggerated (Buchanan et al. 2003). A study of the use of migration in the 2005 general election campaign described how it became a central issue for political communication with an emphasis on highly emotive disaster and container metaphors (Charteris-Black 2006). A comparative study in 2016 found that anti-immigrant hate speech flourished 'inside the newsroom' and that there was a long term obsession with migration as 'invasion' (Sufee, 2016).

The pejorative nature of 'migrant' was strongly signified and expressed through imagery and metaphor. One metaphoric trope that has emerged as particularly powerful in the coverage of the 2015 events is the migrant as invasive insect, a metaphor that has been deployed by politicians as well as press commentators and reporters. Katie Hopkins, a columnist for the UK's largest tabloid newspaper *The Sun* in her piece in April 2015 described 'aggressive young men at Calais, spreading like norovirus on a cruise ship'. She claimed that 'Some of our towns are festering sores, plagued by swarms of migrants and asylum seekers, shelling out benefits like Monopoly money. Make no mistake, these migrants are like cockroaches' (Hopkins 2015). The shift from simile to metaphor was apparent when, three months later, UK Prime Minister David Cameron described 'a swarm of people coming across the Mediterranean, seeking a better life, wanting to come to Britain because Britain has got jobs' (ITV News 30th July 2015). Scarcely surprisingly this graphic imagery was taken up by cartoonists. One infamous example was published on 17th November by *The Daily Mail*, a newspaper whose circulation of approximately 1.6 million is second only to *The Sun*. It is a newspaper that is notoriously hostile to immigration and to welfare claimants. The cartoon by Mac depicted people marching firmly across a line marked 'Welcome to Europe'. These were Muslim-looking characters, bearded, wearing hijabs, carrying prayer mats and guns. At their feet, also scurrying across the border and seemingly passing unnoticed, were rats. It is particularly concerning because these kinds of cartoons are stand-alone items that have an entertainment rather than an informative purpose:

the sort of material which may be re-told in conversation or passed around a group of friends, family, co-workers simply because of its 'amusement value'. In this way the anti-asylum message is shared through gossip and normal social interaction which allows it to seep much more easily into the collective consciousness. It also legitimises what would normally be considered to be socially unacceptable behaviour – to ridicule and demean a vulnerable group.

Buchanan et al 2003: 27

None of these representations went unremarked. Katie Hopkins was questioned by the police for inciting racial hatred and was the subject of an online petition calling for *The Sun* to sack her that received over 200,000 signatures in a matter of days. She was not sacked. The *Huffington Post* described *The Daily Mail* cartoon as 'straight out of Nazi Germany', but the cartoon was defended on the basis that it was the terrorists, not the migrants, who were cast as rats. David Cameron's comments were called 'irresponsible' and 'dehumanising' by refugee groups, but he defended them on the basis that he was simply trying to convey that 'a lot' of people were coming.

Animal Magic

Metaphors matter. 'They are figures of thought as much as they are figures of speech' (Steuter and Wills: 7), or, to paraphrase Santa Ana (1999), they do not simply colour the poetic but shape the prosaic. They are a crucial element in the structuring of our conceptual systems, providing cognitive frames that make issues understandable. They bridge the gap between logic and emotion exposing and shaping our feelings and responses and acting as both expression and legitimation (Mio 1997). Thus they are at their most effective when they are surreptitious and uncontested, not when they

are applauded or called out, but when they pass unremarked into our language. That is, when they shift from simile to metaphor suggesting the horror lurking beneath reason. In the press migrants routinely scurry, scuttle, sneak, and they often swarm too. Migrants are invaders, but invasion usually suggests a state or at least an authority that controls the invasion. In the case of migrants this invasion is a force of nature, of war without sovereignty and of agency without individuality.

The comparison of foreigners and outsiders with animals has a long history. Non-citizens and those regarded as outsiders or sub-human have been called animal names, been treated like animals and forced to behave like animals. This has contemporary twists - in 2013 Tripoli zoo was turned into an immigration detention centre – but it is not new. In Ancient Greece Herodotus compares slaves to cattle, while more recently in the American South slaves were commonly equated with domestic animals – oxen, hogs, calves and colts (Jacoby 1994). Otto Santa Ana has analysed the coverage in the Los Angeles Times of the referendum on Proposition 187 and found the key metaphor discerned to be ‘immigrants are animals’ (Sta Ana 1999) while O’Brian (2009) describes the metaphors deployed during the US immigration debate of the early 20th century and found that the immigrant as invader and the immigrant as animal were even then common tropes. O’Brian’s analyses finds that in contrast to the depiction of slaves who were imagined as beasts of burden, to be whipped, branded and controlled, migrants whose entry must be controlled are compared to ‘parasites or “low animals” capable of infection and contamination’ (O’Brian 2009:43). Similarly those seeking to enter Europe are not depicted as beasts or brutes but as vermin, forms of non-vital life, low down on the animal phyla.

Rats, cockroaches and swarms are urban, they are not wild animals, but neither can they be domesticated. Unlike beasts of burden these are not productive animals. They are alive, but not truly sentient. Considered more closely there are three interrelated connotations of invasive vermin that are of relevance to anxieties about asylum: waste, numbers and threats to the home.

Cockroaches, ants and rats do not come from nowhere. They are strongly associated with human waste and they flourish near humans because they live in the dirt that we produce. They thrive in the places we try to forget: sewers, empty lots, derelict buildings, mountainous landfills. They are ambassadors of entropy, appearing in huge numbers during floods, wars, economic decline, or other periods of disorder, both associated with disaster, but also bringing the risk of ‘natural disaster’ with them. They are nature’s revenge. In her piece for *The Sun*, Hopkins wrote of asylum seekers that ‘They might look a bit ‘Bob Geldof’s Ethiopia circa 1984 but they are built to survive a nuclear bomb. They are survivors’. After the bombing of Hiroshimi and Nagasaki, a science fiction short story by Edward Grendon depicted millions of cockroaches ‘swarming’ out of the cities and killing hundreds of people. It has passed into the public imagination that cockroaches will inherit the earth after a nuclear explosion and insects will survive the apocalypse.

The comparison with vermin recalls the waste of the current social, political and economic global system. In the same way that vermin serve as a reminder of eco-systems of dirt and waste that are thrown up by and live on the by-products of production, so the people at the borders of Europe and those whose bodies wash up on Mediterranean beaches are part of the eco-systems of global economic, social and political relations, and the living histories of colonialism and patriarchy. Europe is not an uneasy bystander having to deal with the consequences of actions that it had no control over, but rather it is dealing with the human consequences of a situation that it played a crucial role

in creating. There is an obvious connection of mobility with recent foreign policy decisions in European capitals, but there are also deeper connections with the economic and environmental 'zones of sacrifice' demanded by our current systems, those areas despoiled for the purpose of resource extraction: "And you can't have a system built on sacrificial places and sacrificial people unless intellectual theories that justify their sacrifice exist and persist: from Manifest Destiny to Terra Nullius to Orientalism, from backward hillbillies to backward Indians" (Klein 2016: 13). Thus migrants belong to eco-systems that we would rather forget,

The problem with insects is a problem of *numbers*. One insect is trivial, of no consequence, but they travel in swarms and one is likely to presage millions. In a video that went viral in July 2015, German Chancellor Angela Merkel was depicted in an awkward televised encounter with a 14 year old Palestinian girl, Reem. Reem described in fluent German how she and her family, who arrived in Rostock four years ago from a Lebanese refugee camp, face deportation. Merkel responded by saying she understood, but that "politics is sometimes hard. You're right in front of me now and you're an extremely nice person. But you also know in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon are thousands and thousands and if we were to say you can all come ... we just can't manage it." The chancellor was forced to stop mid-sentence on seeing that Reem was crying. She walked up to the girl and started stroking her shoulder and attempting to comfort her. She was widely mocked on twitter hashtag #Merkelstrokes, but Merkel did well all things considered. For here we have the bottom line: there are too many of you. If it was just *you* then of course you would be welcome to come, but if we allow the principle, there will be millions of refugee and of migrants.

In the past two or three years, people attempting to enter Europe have indeed been using sheer numbers to overwhelm border posts. Whether running at the fences of Melilla, pulling down the barricades at Macedonia, jumping on to the trains and ferries at Calais, or hiding in the ranks of hundreds of no borders activists walking across frontiers, the weight of numbers is being transformed into a means of resistance. Crowds are breaking down fences and mass co-ordinated crossings are proving difficult to halt. As a border guard interviewed at Melilla put it: 'we can stop them when they come two at a time, but if there are 2,000 at each point we cannot'. This is the very antithesis of 'managed migration' the careful identification, points systems and processing of migrants that lies at the heart of migration and refugee policy. Indeed for decades the principle measure of success of an immigration or refugee policy has been numerical, and more particularly, keeping numbers down. No amount of money it seems is too much if it contributes to dampening the flow of migrants. Arguments from those who advocate for migrants rights have often relied on claims that concerns about numbers are exaggerated, but not challenged the way that limiting numbers of entrants is often the sole measure of policy success.

Vermin are ubiquitous and cockroaches, rats and 'swarms' are indigenous to everywhere. The horror is not simply that the 'sneaky little creatures' do not respect borders or boundaries. They are not invasive of a *territorial* space¹. What vermin are invasive of is the civilized space of the home. Thus comparing migrants to insects and vermin invokes what Walters (2010) has called 'domopolitics', the aspiration to govern the state like a *home*. Indeed, Merkel's policy has been dubbed her 'open door' policy and is in contrast to Prime Minister Cameron's stance that we need to stop migrants 'breaking

¹ The Israeli army has opened small tunnels in the separation wall to migrate, in part because of the separation of animal 'families' (<http://www.dw.com/en/israeli-army-opens-west-bank-barrier-for-animals/a-16351700>). This of course is not necessary for vermin like rats that live on both sides of the wall.

into Britain', both metaphors associated with the home. The home is our place, the space where 'we' are native. In recent years in Europe there has been a striking resurgence of language of nativity and indigeneity. While in colonial past 'natives' were the uncivilised, the tribal, now native and indigenous British/French/European etc. is used to denote autochthony and assert a natural belonging to a territory. Walters discusses the tension between 'domos' and 'oikos', the state imagined as home and the state imagined as household. Oikos and its desire for economy, utility and efficiency is receding in the face of domus and the search for order, domesticity and security. 'Domopolitics implies a reconfiguring of the relations between citizenship, state, and territory that requires securitization or 'homeland security' to protect it' (Walters 2010: 241).

When they are in the home insects must be dealt and while 'exterminate all the brutes' is not acceptable, 'exterminate all the bugs' is, indeed this is the solution to an infestation of pests. The lives of insects do not matter – they are not 'grievable' (Butler 2009). The relation between the development of pesticides for agricultural and domestic use and chemical technologies for the mass killing of humans has been well documented. During the Second World War for example, the German chemical company IG Farben bought the patent for Zyklon B which was used in the extermination camps of the Holocaust. Its original use was an insecticide, and it had previously been licensed for de-lousing Mexican migrants to the United States in the 1930s.

There is no proposal to exterminate people at the borders of Europe (though Katie Hopkins' piece, entitled, "Rescue Boats? I'd use Gunships to Stop Migrants" came perilously close to calling for killing people). However, "letting die" is a different matter. The Italian led search and rescue missions under the Mare Nostrum programme were designated to constitute a pull factor by European policymakers. In October 2014 Mare Nostrum was replaced by Triton which did not have rescue as an operational priority. *Death by Rescue*, a report produced by Forensic Oceanography at the University of Goldsmiths, found that 'institutionalised neglect' 'created the conditions that led to massive loss of life' (Forensic Oceanography 2016). Furthermore the policy of returning people to Turkey requires forced removals to situations which are acknowledged as inhumane. The vulnerable situation of those in refugee camps in Turkey was illustrated by the recent case of a cleaner in one of the camps being convicted of sexual assault against at least 30 children aged 8 to 12 years old.

The etymological origin of 'exterminate' is to put beyond the boundary or the frontier. The question is where shall they be removed to? What to do with Bauman's human waste, the 'collateral casualties of progress'? In the past, penal transportation to colonial territories was the means by which 'civilized England shall be disburdened of its worst people' (1603 Order of the Privy Council cited Beier 1985: 150). Transportation turned the poor into the 'building blocks of Empire' (Ocobock). There was a hierarchy of spaces where people could be removed to. For example, between 1832 and 1843 some 1200 'Liberated Africans' kidnapped from many different areas of Africa were sent to McCarthy Island, a small island in the River Gambia. It had been proposed originally as a British penal settlement, but it was deemed too unhealthy, and would make transportation tantamount to a death sentence, so would therefore be unlawful (Webb 1993). For those rescued from the slave trade however, McCarthy Island was apparently acceptable. In 1936 the French Prime Minister Leon Blum permitted a Polish delegation to Madagascar to explore the possibility of Poland 're-settling' Polish Jews there, an idea at one stage announced to the German cabinet by Goring as a plan by Hitler to solve the 'Jewish problem'. Timothy Snyder (2015) has examined how Nazi politics were presented as restoring the balance of nature in the face of

dwindling resources. 'Races' needed more *Lebensraum* – living room – to feed themselves and to reproduce. But *Lebensraum* also invokes the space of the home, conflating home with nation.

Since 1945, one of the two senses of *Lebensraum* has spread across most of the world: a living room, the dream of household comfort in consumer society. The other sense of *Lebensraum* is habitat, the realm that must be controlled for physical survival... In uniting these two passions in one word, Hitler conflated lifestyle with life... Once standard of living is confused with living, a rich society can make war upon those who are poorer in the name of survival. Tens of millions of people died in Hitler's war, not so that Germans could live, but so that Germans could pursue the American dream in a globalized world.

Snyder 2015: 324

While Snyder asks whether tolerance of climate change invokes *lebensraum*, one might argue that this is much more directly invoked in the language of migration – full up, overcrowded, no room, Europeans only. It is sad to see all these people in such suffering and misery, but we have to put ourselves first. Northern League leader Matteo Salvini suggested taking 'rescued' migrants to disused oil platforms off the Libyan coast abandoned by the Italian energy firm ENI in order not to 'disturb' Italians: 'Help them, rescue them and take care of them, but don't let them land here' (Agence France Presse 2015). As the tourist quoted above complained that she could not eat while there were hungry refugees looking at her, so the refugees must be moved on – otherwise how can we continue to feel comfortable on holiday?

Politicising Pests

Controlling unruly mobilities unleashed by inequality, conflict and hope, channelling, enforcing and preventing them has been a challenge for the wealthy and the powerful for over a millennium. Mobility is not controlled and restricted simply out of cruelty or indifference. It is constrained because it has the potential to be profoundly disruptive.

Disgust at waste, fear of numbers, protection of the home, what do these three anxieties about migrants and migration suggest about the possibilities for a more progressive political discussion – what is it that needs to be tackled? Clearly the guilty eco-systems of migration are important. The boats in the Mediterranean, the fence chargers at Melilla, the lorry and train jumpers at Calais are symptoms of far deeper problems, rooted in global inequality and injustice, the escalation of wars at Europe's edges, and the creaking of the nation state form and ideas of citizenship and human rights. As then UK Foreign Secretary, Philip Hammond, said in a statement on Calais to the BBC:

“The gap in standards of living between Europe and Africa means there will always be millions of Africans with the economic motivation to try to get to Europe...So long as there are large numbers of pretty desperate migrants marauding around the area, there always will be a threat to the tunnel security.”

Here we have an explicit reference to global inequality very gently signified by 'gap in standards of living'. This is a feature of much of the current coverage, and of course is not a natural state of affairs. In fact, 'marauding' might be a more accurate description of the European massacres, betrayals, land grabbing and of course slavery that caused so much devastation in Africa. In wealthy

Europe life for a proportion of the population might look relatively good compared with five hundred years ago, but we are living at a time of the highest level of global inequality in human history, when the poorest 50% of the world have 6.6% of total global income. The World Bank has estimated that three quarters of inequality can be attributed to between country differences (Milanovic 2011). We can quibble about their methodology, but we cannot deny that the world has changed from the 19th century when what was critical to your life experience was if you were a master or a servant. It is not your position in life, but the state where you are born and where you live that shapes your life chances and options for survival. Why some states are poor and others are rich is not because their inhabitants are any more intelligent, plucky or have more resources than anywhere else. It has everything to do with the living (hi)stories of colonialism and exploitation.

Secondly the fear of numbers must be confronted. Numbers are often the principle, if not the sole measurement of an immigration policy's success. The reason that there are too many migrants is that they are a strain on resources, either they are employed, in which case they are 'taking jobs', or they are unemployed, in which case they are 'taking benefits'. 'They' may place demands on infrastructure, social security and health systems. The assumption is that, were it not for migration/asylum, societies and labour markets would remain the same, or subject to only very slow demographic shifts. That is, migration impacts on otherwise stable systems. However, economies and societies are always changing and the obsession with immigration has overshadowed the structural reasons for inequality and lack of social protection.

The problem of numbers is a problem of resources, and the flipside of there is not enough to go round is that there are too many of the wrong kinds of people. The resurgence of domopolitics suggests we need to interrogate more closely the relation between state and nation, and the relation between nationalism, xenophobia and racism and find ways of introducing this more sophisticated discussion into public debate. To claim that the experiences at the borders of Europe are consequences of 'racism' is to risk underestimating their persuasive power if by 'racism' we mean an individual's belief in biological difference and hierarchy on the basis of skin colour. After all, Black people with US passports will generally find it easier to enter Europe than those with paler skin who are from Afghanistan, Syria or Iraq. Citizens of these states are subject to the most stringent visa restrictions in the world while those with US passports can travel relatively freely. Black US citizens are however disproportionately likely to be checked in comparison to white people with US passports (Anderson 2013). Race, nationality and poverty are interrelated in complex ways and immigration controls and their consequences can seem rational to many of those who take a strongly anti-racist position in non-immigration politics. For while race is always reducible to skin pigmentation it is far more complex and racism is highly adaptable. Race in the context of migration to Europe is, bound up with nation, and more particularly with nationality, ethnicity, culture and poverty. Immigration controls work to, quite literally, turn people into 'aliens', and also often make them subordinate, dependent on citizens, as employers, spouses, sponsors. While policymakers disavow race as an ordering tool of immigration controls, nationality is fundamental to them.

Conclusion

On July 30th 2016 the upmarket burger chain Byron had to temporarily close two outlets. The firm had colluded with immigration officials and tricked members of staff into attending health and safety meetings that had turned out to be immigration traps. Some thirty five people were deported.

A Boycott Byron campaign was organised, but London Black Revs and Malcolm X Movement went further. They released some 8,000 locusts, 2,000 crickets and 4,000 cockroaches into two central London branches forcing them to close for cleaning. One protester said: “Katie Hopkins called them cockroaches in an article just a few months ago. We want to show these people what cockroaches really look like, and we’ll unleash them on places like this if they don’t change their ways.” (The Guardian 31st July 2016).

There is empathy and solidarity if we dare. After all in the inaugural public opinion research on the refugee crisis it found that 73% of people in 11 countries in the global north acknowledged some level of responsibility to accept refugees. This is a start. It suggests that politicians can afford to be bolder in search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean and expand safe and legal channels into the EU. Countries – and not only within the EU, must ensure more equitable responsibility sharing for asylum seekers. These are demands to make of policy makers and governments and they can be made now, but they are not enough.

It is not enough to demand from policy makers, and it is up to all of us to build connections between the low waged, homeless and unemployed EU citizens, those struggling to get by, and the struggles of migrants without turning them into competitors for the privileges of membership? How to jump the scales and the borders of the local, national and global and make the connections between them? There new possibilities here that resist the lure of domopolitics and make important connections between migrants and citizens, but the analysis can’t be abstracted from political and social practice. It can offer clues that must be followed and developed through campaigning and organising and people’s daily experiences of building relationships with one another. In recent months across Europe people have been supporting and welcoming migrants, but we are in for the long haul of building an economy, culture and society where better lives for Syrians, Eritreans, Afghans and Pakistanis, mean better lives for all of us.

Perhaps we can look to metaphor for political inspiration, for ways of reframing the relationship between embedded citizens and mobile populations. Teiko Tomita was a woman who came and farmed in the US in 1921. Throughout her life she wrote beautiful tanka, a particular form of Japanese short poetry, expressing her struggles and hopes. When her poetry was published as part of a collection of Issei poetry, she entitled her section *Tsugiki* meaning ‘graft’ or ‘grafted tree’, a depiction of her and her children’s relation to their lives in the US (Nomura 2005).

Carefully grafting
Young cherry trees
I believe in the certainty
They will bud
In the coming spring

(Teiko Tomita)

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