



**Working Paper  
No. 495**

**MOVEMENTS OF THE 'WE':  
INTERNATIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL  
MIGRATION AND THE CAPABILITIES  
APPROACH**

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February 2010

ISSN 0921-0210

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## **Abstract**

We consider cross-border migration through the lens of the capabilities approach, with special reference to transnational migration and to implications for the approach itself. Cross-border migration has profound and diverse effects, not least because it accelerates change in the nature of political community. A capabilities approach can be helpful through its insistence on multi-dimensional, inter-personally disaggregated, reflective evaluation. At the same time, the realities of migration exercise pressure on capabilities thinking, to deepen its underlying social and political theory and nuance its efforts to counter communitarian tendencies. By extending its attention to migrants and the locality-spanning social and political spaces in which they live, the capabilities approach will be able to better concretize and situate the picture of the ‘we’ who ‘have (or seek) reason to value’ purported goods and rights.

## **Keywords**

International migration, transnationalism, capabilities approach, identity, human security

# MOVEMENTS OF THE ‘WE’<sup>1</sup>

## INTERNATIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION AND THE CAPABILITIES APPROACH

### 1 Introduction

Mobility has always been a major feature of human life. Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights further asserts the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state and the right to leave any country, including one’s own, and to return. However, the capabilities approach, that seeks to provide a well reasoned formulation and basis for human rights (Nussbaum 2006; UNDP 2000), has yet to address cross-border migration with sufficient self-reflexivity. We will explore both how the approach can assist in considering current realities of migration, and the implications that thinking about cross-border migration has in turn for the capabilities approach.

Ability to access public services in one’s locality and to participate in society depends on capability for movement. In the terms of Sen’s version of capability theory, ‘we have reason to value’ the capability of sufficient local mobility. The meanings here of ‘one’s locality’ and of ‘we’ are typically taken as self-evident. Migration, by contrast, concerns movement between localities; and cross-border migration concerns movement also between polities. Circular migration and transnational networks bring ongoing intense connections between people in different polities. Transnational migration refers to cross-border movements that involve retention of this intense contact with the locality of departure, through remittances or visits, frequent communication, intended or actual return or continuing cultural reference, or some combination of these. Such connections undermine the binary constructs of national-international and local-global that structure dominant discourses on migration. Work on transnational migration widens our understanding, from for example a stress on just one relationship of belonging – the citizen in relation to the nation-state seen as a unified identity community – to appreciation of multiple relations stretching across family and kinship systems, communities and nation-states. But state practices for the constitution of political communities often apply polarizing approaches, ‘nationalist’ rather than ‘transnationalist’ (Earnest, 2006). In addition to discussing how far people have reason to value the capability of inter-national mobility, analysts must reflect on who are the ‘we’ that capability theory’s formulations may take as relatively self-evident. International migration, and within it especially transnational migration, can bring confusion, modification and extension of the meanings of ‘we’. There is need to reconsider assumptions in normative political theory that remain tacit in most development studies.

This essay first briefly presents the enrichment of perspective that capabilities thinking’s multi-dimensional and inter-personally disaggregated

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approach can give for looking at migration's diversity of impacts (for a more detailed treatment see de Haas 2009a). It goes further by looking at impacts on identities and by asking how evaluators could be oriented and motivated to use such an enriched but more demanding perspective, suggesting that it can help to counter imbalances in capital-centred and nation-centred treatments of cross-border migration. In doing so it identifies though a core ambiguity in capabilities analysis, around the specification of the 'we'. So finally it examines how human development theory can itself be deepened through thinking about cross-border migration, with special reference to migration's impacts on perceptions of affiliation and identity and to assumptions about and influences upon political community.

## **2 A capabilities perspective for looking at the impacts of migration**

A capabilities approach to migration responds to the implications of Swiss novelist Max Frisch's famous description of the 'guest-worker' policy during Western Europe's postwar economic boom: 'We had called for labour power, and there come human beings' ('Man hat Arbeitskräfte gerufen, und es kommen Menschen'; cited by Scheffer, p.224). Migration must be studied and evaluated as action by and on people, not only as economic flows seen as a sort of impersonal mechanics. The capabilities approach includes use in evaluation of a much wider range of criteria than traditional economic concerns with measurable impacts on economic output and remittances – in other words, it uses a broader picture of well-being; and second, a potentially richer picture of human agency in explanation and interpretation, with attention to the formation or suppression of capabilities to think and act, and the formation and evolution of preferences and of feelings of identity and affiliation. The broader ranges of concern in evaluation and in explanation are connected; human observers can both grasp and often share the values that human agents form and follow.

In this broader perspective, amongst the fundamental impacts of migration systems are exposure to new worlds of experience and the creation of new identities and groups, besides sometimes profound changes in distribution of income, status and opportunities between groups and between genders. New social spaces are created too, including frequently a nether world of illegality and exploitation which severely limits and distorts the freedoms and capacities of many migrants.

### ***Diverse valued impacts, varying across persons and groups***

Capabilities analysis looks at impacts on individuals' real freedoms to attain what they (or an evaluator group, perhaps a public authority) have reason to value, not merely at money flows to the aggregate entities of the nation or the household. The range of relevant values partly mirrors the range of reasons for migration besides economic gain or physical security. Such reasons include religious and political motivations, and searches for sexual or cultural freedom or adventure. Sharma (2008)'s study of the migration of young men from the

hills of Nepal to the megalopolis of Mumbai shows how it is perceived as an important phase of growing as a man. Even if remunerative work were available in the hills, some young men would still seek the challenge of a period in a distant place that offers less social constraints, allows wider experiences, experimentation and personal growth, and is recognized as a phase in becoming 'a man'.

Migration differently affects numerous relevant groups and individuals. Many aspects of this are well known—for example how remittances typically increase differentiation of social position between families in the sender country; how refugees and other migrants often lose their original status as they settle in a new country, not least for men who may lose some male prerogatives; and how migrant workers in the 'heart trade' physically and emotionally care for the aged, the infirm and the children of affluent societies often at substantial cost to themselves and their own dependents who are left behind (Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2003, Parrenas, 2001). Nonetheless, the capabilities approach's insistence on disaggregation to the level of the individual, and on systematic accounting there in terms not merely of money or of 'interests' but also in terms of health, time, affiliation, respect, identity, and other major values, can often generate new insights. While a disaggregated broad-value-spectrum treatment is not unique to capabilities theory, the approach provides a formal framework that can consolidate and sustain such treatment.

Let us illustrate with reference to two types of impact that have been less emphasised in previous reviews of migration and human development (de Haas, 2008, 2009a): the frequent creation of a world of illegality which has major implications for capabilities; and, especially, the impacts on identities, for those have implications for the capabilities approach itself.

### ***Illegality and its socio-political implications***

While being central to processes of socio-economic development (de Haas, 2009), immigration is treated legally as requiring special permission. Behind the presentday official parade of firm legal restriction, low-cost immigrant labour remains readily available through 'irregular' means, with sending states locked into a path of labour exports as a means to cope with fiscal deficits and unemployment, and receiving states maneuvering between the pressures of labour needs, xenophobic sentiment, humanitarian concerns and global competition. Entire industries emerge that rely on labour that lacks rights, security or permanence, and thus typically is unorganised, docile and – cheap (Samers, 2004, Lucas, 2005, Oishi, 2005). Ironically its 'irregularity' increases the demand, for labour that is not entitled to publicly set minimum wages, legal protections and social provisions becomes attractively cheap. Many migrant workers in this nether world are vulnerable to capabilities damage.

Various recent studies (e.g. Kuptsch, 2006) show the diversity of actors involved in today's migration processes and their complex linkages with state institutions. The role of private recruitment agents and networks has grown (Tierney, 2007). Implementation of legal norms of preference for high-skilled labour entrants leaves a demand for private agents engaged with the lower-skill

range who operate quasi-legally or illegally. The inability and low priority by governments to control these agents and their networks has allowed the rise of a category of 'irregular migration', a term that reflects an ambiguous relationship between migrant and state. Such a relationship often denies migrants protection and weakens their bargaining power and employment conditions. When faced with exploitative practices such as the demand for supplementary contracts once abroad in addition to the fees originally agreed for brokerage services, migrants lose earnings, incur more debts, and can be entrapped in a semi-permanent state of 'transition'. They have to seek higher-wage jobs and thereby become more vulnerable to smuggling and trafficking (Kojima, 2007).

The costs of this induced zone of ambivalence, permissive of diverse forms of exploitation, demand to be evaluated from a human-centred perspective. Footloose global capital has prised open and undermines social protection systems, traditional or modern, in many countries. Footloose migrants restore some protection to their kin and communities through great efforts and stress, in legal and illegal intra- and inter-national migration. Such migration to and fro puts social ties and identities under stress, and seems to prevent the kind of consciousness required for effective resistance to exploitation (Faist, 2004). The longer run impacts of creating such zones of illegality could yet be major, as were those of liquor Prohibition in the USA.

Besides considering distribution of benefits and costs between groups and persons, we must consider impacts on the very identity of persons and constitution of groups.

### ***Impacts on values and identity; the creation of new groups***

Of central importance for this essay's concerns, migration creates new identities, for all concerned, not only for those who move. Firstly, migration in space is typically an existential migration too, which involves also the people the spatial migrants leave behind. It is likely to influence values in both countries, through flows of 'social remittances' (Levitt, 1998) in both directions (see e.g. Suksomboon, 2008). Emigrants themselves typically experience major feelings of loss, and often pass through a phase of introversion, nostalgia, and avoidance of other groups. At group level this is typically followed—in the classic model of interwar Chicago sociologist Robert Park—by phases of greater contact, competition and conflict, and eventually of greater accommodation and substantial assimilation.

Secondly, groups are formed who are different from those previously found in either the country of origin or the country of arrival. This clearly happens in cases of long-term settlement. It can happen too even as a result of temporary movements. For example, even those movements produce children who possess identities different from any which preceded migration. Nuqui (2008) looks at the migration of Filipina brides and Filipina women 'entertainers' to Japan. 'Entertainers' as a category have a long-term role, but not so the individual women. They are typically trafficked under false pretences and then forced into prostitution for some years until no longer profitable. The movement of brides is no doubt intended as permanent, but each year about



4,000 of these marriages end in divorce. In both cases there are some permanent effects. Nuqui reports that over 150,000 Filipino-Japanese children have been born. They are mostly now back in the Philippines, and very many of them are not at home in either country. Similar experiences are documented for Korea and Taiwan.

Thirdly, as important as the creation of new groups in a country is the impact on previously existing identities there. In-migration often leads to existential migration for the previous residents too, as we see now in much of Western Europe. Current estimates suggest that by the mid 21st century post-war immigrants (excluding those from Western Europe and North America) and their descendants could be a quarter of the Netherlands population. Within the next decade they will already comprise half the population of a city like The Hague. Reactions are diverse, from welcoming the enriching of identity, to seeking to revive an imagined prior culture, to attempts to selectively and constructively guide cultural evolution, as will be discussed later.

The next section situates this capabilities perspective centred on individuals in relation to predominant perspectives centred on the nation or the market value of production. It identifies both its attractions and a core ambiguity or choice between its cosmopolitan and communitarian strands or potentials.

### **3 Capabilities theory in comparison to capital-centred and nation-centred frameworks for understanding and *evaluating* international migration**

Gore (1996, 2000) compares approaches to international development in terms of alternatives in two dimensions: use of a national or a global frame in explanation; and of a national or a global frame in valuation. For example, a particular sort of global frame in explanation gained predominance in the 1980s: the perspective of global market economics. National economies were deemed to prosper or not according to their degree of exposure to international market forces; greater exposure was held to spread ideas and competition and promote economically efficient specialization and division of labour; and vice versa. This explanatory model was partnered by a particular approach to valuation: everything must be valued in terms of 'world prices', the prices in the global market. But that stance in valuation differed fundamentally from an ethic of human inclusion. People with no purchasing power are not counted in the global market, and people of wealth are counted many-fold.

A capabilities approach has something to contribute to both explanatory and evaluative thinking about international migration. In principle it provides some counterweight to one presently dominant framework, that of capital-centred calculation; and it could potentially also counterbalance a second, that of nationalism and the nation-state, which is partly in conflict with the first but is usually its partner. This potential second contribution may require elaboration of cosmopolitan humanist strands within capabilities theory, without losing all of its communitarian strands. Let us consider how the 'broad-value-spectrum, high-person-resolution' approach of capabilities theory

contrasts with the frameworks of nation-state calculation and capital-centred calculation and their dominant alliance. The frameworks are ideal-types, and combinations and other types are also possible.

***The Westphalian perspective: no global normative framework and typically no global explanatory framework***

In a Westphalian perspective, the world consists of states, distinct and separate universes of political legitimacy and—since over time most of these states have fallen into the mould of the nation-state—of cultural identity (Booth, 2007). The very term ‘state’ exhibits a persistent ambiguity: it refers to, first, an apparatus of governance that has somehow absorbed and become inseparable from, second, the society that it governs. States interact with each other, in this perspective, for the defence and advancement each of their own corporate self-interest, unilaterally interpreted. They are deemed normative universes, each with its own determining sovereign power. Between states there is no determining sovereign power and no inherent moral obligations apply, no norms other than—perhaps—those born out of mutual convenience and agreement, though those are liable to be flouted when no longer of convenience to one party. Under restrictive migration policy, potential migrants may have a right to emigrate but they have no right to immigrate, to another people’s national home. They will be kept out unless their entry furthers the national interest. The perspective assumes that States have the power as well as the right to exclude immigrants. Besides normative nationalism it includes in various ways a methodological or explanatory nationalism (Gore, 1996, 2000; Wimmer & Schiller, 2003): an assumption that countries can and do in key respects separate themselves from others and are therefore the relevant units in description, explanation and regulation.

Categorical boundaries are drawn to distinguish between: ‘political refugees’, who may, at least in principle, be granted entry as exemplification of the political principles which the state endorses; ‘economic refugees’, whose claims for a right to asylum are denied, but who may if very fortunate be admitted under the next category; legal migrant workers, those invited in for furtherance of the national (economic) interest, on either temporary or indefinite terms, who are typically correspondingly subdivided into unskilled and skilled categories; and illegal migrant workers, who are at risk of deportation. Lastly, persons who have been trafficked under false pretences or coercion are officially protected by international law, but are often treated as illegal migrants and have their human rights ignored from all sides (GAATW, 2007).

The categorical boundaries have been outmoded by processes of globalization—we can often not distinguish for example between ‘economic’ and ‘political’ refugees when political conflict or globally determined economic policies bring destruction of means of livelihood of some groups in poor countries—but they remain in force; for they reflect a normative nationalism and one way of seeking to cope with global pressures. While industry and finance, and the impacts of their actions and fluctuations, have long since gone global, justice remains operational primarily within the confines of the nation-

state (Caron, 2007). Explanatory nationalism bolsters this normative nationalism: rich countries which energetically export arms to troubled poor countries whose manufactured and agricultural exports they at the same time firmly restrict through use of tariff and non-tariff barriers, while also drawing away their best educated personnel, yet hold the poor countries overwhelmingly responsible for their failed systems of governance and thereby draw no conclusions of moral obligation for themselves – obligations to help constructively, to cease destructive exports, to open economic opportunities, and to admit more deserving migrants (cf., e.g., Black, 1996, for a similar diagnosis). No causal connection is drawn between the systems of global economic and political governance, controlled by the rich countries, and the flows of aspirant migrants out of the poorer countries.

### ***The capital-centred perspective: a global explanatory frame and a non-humanist global normative frame***

Capital-centred approaches evaluate migration with reference to contributions to profitability and economic growth. Post World War Two economic growth has generated both pull- and push- forces for huge migration flows. Not least, the physical displacement of an estimated 15 million people per annum by new development projects, and the interconnected impacts in many countries of economic structural adjustment, environmental change and armed conflict (see e.g. CHS, 2003), strengthen the impulse to migrate.

Pure capital-centred approaches extol free migration, using theories of the comprehensive virtues of systems of free markets. They combine a global explanatory perspective—including a theory of the interconnections of markets worldwide—with a particular sort of normative perspective with a global scope. Market principles do not distinguish between buyers or sellers on the basis of any non-economic criteria of nationality or race, gender or creed. They distinguish only on the basis of money power: those with the most purchasing power have the loudest voice, and those with no purchasing power have no voice at all. They are free to starve (see, e.g., Davis 2001). This normative perspective has global scope but little humane content.

Extreme market-based ethics assert that whatever eventuates from voluntary market processes must be seen as a fair outcome, and as providing a fair starting point for subsequent activity. In practice, a capital-centred approach is mostly combined with a nationalistic application of a ‘veil of ignorance’ to the historical record of dispossession, domination and discrimination globally (Bagchi 2008; Gasper 2005; Scheffer 2007). As a result, the distress entry of some migrants into exploitative networks of the sex trade, the ‘heart trade’ and what is now called the new slave trade become seen as Pareto improvements that fortunately alleviate regrettable but fair starting positions.

Immigration policy within states that are the main global centres of capital is largely directed by this synthesis of capital-centred and nation-centred perspectives. Capital migrates legally across the political boundaries, as a supposedly fundamental expression of and condition for freedom, but the movement of low-skilled labour is, at least on paper, rigorously controlled.

This global set up is strictly analogous to the South African system of apartheid before 1994, argues Mine (2010) amongst others.

Market demands for low-cost labour for agriculture, construction, sexual services, care and many other types of service ensure that much formally illegal immigration does occur. As we saw, the illegality renders the labour exceptionally low-cost and benefits employers and consumers in high-income areas, but can in the end leave many migrants poorly remunerated, insecure and at risk of legal victimization and super-exploitation by intermediaries. Using a textbook model of perfectly (or sufficiently or ‘workably’) rational and well informed agents, the capital-centred approach declares that migrants only move because it improves their well-being. All is for the best. As with the trade in human organs, neoclassical economics in purist versions declares that the sex trade and the heart trade must be considered beneficial since they are entered into by willing sellers who know their own needs and preferences better than does anyone else. The argument assumes that choosers are capable, well-informed and not coerced; and that the starting point for negotiation is just. Some others will consider a life separated from one’s children, due to absence of opportunities to fulfill social expectations and requirements at home, as unjust, even when entered into voluntarily and in full awareness of the implications, which is certainly not always the case. Often the promises made in advance concerning ability to save and remit funds are far from the truth that awaits the emigrants.

Fortunately, liberal societies which have bound themselves to international protocols and have strong independent legal systems do not treat migrants as mere labour power, for also in play are principles of human rights (Scheffer, 2007). Two variants of thinking that reflect such principles – especially so in the second case, the human security approach – are discussed below.

### ***The capabilities perspective: a humanist global value perspective, in terms of individuals’ real freedoms***

A capabilities perspective that understands people as finite and vulnerable, creatures of hope and fallibility, benevolence and malevolence too, helps us to interpret a world in which not all is for the best (e.g., Nussbaum, 1999, 2001, 2007; Gasper & Truong, 2010). As an approach to human development it pays attention to fundamental features of being human. For many people ‘well-dying’, for example, is central to well-being, extending perhaps to a wish to be buried in the land of origin, in the company of one’s closest familiars. Many Ghanaian migrants to the Netherlands yearn for a reverse migration after death, and pool resources so as to fulfill that wish of their departed fellows. While an extreme example, this wish to have a meaningful and honourable death is perhaps especially strong amongst migrants.

As discussed earlier, a capabilities approach refers thus to a wide range of relevant values beyond those captured in standard economic measures. As part of this it insists on reference to objective well-being, i.e. societally (and sometimes globally) approved criteria of fundamentally important capabilities and functionings, not only to subjective well-being, states of mind. It is important to consider how long people live and how healthily, for example,

not only whether or not they are cheerful. We cannot automatically assume that Nepalese young men who depart to face the challenges of India's cities and who survive there for some years in and out of marginal jobs are necessarily discontented; but assessment of mental states, while essential, does not substitute for assessment of objective circumstances. Cheerful migrants are not necessarily contented overall; and insofar as they are happy one must still ask how far this is despite their circumstances, not thanks to them.

A capabilities approach refers then to real freedoms to achieve things that people have reason to value. The stress on freedoms reflects that this is a political conception, about judgements by a relevant community of which things it should respect and promote, rather than in most cases oblige or enforce. The 'we' in the phrase 'capabilities that we have reason to value' concerns a political community (directly, or as represented by politicians and/or administrators). These capability judgements are not those of an individual choosing for him or herself. This feature is sometimes missed (e.g., in the introductions by Alkire 2005, Robeyns 2005) since the capabilities approach is concerned so much with real freedoms of the individual in a given life-environment.

In issues of personal and community identity, capability theorists including Sen (2006) have stressed that, although choice is always encultured choice, yet there is always and should always be some choice of culture. Individuals can choose between or differently weight the various elements of identity and heritage which are open to them. But here the individuals are choosing identity, not capabilities. The decisions to facilitate individuals to have (in Nussbaum's terms) the internal capabilities and combined capabilities required for this autonomous choice, and over which areas of life, are community decisions (Gasper, 2007).

A potential tension within capabilities thinking arises, between its habitat in informing the deliberations of a political community, and its underlying motivation. For why should we engage in 'broad-value-spectrum, high-person-resolution' evaluation? The reasons, in terms of recognition of and respect for human dignity, the dignity of each individual, have cosmopolitan scope. And what should be done if the deliberations of a political community lead to the oppression of a minority, even to its majority-supported eviction or extermination? The capability approach to human development must rest on a conception of human rights more extensive than purely national, more for example than the right to vote in a referendum that decides on revocation of one's rights, even one's extermination. To return to cross-border migrants and Max Frisch, immigrants are to be seen as human beings, not as alien abstract labour-power.

### ***Human security: a global explanatory frame added to a global normative frame***

This paper has sketched so far three ideal types in migration discourse: first, a nationalist perspective that adopts only the nation as its ethical space, and typically adopts a national frame in explanation too; second, a capitalist perspective that adopts a global frame in both evaluation and explanation, but

with enormous exclusions in concern for poor people; and, third, a capabilities perspective that has a global normative frame, in two senses—a comprehensive interest in the contents of people’s lives, and a concern for people everywhere, grounded in perceptions of human dignity and fundamental rights. Mahbub ul Haq combined such a normative perspective with a global-wide scope in explanation too, in his Human Development Reports of the early 1990s and in particular in his conception of human security, launched in the 1994 Report. We use that to represent a fourth ideal-type that thereby goes somewhat beyond the third. The conception has been taken further by Amartya Sen and others, not least in the report of the Commission on Human Security (CHS, 2003).

A human security framework is particularly relevant to the theme of migration. It enriches the project of international human rights, as an attempted corrective to the dominant project of global capitalism. The framework goes beyond the Westphalian conception of states and citizenship and recognises instead a transnational, interpenetrated system. It combines this ‘joined-up thinking’ in explanation—a tracing through of fundamental interlinkages that cross national borders and conventional disciplinary boundaries—with cosmopolitan ‘joined-up feeling’ in valuation, giving priority to basic needs everywhere. The human security approach can at the same time be less individualistic than baldly stated human rights thinking, allowing more emphasis on community and security of identity. It thus combines the political projects of human development and human rights with major elements of care ethics and sensitivity to subjectivities (Burgess, 2007; Gasper and Truong, 2005, 2010; Gasper, 2010).

Complementing the human rights principle of respect for basic requirements of human dignity, another normative principle of global scope informs human security thinking. The choice of a global frame in explanation reflects the realities of global interconnection, which carry an ethical implication that is underlined in the 2007-8 Human Development Report on climate change. The meaning of the ‘we’ in policy discussion—at least one of the major ‘we’s—must be: everyone whom the actions under discussion substantially affect. Often this ‘we’ extends worldwide.

Ethical reflection and policy stances on migration centre in large degree around how to specify the ‘we’. Let us look further at how migration affects and is affected by such conceptions; and at the agenda for investigation and discussion that arises.

#### **4 Who are the ‘we’ who experience, react, reason, move, and co-exist ?**

##### ***The ‘we’ in capabilities theory and political philosophy***

The mainstream of political philosophy, like the social sciences as a whole (Wallerstein et al., 1996), have tended to take nation-states as givens, and to treat people’s mobility as an exception rather than as a general feature of humankind. In Rawls’s theory of (domestic) justice, the parent theory against

which both Sen and Nussbaum define themselves, migrants are not considered. In other words the theory excludes a basic issue in human existence. Migrants did not fit readily into Rawls's social contract conception. His 'original position' could still be, but was not, conceived in terms of the set of all humans, with individuals not knowing which nation they will belong to nor whether they will be faced by pressures that induce them to emigrate. His later conception of political liberalism (Rawls, 1993) includes the freedom to choose where to live and where to work, but only for citizens and within national boundaries. At global level such freedom is at present restricted to global elites (Düvell, 2003). Rawls's theory of international justice proceeds instead in terms of a fiction of supposedly self-sufficient, roughly equal, and internally emotionally united 'peoples' (Rawls, 2000), rather than dealing, as does his domestic theory, with individuals and their claims to basic rights. Nussbaum (2006) shows how his social contract formulation marginalises the weak, nationally and especially internationally, and she presents instead a theory of basic rights/capabilities. She has not yet applied this to international migration. Such application would be of great interest, and might be enriched from other work on the rights of migrants, such as by Benhabib (2004) or Black (1996).

While capabilities thinking reacts in part against Rawls, it has grown out of the same parent tradition of Western political philosophy which took the city state as its framework and later the nation state, as well as out of a parent tradition of welfare economics where little attention was paid to political, let alone international, framework. Sen has recognised how personal identity, the 'I', is inherently plural (e.g., in Sen, 2006). People thus have choices, whether or not they recognise them, of how to weight their diverse inherited and acquired values and identity features, including even an option to apply zero weight to some features. His discussion of reasoned choice by individuals and in groups does not say much about how to constitute, maintain or modify a notion and practice of 'we'. Yet international migration, especially transnational migration creates new liminal zones, zones of experience around a transition or boundary, where identity categories are unstable, ambiguous and plural.

Since it deals at the level of individuals, a capabilities ethic helps us to some degree to cope with the reality that migration reconfigures the national 'societies', the supposedly separate boxes that are assumed by nationalist ethics. However, it has to face further complexities, that are perhaps less attended to in 'migration systems theory' (Mabogunje, 1970; de Haas, 2008, 2009b) or most discussions of the ethics of migration (e.g., Black, 1996): not only the societies are reconfigured, so are the individuals. Migration brings cultures into closer contact and collision, and thus modifies individuals too and creates new social worlds: social locations that have never existed before and new combinations of identities.

Migration presents thus a particularly intense case of the endogeneity of values. The capabilities ethic arose to deal with such a challenge, that of 'adaptive preferences', by directing attention to how people live and can live, not just to how well or ill they feel. But its way of resolution involves reasoned debate and decision-making by a political community to identify and prioritise aspects of people's living. Choices around migration concern options in which

the political community itself is configured differently by different options, and where members may have affiliations to multiple communities.

From its political philosophy background, capabilities theory has addressed what the community, in the sense of the city or nation, should evaluate favourably and thus guarantee or support for all its members. Nussbaum extends capabilities thinking to a global stage, but she does so as an ethical cosmopolitan not a political cosmopolitan: thus still within a strong nation-state framework but with an ethic of human rights and mutual sympathy that generates attention to obligations (and to benevolence beyond duty) across borders (Nussbaum, 2006).

Some argue that international mobility is a right, as an implication of human unity. Some argue that it can never be more than a conditional privilege, since the fundamental unity is that of the political community organised as a state. Black, for example, is led “to question whether the individual-level focus normally associated with discussions of ‘human rights’ is apt in migration settings” (Black, 1996, p.73). Some of the first group assert the hypocrisy of nations that were largely formed by immigration enforced against the wishes of the original inhabitants that then rigorously control subsequent immigration. However, if their argument is that the wishes of existing inhabitants should be decisive this leads away from a principle of open borders.

Rather than abandoning an individual-level focus in discussion of human rights and migration, one can de-absolutise it, as Nussbaum in effect does. First, one should clarify rights to what. Black helpfully highlights the frequent relevance and sufficiency of a status of ‘denizen’ rather than full citizen: migrants who acquire rights of residence together with other civil rights but without becoming full members of the political community. Second, even if mobility is a right, the principle will like other rights not be without limit and override all else. In the same way, a right—other things being equal—of the rich consumer to ride and fly endlessly does not (i.e., should not) override the rights of contemporaries and future generations to more basic goods, notably a stable global climate. The impact on those other, more important, rights is too major to allow priority to unlimited mobility. Likewise any right of migration would have to be balanced against considerations of other rights and considerations of prudence, and in light of other action alternatives. The absorptive capacity, including psychological capacity, of receiver countries has limits in any given period, and many potential migrants would gain equally or more through measures in their home country (cf. Black, 1996). Amongst other rights against which the claim to mobility must be balanced is not only the right ‘of communities to exclude those who constitute a threat to the community’ (Black, p.73) but also to stop inflows on such a scale as to jeopardise public order and acceptance of institutions of social justice (pp. 71-72). Migration scholars must discuss such policy matters with sensitivity to the range of likely effects and to the ways that societies realistically can evolve and over what time scales.

To recap, one possible response to the endogeneity of values is to take the declared universality of human rights as providing principles of choice that are not themselves endogenous. But simply to declare rights does not suffice to



have them agreed and honoured. Nussbaum's attention to affiliation and imagination is helpful here in thinking about the necessary ongoing construction of 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983). Every political community beyond a village is an imagined community, most of whose members will never know each other. It must be continually re-imagined for it to serve its unifying functions, as conditions evolve and as the players change. In the late modern world, this construction of identity can appropriately be influenced by the perspective of interconnectedness that is particularly strong in human security thinking. That perspective can favour 'joined-up feeling', if it conduces to a perception of 'we' as being all those who fundamentally affect each other: a recognition of humanity as a 'community of fate'.

### ***The ongoing construction and maintenance of real and imagined communities***

International migration, and perhaps especially transnationalism, may contribute to 'The global spread of plural loyalties [which] is essential to the creation of a new world order: it is the psychic infrastructure without which the emergence of such an order remains impossible' (Goulet 2006: 127). The contribution is possible rather than inevitable. Transnationalism—the retention of intense ongoing linkages to the country of origin—complicates, though it also potentially enriches, national citizenship. It may potentially facilitate global citizenship, but certainly not automatically (Gasper 2005). Further, the global spread is likely to be only gradual and long term. For Goulet refers here not to the cosmopolitanism of the market, where the same rules are enforced globally but there may be loyalty to very little and where the weak are not counted; he refers instead to a solidaristic cosmopolitanism of mutual openness, goodwill and support. The associated rethinking of the contents of 'self' cannot be rushed. It may require first a phase of respectful coexistence motivated by a rethinking of the implications of 'self-interest' in an interconnected world where one interacts not with (post-)colonial subjects but with active agents who command respect and treatment according to equal principles.

Mushakoji (2010) and other writers warn that global solidarity should not be seen as fundamentally opposed to local solidarity. If the principle of concern for others is not locally fostered and applied it will not be present to be applied globally. And nothing will be achieved simply by advising either the newer or the longer established residents in any city in The Netherlands that they are all now world citizens, remarks Scheffer (2007); instead it is essential to revive local community loyalty and involvement. Facing the existential dilemmas emerging from many states' attempts to strengthen their citizenry's national identity and at the same time, given the forces of economic and demographic change, to accommodate many immigrants within a framework of citizenship, Mushakoji argues for a synthesis of national values and universal liberal values. Otherwise universal values will remain exogenous and always liable to criticism as an imposition of cultural colonialism. Mushakoji (2010) uses a form of human security discourse, to promote acceptance of, first, plurality of identities; second, perception that one's identity can be enriched rather than threatened by the identities of others, a perception that can be promoted by the phase of respectful co-existence and mutual learning

mentioned above; and thus third, plurality in each person's identity, including elements of shared human identity.

Mushakoji writes mainly of Japan. Scheffer (2007) sifts the contemporary debate in the Netherlands, a country well-used to rule others and to export population, which is now undergoing fundamental transformations and self-examination as a result of immigration from outside Europe that began in the 1950s but has brought an explosion of concern fifty years later. He starts with Park's classic model of phases of absorption of immigrants in the USA. Ghetto formation initially is a normal part of immigration, driven both by avoidance by the earlier city residents and by the newcomers' needs for mutual support and affirmation; but it can tie too many immigrants into an insular and resentful milieu. Scheffer recounts a growing realisation in the Netherlands, however, that one could not continue demanding integration by immigrants into a society which lacked any clear idea of its principles and in which earlier residents themselves participated less and less. The society could only demand from newcomers an accord to rules that were clear and applied equally to all. His analysis shows how a spatial migration by some is part of an existential migration by all. The analytic lenses of human capabilities and human security must be used to think about prior residents as well as about immigrants (cf. Burgess, 2007). Will the new members of the society be part of a renewed conception of citizenship – part of a rethought nation in a globalized world – or will they only be workers and consumers, bitplayers in the melodramas of global capitalism?

The central question, argues Scheffer, is whether immigration is seen as the end of the possibility for a 'we', or as an occasion to reflect anew on the meaning of 'we' and to update it in a changing and learning world, as a part of moving forward which requires also a conscious looking back. He proposes that to maintain and build community loyalty we require the feeling of being part of something that has a history, which gives a heritage from which residents benefit regardless of where they were born, and that has a future; so that residents have towards it a debt and some obligations. Without a feeling of 'we', which includes a perspective of some shared heritage, there will be insufficient acceptance of shared responsibility for the present and future. The recognised shared heritage must cover all the fundamental strands that have created the society, including for example slavery and colonialism and immigration.

The issue of citizenship is not limited to the relation between recent immigrants and longer-settled residents, continues Scheffer, but involves also other relations over time. Response to problems of sustainability requires a similar recognition—now at global as well as local scales—of shared heritage, of a shared and interconnected present in which people must take responsibility for whatever damage they cause, and of a shared future. Insofar as migration encourages a necessary updating of conceptions of citizenship, it may contribute to preparation for the challenges of global sustainability.

## 5 Conclusion

The paper has suggested that a capabilities approach can contribute usefully to thinking about international migration, and be deepened through this engagement. The insistence on disaggregation to the level of the individual, and on systematic accounting there in terms of a range of collectively reasoned values, provides additional insights. A 'broad-value-spectrum, high-person-resolution' treatment may be grounded in other ways too, but the capabilities approach gives a theorized framework for evaluation and understanding that insists on such treatment.

We discussed in particular the impacts of international migration on identity, for these have implications for the capabilities approach itself. Migration reconfigures not only societies, it reconfigures persons, and creates new categories and combinations of identities. Implicitly the capability approach's category of 'we', the 'we' that 'have reason to value', is in movement too. Thinking through the ethical and policy implications of such movement is a central challenge in migration studies and for the capability approach. The paper has reviewed some promising lines of response, from work on citizenship and on human security.

Even in less ambitious evaluative work, a capabilities approach provides an orientation rather than an elaborate theory or methodology, and is in no way self-sufficient. To theorise, describe and evaluate processes of migration in depth requires connection also to richer bases in social theory, including analyses of social embeddedness and of the formation of migration regimes in various localities, and systematised sets of indicators that relate to those theoretical bases. But we suggested the importance of a basic orientation that provides some counterweight to frameworks of capital-centred calculation and of nationalism and the nation-state. This involves elaboration of the cosmopolitan humanist strand within capabilities theory while not losing its communitarian sensitivities; we saw this in some of the current work on human security.

Amongst migration's implications are the move towards greater complexity of identity, arguably a desirable trend, and the need for a new understanding of rights and entitlements appropriate to a transnationalised world of mobility. The capabilities approach can both contribute and be enriched through attention to those issues.

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