MIGRATION
LETTERS

Migration and security: in search of reconciliation | Islam Ahmed [±]

Abstract

In this paper a case is made for the necessity of an inter-disciplinary treatment of the migration phenomenon. The paper addresses the relation between migration and security from a reconciliatory perspective after a brief analysis of the migration-security nexus and how migration got securitised. Based on the Foucauldian notion of biopolitics, one can argue that what contributes heavily to the securitisation of migration is the emergence of biopower and biopolitics which are primarily concerned with the control over lives of the population within a given territory. This makes states and societies consider migration as a matter that should be under control, since it is related to the hygiene of the population and nationals of a given state. I, therefore, discuss the EU and other European countries' policies regarding migration and how biopolitics have influenced securitising the EU's migration policies. The main argument is that migration can, and should, be treated as an advantage rather than a threat, though it does not deny the security concerns that alway accompany such social phenomenon. The impact of culture and history on migration policies, and how identity politics shape a given country's policies are discussed. Perceiving migration as either a threat or an opportunity, the way in which a country perceives migrants shapes its migration policies, whether restrictive or multiculturally-tolerant.

Keywords: migration; security; biopolitics; Foucault; EU; Europe; refugees.

Introduction

'Migration studies' as a scholarly discipline is still a relatively new subfield in International Relations. This is primarily because migration policies and migrant-related issues were mainly considered, between 1945 and 1980, a kind of 'low politics' or domestic issues that concern only the related receiving/host country itself, as opposed to 'high politics,' which is concerned with foreign policies and inter-state relations. This was a result of the less impact that migration policies had on the balance of power during the Cold War, and especially in the political and social milieu in the United States. Given the fact that International Relations is a US-dominated discipline[1], it is thus quite understandable why it had underestimated the relevance of migration policies to be studied and analysed deeply in its subfields (Hollifield, 2008, p. 183), especially 'security studies' which relied on a state-centric approach. It is only after the end of the Cold War that IR scholars came to realise the 'new' insecurities that needed to be analysed and

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[1] For an elaboration on this point, see: Smith, S. (2002). "The United States and the Discipline of International Relations: Hegemonic Country, Hegemonic Discipline." *International Studies Review*, 4(2): 67-85.

discussed, apart from the military-based notion of security that dominated the field throughout the course of the Cold War period (Huysmans and Squire, 2009, pp. 1-2).

To begin with, one may need to define who a 'migrant' is and what 'migration', as a social phenomenon, is. In order to provide a definition of who a 'migrant' is, in the first place, Thomas Nail looks back into the history of migration insofar as it is related to cosmopolitanism and the 'cosmopolitan hope.' Yet, he then gives a comprehensive definition that attributes the word 'migrant' as "the collective name for all the political figures in history who have been territorially, politically, juridically, and economically displaced from their homes by force" (Nail, 2013). The 'force' here would be a broader concept that includes economic drives and motives.[2] Thus, even when migrants 'choose' to migrate, for better life conditions and economic privileges, they are still 'forced' to move for the sake of improvement and for developmental goals, since otherwise people would, psychologically, opt to stay safe in their homes with their families and their old memories. One can add also education as another need that drives people to continue 'on the move,' seeking better chances of a high-quality education.

'Migration' is defined as a "permanent or semipermanent change of residence" (Lee, 1966, p. 49). It can also be defined as "the process by which individuals, families, or groups move from one country of residence to work or settle in another" (Parry, 2007, p. 565). Parry adds that the concept's meaning has changed over time, shifting from concerns over economic reasons of migration to 'a variety of reasons'.

The migration-security nexus

The relation between security and migration is double-sided. Security concerns can be found in destination countries, just the same as they are of the main reasons that drive migrants to start their journeys.[3] Analysing the migration-security nexus is not an easy task to be carried out, mainly due to the subjectivity of the two concepts. Therefore, their linkage should be analysed within a structural-realist framework of the English School that bridges both the objectivity of realism to the subjectivity of constructivism, emphasising the connection between migration, identity, and security according to the different levels of analysis that spread from the individual, the state, to the international system, following 'the logic of anarchy' (Stivachtis, 2008, p. 2). Yet, some neo-realists acknowledged that non-state actors in international relations can still constitute "a threat to the autonomy,

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[2] For analysis of the relation between insecurity and migration, see Sirkeci, 2005. Transnational mobility and migration are but endeavours to attain human security and escape human insecurity, that is very present in conflict zones — conflict being something beyond physical violence; see Sirkeci, 2009, p. 7.

[3] For more conceptual work on conflict, insecurity and migration, see Sirkeci, 2006; Cohen & Sirkeci, 2011; Sirkeci & Cohen, 2016; Cohen & Sirkeci, 2016, and Truong & Gasper, 2011.

sovereignty, and territorial integrity of the state with the potential ability to cause disputes or even conflicts between countries," and this acknowledgement came in line with the new agenda of security studies, proposed by the Copenhagen School[4] (Thompson, 2013), and especially promoted in the writings of its director Barry Buzan, who, along with Ole Wæver, was one of the most important figures in the School and the new scopes it brought to security studies. Therefore, to count migration as a security issue and to incorporate it into security studies is a part of the trend to expand the issues and topics covered in security studies so as to go further beyond the realist state-centric and military-focused approach (Krause and Williams, 1996, pp. 229-31).

It is out of rational realism and security dilemma that states come to consider migration as a security threat and its policies as a matter of national security protection, for this might be a clear manifestation of the national interest and political sovereignty. Yet, this is related to how powerful a state is within the international system to practice its national sovereignty in the global arena (Hollifield, 2008, p. 201). Further exemplary elaboration from the post-Cold War era is given in the Brettell and Hollifield's volume on *Migration Theory*.[5] Besides, ethnic security dilemma that leads to such conflictual situation is when a certain ethnicity perceives another's advantages or well-being as a threat to its own, and thus see their reactions as a zero-sum game, a win-lose situation (Ramsbotham et al., 2012).

To move ahead on the securitisation discourse, we face questions of the type: Who is a migrant? Which issue is to be taken as a security one? Answers to both questions are still subject to vary according to the different perspectives and lenses through which they are looked at and analysed (Pinyol-Jiménez, n.d.). As Williams Walters argues, the two issues fit together, for they are as associated as 'law and order' or 'peace and stability.' They are even depicted like a 'proverbial happy couple.' The interconnectedness of 'security' and 'migration' can be traced back to the end of the Cold War and the ensuing inter-ethnic conflicts and the huge number of both refugees and economic migrants[6], fleeing the devastating conflicts or seeking better economic chances (Walters, 2010, pp. 217-8). To deal properly with the relation between security and migration, there is a need to a comprehensive approach to security that would examine all of its aspects[7], and thus produce an integrated policy-framework that fits the issue better. Such policies are the

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[4] Officially the 'Copenhagen Peace Research Institute (COPRI)'.

[5] Brettell, C. B. and Hollifield, J. F. (eds.) (2008). *Migration Theory: Talking across Disciplines*. London, UK: Routledge.

[6] Though the paper would set a distinction between migrants and refugees, as an issue of legal and technical definitions, it would treat them later interchangeably, under the name of 'migrants,' since refugee are not but forced migrants. Sirkeci also calls for such interchangeability of terms, as he argues that this is a false dichotomy, as both categories "share the same needs." see: Sirkeci, 2006; Sirkeci and Cohen, 2016.

[7] E.g. political, socio-economic, cultural, but not limited to the state-centric military aspect.

prerequisite for an effective multilateralism in the treatment of the debate over 'the interconnectedness of migration and security,' so as to efficiently coordinate the efforts of all local, regional, and international institutions that work in the field.

For example, the linkage between the North African migrants and terrorism[8] is a common mistake that most of us make. The potentiality of becoming terrorists mentioned in Gebrewold's argument is a subjective concern rather than a real threat (Gebrewold, 2008, p. 116). Moreover, as argued by Ambassador William Lacy Swing, the Director-General of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), there is no statistical approved connection between migrants and violence in the receiving states. Hence his call to 'decriminalise migrants,' namely to see the potential in them and to see them as fellow humans who are willing to participate and contribute (Swing, 2013). In accordance with this call came the IOM campaign 'Migrants Contribute' under slogans like 'It is Amazing What Migrants Bring,' calling the receiving states to be ready to gain the potential benefits migrants might bring such as 'brain gains' (IOM, 2015). To give a positive side of its relation to security, it is argued that among the impressive aspects of international migration is that it can act as a reinforcing element for global security when it is considered and analysed from a cosmopolitan perspective. According to Nail (2013), they are migrants who really foster what Catriona McKinnon of Reading University calls 'the cosmopolitan hope' (McKinnon, 2005), since they—while away from homes—feel deprived from anything but their labour, and thus they develop a true sense of solidarity and cooperation, a real fraternity feelings, offering new and alternative social orders. This is how he comes to the conclusion that migrants "are the true agents of political inclusion and cosmopolitanism" (Nail, 2013). Political inclusion definitely promotes global security, as it brings about stability and order nationally and internationally, inside and outside.

To label migrants and migration as a 'threat' or a 'security issue' is to affirm a stereotype that is too populist with no empirical evidence to support it, while it ignores the real beneficial contributions that migrants provide to their 'adoptive societies' and their support for economic development in their homes through remittances. Such labelling is a dangerous act, for it divides peoples and increases xenophobia and anti-migrant sentiments (Thompson, 2013), especially in the developed countries[9] despite their need for this migrant labour. These sentiments are in an unexampled level already, in an age of huge human mobility and great numbers of 'people on the move,'[10] resembling a 'cruel irony,' as Swing called it (Swing, 2013).

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[8] And thus creating a security issue out of their migration—as Gebrewold does, basing his argument on few recent incidents.

[9] Which are targeted by migration waves.

[10] Almost one seventh of the world population. When looking at both international and domestic migration; since there are about 230 million international migrants and 740 million domestic migrants (Swing, 2013).

Additionally, as Koser (2011) argues, there is no clear evidence of criminality, terrorism tendencies, nor epidemic diseases among migrants and refugees. He also argues that overemphasising these imagined and 'extreme risks' blocks the sight from realising the 'real threats' that migration may bring about, which according to him, are not systematic rather are related to specific conditions and contexts that raise the possibility of migration being a security issue; otherwise they are ordinary labour. Among these conditions is the subjective perception of national security and social harmony—from a homogeneous understanding—that raises hostilities among the public opinion towards migrants, regardless of them being a real threat or not.

Securitisation and the impact of 9/11

Although it has been *systematically* securitised in the aftermath of 9/11 events, it is no new phenomenon to securitise 'migration' and to look at it through security lenses. Throughout history, and during periods of conflicts, migrants were considered as a potential threat to the receiving country, especially when the receiving country and their countries of origin are in direct confrontations and conflicts; as they might cooperate with their countries of origin, acting like a 'fifth column.' The Germans in the UK and the Japanese in the US during the two world wars of the twentieth century are contemporary examples (Koser, 2011). The fall of Berlin Wall, the end of the Cold War, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union brought about a new understanding of security threats that was broader than the conventional military-based one (Pinyol-Jiménez, n.d.), hence the wide rang of issues that qualified as security-related issues, including migration, environment, identity, etc.

The securitisation of international migration has then intensified in the aftermath of 9/11 (Pinyol-Jiménez, n.d.). Since the attacks were executed by non-state actors and networks, Buzan's call to broaden the agenda of security studies and to reconsider security threats has found a great reinforcing element, bringing about a shift in the object of security studies; from states being the threatened object, to cover other non-state objects including individuals and social groups (Buzan, 1983, cited in CRER, 2013). Therefore, when we come to analyse the process of securitising migration, we need to refer to the broadened agenda of security studies, with much credit goes to Buzan for his affirmation that the state is not the only possible threatened or threatening object, rather non-state actors are also potential objects that may come under threat or resemble a threat. To name a few, one can mention environmental, economic, and societal issues that came to the fore of security studies (Tallmeister, 2013); hence the concern over migration as a possible security threat from an economic, social, and cultural perspective. Migrants are then considered as a threat by 'natives' as they are seen as 'aliens,' who might instil a threat to the economic privileges that 'natives' have, as well as to their culture, identity, and social harmony (van Gerwen, 1995, p. 8).

Biopolitics

Biopolitics is a relatively new term that emerged in the last century to define the range of politics that is directly related to life controls. The Foucauldian notion of biopolitics, applied here, is a historical and relational one. It is, thus, centred around life as the main domain of political actions (Lemke, 2010, pp. 124-5). For the French philosopher Michel Foucault, biopower is the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power, or, in other words, how, starting from the eighteenth century, modern western societies took on board the fundamental biological fact that human beings are a species. This is roughly what I have called bio power (2009, pp.1-2).

One of these 'basic biological features of the human species' is that they do migrate and move from one place to another. Therefore, one can argue that what contributes heavily to the securitisation of migration is this emergence of biopower and biopolitics, as these concepts are primarily concerned with the control over lives of populations within a given territory. This makes states and societies consider migration as a matter that should be under control, since it is related to the hygiene of the population and nationals of a given state (Foucault, 1997). Racism and racist policies, as un-militarised war against foreigners and 'the other,' cannot but take migration as a security threat to the 'purity' of the nation that constitutes such-and-such a state. It is a continuous process of 'otherisation'.

From the reverse perspective, migration is also taken to be one of the tactics through which biopower is practiced, hence the securitisation of the phenomenon, since it is a method that might be deployed to penetrate into the politics and the societal realm of other states. Therefore, one may argue that racism is of a great impact on the securitisation of migration policies. Cultural concerns reinforced with racism lead to the European image of migrant flows as a 'cultural threat' that would destabilise the bases of the liberal democratic Western societies (Brimelow, 1995, cited in Brettell and Hollifield, ed., 2008, p. 202). In the first glance, it is because of the different backgrounds from which migrants come[11] that migration can be taken as a cultural threat. However, as these migrants 'choose' to leave and migrate to these countries, they might be willing and open to learn more about, and even adopt, their new societal ideals. The next generations are more likely to go into this process of the so-called 'assimilation' through education and cultural interaction. Yet, even if they do not get totally assimilated and preserve there original identity, one may argue that this is quite understandable and natural in the age of globalisation and cosmopolitan cities; when and where no society can be totally homogenous unless it is altogether isolated.

Globalisation has also brought about a new phenomenon that requires the state to seek skilled labour from different regions, yet remain concerned with the potential

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[11] Mainly from rural areas, with no experience or encounter with Western liberal values.

threats that might be included in the uncontrolled flows of migrants. Therefore, the state still plays this game of biopolitics: controlling the flows of migrants crossing its borders, as it is within the scope of biopolitics that the state would attempt to control the populations' mobility into and out of its territory. This is also associated with the process of urbanisation (Walters, 2010, p. 222), as a significant number of migrants come originally from rural areas, yet end up settling in 'big cities,' where they may find difficulties to adopt the rapid lifestyle and the urban customs. This might be a sociological aspect of migration which is better left for sociologists to elaborate on.

The EU and biopolitics

Since most European countries now face a crisis of an ageing population, it is understandable that they would consider migrants as a threat to their social cohesion and the 'purity' of the European continent as a territory dominated by the Judaeo-Christian tradition throughout its long history and heritage. In this context comes the name of the Italian operation 'Mare Nostrum,'[12] considering it as 'their sea,' reflecting also a Eurocentric view of world politics and international relations. It also was not much effective as it depended on Italian financial support, while other EU member states almost considered it as '*mare vostrum*,'[13] as if the Mediterranean is an Italian border, not one of the EU in its whole (Motta, 2014). This shows a lack of coordination among European countries in respect to their migration policies. However, irregular migration, in the sense of 'crossing borders illegally,' should not be the main concern of the receiving states, as, statistically speaking, the majority of irregular migrants have crossed borders legally initially, but later broke the laws and stayed illegally in their destinations and host countries (Koser, 2011).

Moreover, the FrontEx agency was established by the EU to secure its external borders against possible threats to the 'racial purity' of Europe. It was established to control whom to allow to enter and whom to deny entrance to Europe, regardless of the diverse backgrounds from which those migrants/refugees come. This was not for mere economic reasons, but it must have some connection to biopolitics that is associated with control of life and regulation of population health and hygiene (Foucault, 1997). Thus, protection of refugees in a regional context[14] would be interrelated to issues of both cultural identity and security concerns (van Selm, 2005, p. 24). The securitisation of migration is a result of perceived dangers that it might impose on the social order and harmony, and this is why the EU agencies that design its migration policies take it as an obstacle to the internal and domestic cohesion of the member states (Huysmans, 2000, p. 757).

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[12] From Latin for 'our sea.' — A mission to rescue any drowning migrants' boats, but also to ward off irregular migration in the Mediterranean, and it was replaced in 2014 by the FrontEx's Triton mission.
[13] 'Your sea,' as addressing the Italians.
[14] Such as the case of EU member states receiving migrants and refugees from Asia and Africa.

Different approaches to identity bring solutions

As politics affect migration policies, so do history and culture. Different histories affect the perception of migration, and whether a country considers it as a security threat or not (Tallmeister, 2013), hence the different policies that these states would take to promote their social integration. The way a country perceives migrants significantly shapes its migration policies, whether restrictive or culturally-tolerant, as the political and social identity of a society is consolidated more assertively in response to an imagined threat of migration (Huysmans, 2000, p. 757). It is mainly the cultural and social concerns that participate heavily in the perception of migrants as a social threat to the national fabric, stereotyping them as criminals or potential terrorists, especially in the post-9/11 era. This perception of migrants presupposes that homogenous societies were a possibility at all in history, and that they even can be reconstructed again, though in such a globalised world. This imagination is misleading both socially and historically (Huysmans, 2000, p. 758). Therefore, it is up to how states see themselves and the multiplicity of their societies that they come to perceive migration vis-à-vis security differently. To give few examples, we may consider Canada and France. Canada perceives its social identity as a multicultural and inclusive one and thus it permits linguistic differences to the extent that a big province of its is permitted to have its own educational and political preferences and its own official language. Quebec might extend these privileges to go into a referendum on independence. On the other hand, the French concept of identity is one of a homogenous society around liberal secular values, and hence the French restrictive and exclusive migration policies (Esses et al., 2006, cited in Tallmeister, 2013).

Economic reasons have their own share as well to impact on migration policies. Migrants are mostly seen as a threat to the financial capacities of the receiving state (Stivachtis, 2008, p. 17), hence the call for restrictive migration policies; neglecting the potential economic benefits and 'brain gains' from such keen individuals who would do much better so as to prove themselves worthy of the social security they are to receive in their new societies (Swing, 2013), as they would have no more than their own labour to give to the host societies. Moreover, migrants are continuously accused of 'stealing the nationals' jobs,' despite the fact that this perception is a mere subjective concern that has no empirical support or statistical proofs, as it, argues Chomsky, is based on the fallacious idea that the jobs are determined only by the number of people who seek employment (Chomsky, 2007, cited in Tallmeister, 2013).

Reconciliation

In order to reconcile this double-edged goal of getting labour, especially in ageing societies, yet keeping social harmony and security unaffected — there is a need to seek relatively objective policies that set aside the subjective concerns of threat possibilities, though it also requires states to put some restrictions that assist them to achieve their goals with security dimension still in the scope (Walters, 2010, p.

218). This might be a reason behind dumbing migration as one of the discontents of globalisation, for it is not only about forced migrants or refugees rather most other migrants recorded in the IOM's statistics are economic ones, seeking better work conditions and economic benefits (van Selm, 2005, p. 11).

Moreover, population movements and state policies are mutually-affected and their relations are tightly tied to each other. This is manifested, for example, in the impact of Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and its impact on the Palestinian migrants there. Additionally, around 1.5 million of the Egyptian labour in Iraq, who were economic migrants, were recruited in the Iraqi army during the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988 (Weiner, 1990, p. 1). Drawing on this connection between stability and population movements, a new framework for understanding the causes and effects of international migration can be established so as to broaden the scope of migration studies to include security and political dimensions as well as economic one. These different frameworks would also lead to different analysis of international migration, that probably would welcome it positively (Weiner, ibid, 2-3).

It can be argued that irregular migration is that what may resemble a security concern to the EU, for example, since it results from the lack of real European investment efforts in 'the South'—so as to limit the probabilities of economic migration—and/or from the absence of an effective 'quota-system of *planned* migration' (van Gerwen, 1995, p. 8, emphasis in the origin), hence the vital need for homogenous EU migration policies that could fit more the age of globalisation and the liberal value of a free movement of people. The liberal ideal of a free trade would imply more openness regarding the human capital movement and also open borders that would facilitate the modern global trade; while still concerned with national security and protecting national borders. This dichotomy puts the modern liberal state on the horns of a dilemma (Sassen, 1996, cited in Lahav, 2003, p. 90). Moreover, it is argued that whether irregular migration threatens national sovereignty or not is an issue that is subject to debate and cannot be settled once and forever. Another dilemma here is that national sovereignty[15] and respect for human rights are somehow in a conflict vis-à-vis migration policies, because policy-makers would face tremendous difficulties in their attempts to reconcile these two concerns (Koser, 2005).

A practical consequence of harmonised migration plans within a specific region, e.g. the EU, is to achieve a burden-sharing policies that would prevent the countries which follow 'open door' policies and multicultural approach—as the EU lacks a unified migration policies—from falling in the 'prisoner dilemma' trap, i.e. carrying alone the burdens of migrants' accommodation and social protection as a result of their tolerant policies (van Gerwen, 1995, pp. 6,8). From another concern, providing and sustaining an economic security and developmental plans in

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[15] In the sense of controlling who to be allowed or denied entrance and crossing national borders.

potential migrants' countries[16] with the assistance of developed and rich countries would secure the future of these potential migrants in their homes. Additionally, an effective mechanism of conflict resolution so as to reduce armed and ethnic conflicts is of a great help in this context, so as to reduce the number of refugees. This would render the European continent receiving less numbers of refugees and economic migrants, thus reducing its security concerns (van Gerwen, 1995, p. 7).

With respect to actors that are concerned with the security-migration nexus, as mentioned earlier, the scope is broader than states as political institutions. The scope of actors now includes international organisations, security agencies, and transportation companies. This requires security analysts to look from new perspectives that are broader than the conventional conception of security—concerned with state policies and military-based notion of security—so as to find out more about the non-state actors that play on the ground in the filed of populations movements (Lahav, 2003, p. 91). From a human-centric security perspective, human lives are of a higher priority than states' borders and the subjective perception of 'national security.' This is the logic according to which Amnesty International has launched its campaign 'People before Borders' in response to the Mediterranean tragedies recently (2014-2016). Its logic relies on legalising free human mobility, so as to stop human rights violations, with the expectations of better economic benefits to stem out of multicultural human interaction, providing labour to ageing Europe. Yet, obviously Amnesty International's campaign is based on more humanitarian concerns than security ones, which somehow render it irrelative to security studies unless it is considered as an attempt to neutralise the nationalistic/ethnic revival in approaching security issues and threats by raising the global awareness of interconnectedness of humanity in its fate and destiny (AI, 2014).

A new approach to the migration-security nexus is to consider migrants as the threatened side, rather than the source of threat to the receiving state and society. Therefore we need to put a greater emphasis on the reasons that drive migrants to leave their home countries seeking better life conditions or fleeing armed clashes. This approach attempts mainly to analyse economic (in)security, structural violence in underdeveloped countries, and direct violence; with the latter coming in the form of armed conflicts, political oppression, or other sever human rights violations (Thompson, 2013). To debate the state-centric and human-centric approaches to security-migration relations is of a greater impact on the public opinion as well as the policy-making process, so as to find a middle ground to reconcile this nexus; as the latter is concerned with human rights and economic exploitation of migrants, while the former focuses on state-centric notion of security. Therefore, a further and elaborative look that compares and contrasts both perspectives is needed (CRER, 2013).

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[16] The source of possible migration waves.

Conclusion

Therefore, we can conclude that although the state and its governmental agencies currently play biopolitics and biopower as they control populations' mobility into and out of the state's territory — political activism and human rights associations' campaigns, on the other side, need to emphasise and stress on inclusive approach to the issue, such as cosmopolitanism, in order to reconcile national security concerns with the flows of migrants in such globalised age.

Moreover, tolerant migration policies would result in political and social inclusion that eventually promote global security, as they help connecting people and developing a true sense of solidarity and cooperation, offering new and alternative social orders. Globalisation is a source and reinforcing element of diverse and multicultural identities in our age, and thus the game of biopolitics to prevent migration so as to keep the social 'purity' and homogeneity is doomed to fail, unless such states and societies opt to stay totally isolated. And this is not an option in the age of globalisation.

Acknowledgement

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