



Research Paper

# Borders or No Borders? That is the Question: An Exploration of Whether or Not Migrants Should be Allowed into the Host Countries they Flee to

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## I. Introduction

In February of 2019, thousands of Americans gathered at a Trump-support rally in Texas chanting, “Build that wall!” after President Trump proposed that a wall be built along the US-Mexican borders three years earlier as part of his presidential campaign (Brechtel, 2019). The wall was aimed to prevent “illegal immigrants” from crossing the borders into the US, the rationale being that those immigrants were mostly “drug dealers and prostitutes”, according to the President (Miller, 2019). This anti-immigration policy was once again revisited in October of 2019 when President Trump went off the records to suggest that those who tried to cross the borders be shot in the legs by US soldiers standing guard to slow them down, that is, if they manage to escape the electrified wires and the snakes and alligators in the water-filled trenches he wanted to dig (Narea, 2019).

Although the idea of building trenches with snakes and alligators to drown aspiring immigrants might be original, the one where borders are meant to block outsiders is nothing new. Borders have always been a point of contention between migrants and receiving countries (Hess, 2015). Walls are not peculiar to the US. Long before the US conceived the wall notion, Europe was practicing a similar strategy (Hess, 2015). The literature abounds in stories about migrants coming to European borders only to be refused entry by authorities of the host country (Hess, 2015).

On the other hand, there are liberal voices that believe that there should be no borders between states (Anderson, Sharma, & Wright, 2009). They believe that migrants are human beings first and foremost and should be dealt with as such (Anderson, Sharma, & Wright, 2009). Migrants who want to cross a border should be allowed in, according to them (Anderson, Sharma, & Wright, 2009). Those activists commend migrants for their agency. To have left their own country, made that decision to cross the border, demanded that they be allowed into a new one, and refused to stand by as the government tried to exploit them and dictate terms of their entry, they are commended for their autonomy (Hess, 2015). The migrants’ negotiating roles and power is recognized and praised as an act of resistance (Hess, 2015).

As the number of migrants goes up (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016), however, the need arises to address the concerns of that growing segment and what prompts them to risk the safety of the familiar and venture into the unknown in order for the host countries to be able to address the needs of that particular group and decide if they should allow migrants to cross their borders. This begs the question that the present paper attempts to answer: Should the no border approach be adopted or should more walls be built to block future migrants? And if so, why?

## II. What is Migration? Who is Migrating?

Migration as defined by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is “the movement of a person or group of persons from one geographical unit to another across an administrative or political border, wishing to settle definitely or temporarily in a place other than their place of origin” (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016, p. 5). In 2010, the United Nations announced that two-hundred and fourteen million migrants left their native lands in pursuit of better opportunities in other countries (as cited in Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016). That is a considerable number that is reported to be on the rise (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016).

In 2010, the UN named the top countries with emigrating populations and Mexico, followed by India topped the list (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016). Among the top 12 countries with the highest number of emigrants were also Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Egypt (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016). The common

denominator between these countries is that they are all Third World countries (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016). They are developing nations. But what is it that compels migrants to leave their homelands behind?

### **III. Why are People Migrating? The Push-and-Pull Theory as a Model**

The literature abounds in theories that attempt to rationalize the pursuit of migrants' future in countries other than their homelands. The push-and-pull model is one of the functionalist theories that aim to identify factors that drive migrants out of their homelands and into host countries (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2014). The theory identifies overpopulation, political persecution, environmental, social, and economic factors as "push" factors that drive migrants out of their countries, and availability of land and job opportunities as well as political freedom as "pull" factors that draw them into other countries (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2014).

Migrants are on the lookout for opportunities to improve their conditions (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016). They mostly leave their own countries when life in it becomes challenging. This could happen due to a number of reasons. Their country could be at war with political factions or with another nation, for example, where they might fear for their lives should they stay or they might be politically at odds with the government and persecuted as a result (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2014). Even if the migrants are not descendants of a war-torn nation, they might be struggling to survive for different reasons (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2014). This could be due to the scarce resources of the country of origin or lack of employment opportunities or education (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2014). This would prompt people to find their livelihoods in countries that hold better promises for the future (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2014). Sometimes even if they do not know much about their destination, they still might expect it to compensate for what was lacking in their homeland (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016).

One of the major critiques of such a model is that it does not explain how the factors interact (as cited in Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2014). It neglects that sometimes more than one factor might be at play and treats them as independent of each other when they might not be as isolated (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2014). In defense of the push-and-pull theory, however, it does name more than just the factors associated with the country of origin and host countries as reasons for movement. It also identifies deterrents and personal factors that might impact a migrant's decision to leave their own country in pursuit of better opportunities elsewhere (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016). Sometimes, despite the lack of job opportunities in one's own country, for example, poverty might not enable a person to migrate because he might not have the financial means to travel (deterrent) or might not want to leave his family behind (personal ties to land) or might not be a risk-taker when it comes to starting afresh in a new country that could deport him anytime (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016).

### **IV. What are Borders?**

Before migrants realize their dream of entering their destination, they have yet to do one thing: cross the borders of the receiving country. Anderson, Sharma, and Wright (2009) define borders as sorting barriers that separate groups of people. It is a peculiar classification system that divides groups of people and creates uneven power dynamics that always tip the scales in favor of a particular group. It separates natives from nonnatives, employed from unemployed, wanted from unwanted, filtering those who pass through and those who get stuck in the status quo. In the process, it might endow some with power and strip others of them based on their status.

They explain that although they are physically manifested on a national and international level, they might be subtle in most cases. They are not fixed. They are labels carried around with their subjects no matter where they go; their statuses define who they are, the opportunities they are offered, and the rewards they are afforded. They control the future of migrants and often imprison them in a state of present limbo. Neither are they in their homelands nor fully admitted and accepted in the receiving country. Rendered unable to make long-term plans for themselves, their future is bleak and opportunities to move forward are elusive.

The most infamous borders, however, remain the ones that separate nations. This is where most atrocities are committed in the name of homeland security. Fully aware of how top destination countries often perceive and fear the foreigner as a primitive being who has chosen to import his or her barbaric practices to the receiving country and land jobs originally secured for the natives, Hess (2015) regrets how most of those countries, especially in Europe, have dealt with migrants. Millions of Dollars and Euros are splurged on blocking out migrants through building walls, electrifying fences, and digging trenches heavily guarded by armed security (Hess, 2015). This is not just happening in the US; it is also happening in Europe along the Greek-Turkish, Bulgarian-Turkish, and Hungarian-Serbian borders (Hess, 2015). It does not stop there, however. If the migrants manage to get through the physical borders, then "digitalized, smart border technologies" are sure to stop, or at least filter, them (Hess, 2015, p. 90). The smart security background checks can easily identify and block the unwarranted guests.

### **V. Should We Have Borders, though?**

Anderson, Sharma, and Wright (2009) add that recently, therefore, there have been calls to abolish territorial borders. Since the 1990s, activists and migrants alike have become aware that borders are not set in stone and that border power could, in fact, be contested and overturned. After all, borders have never stopped migrants from crossing them in the past, so why would that change in the present? The No Borders approach condemns the inequality borders create between citizens and non-citizens and acknowledges the right citizens of the world have to remain in one territory and/or move from one to the other. It first started in the US in 1954 and then was resurrected in France in 1996. When it first started in the US, it was to counteract the governmental Operation Wetback which deported over a million people to Mexico in the same year. In France, it was to oppose the governmental raids on Africans and rendering them “documentless”, hence illegal and not fit to stay in the country. The bottom line of both movements was to demonstrate that all citizens were originally immigrants when they came to those countries, and that, consequently, no one should be removed for that reason.

Endemic in the No Borders politics is the principle that migrants and citizens have more in common than meets the eye, namely their humanity. They are, subsequently, endowed with the same rights to move around, enjoy freedom, and seek subsistence and livelihoods wherever they see fit. It is a social practice that eliminates differences and classes, and, instead, brings people together and whose tenets are founded on the equal rights of all human beings to enjoy and not be excluded from their mutuality. Citizens and non-citizens alike are born with those rights to enjoy the global resources of Mother Nature. Since we all share humanity and this earth, this principle reinforces that there is no line that separates a native and a foreigner; they are both “co-members of a global society” (p. 12).

Although I am a proponent of this No Borders approach, I have a different rationale for opening up to migrants. It is a rationale Pahuja underscores in her 2012 article “The Poverty of Development and the Development of Poverty in International Law”. Pahuja (2012) laments that the rich countries are still accumulating wealth while the poor countries are getting poorer. She explains that international law’s answer to how poverty can be addressed has been development, which has categorically failed to serve its purpose and has always found a way to blame the poor countries for their failure to develop. It has failed to identify the root causes of the poverty problem and settled for pointing a finger at the corruption of the poor country’s governments or their mismanagement of wealth, for example, which could only be addressed by changing the institutional culture of that country. The rich countries and colonial powers, and the international community, for that matter, never factor into the equation for their usurping their natural resources or unrealistic terms of trade. They are perfect and can never go wrong. It is the poor countries that have to shape up if they want to emulate the developed ones; the more their GDP increased, the better shot they had at economic growth.

Pahuja (2012) argues that it is in the best interest of the rich countries to stay wealthy and convince the poor countries that they stand a better chance of developing if the status quo is maintained. At one point, she even lashes out at the rich countries for obsessing over the present and ignoring the root causes of the poverty problem. She accuses the former colonial powers of missing their reign and resorting to other means to control their former colonies: their Gross National Product according to which they are ranked and promised “assistance”. They, therefore, try to make sure the Third World becomes dependent on loans from the World Bank even when they can most certainly predict that they will fail to settle those debts for generations to come. She reminds readers that the colonization of the poor countries and the exploitation of their resources by the colonial powers in the past is one of the main reasons they are now poor and the other reason is that the First World keeps convincing the developing countries that they need loans from the World Bank when they are certain they will not be able to afford the payback. Those are the root causes of the problem that need to be addressed.

Pahuja (2012) proposes redistribution of wealth as an answer, but this is where I disagree. I personally do not believe one country owes any other country any “wealth”. I see no shame nor need for apologizing for being rich. This is almost the same argument that I hear from my friends about the Gulf countries and how they do not deserve their oil when it meant they “have more money than they could spend” and how it should be redistributed so that there is no poor country in the region. It is also the same excuse the colonial powers had when they invaded the underdeveloped nations for their natural resources. The natural resources of a country are its property; they are not any other country’s to exploit for its comfort or consumerism. Like the author, I vehemently believe that money should only be exchanged for services or products. Another case in which money is exchanged is reparations as a right afforded to all commoners (as cited in Anderson, Sharma, & Wright, 2009). The countries that were once colonized and now indebted merit, not just an apology, but compensation for the occupation of their land and the exploitation of their natural resources and cheap labor. This is not necessarily pursued so that the poor countries could develop or be like the rich countries; it should be done because that is the right of the formerly colonized countries. I am surprised that, although she refers to the exploitation of the poor countries at the hands of the imperial powers, she does not pursue this reparations

argument further. In fact, she makes it seem that the odds would always be against the poor countries, especially when it is the rich countries that have the political authority. They are passive entities the developed countries will continue to manipulate.

## **VI. Conclusion**

In conclusion, in an attempt to identify why natives (mostly of developing nations) leave their countries, the push-and-pull theory has often emphasized economic factors, among others, as ones which drive migrants to leave their countries in search of better livelihoods (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2014). They move to new countries in pursuit of better job or educational opportunities, hoping to escape the impoverished conditions in their homeland. The common denominator between all countries receiving of migrants is fear. Natives of the receiving country often believe that the migrants have come to their country to take over (Anderson, Sharma, & Wright, 2009). They come to compromise their employment opportunities and national identity (Anderson, Sharma, & Wright, 2009). They want to take their jobs and import with them their barbaric traditions that unsettle their community. That is why they do not want them in. The governments of the receiving countries, therefore, reluctantly allow them to cross their borders.

However, the First World, which is the one consistently denying migrants access to their land, are the ones who caused the migrants to leave their countries in the first place. They are the ones that contributed to the global poverty in the Third World and then made sure they became indebted to the World Bank and stayed impoverished (Pahuja, 2012). The least they can do is assume responsibility and share the global burden. They can alleviate the suffering of migrants and offer them a chance at the decent life which they came to their country to attain. That is why they should allow them to cross the borders and offer them employment opportunities. Lately, activists have proposed that no borders should stand in the way of migrants (Anderson, Sharma, & Wright, 2009). They demand that migrants should be allowed into whatever country they seek refuge in. I, too, believe migrants should never be turned away, especially that they are seeking refuge in countries that probably caused their poverty.

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