Open-Border Immigration Policy:
A Step towards Global Justice

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ABSTRACT

In this article we argue for a world in which open borders are the rule and not the exception. This argument is based on the general recognition of *ius migrandi* as a basic right of persons. An open-border immigration policy is preferable—at least from a normative standpoint—to the typical policies designed to control or block borders through the simplistic mode of constructing walls. On the basis of a global conception of distributive justice as suggested by cosmopolitan egalitarians, we claim that open-door policies—or, failing in that, the implementation of a system of economic compensation for poor countries—provide powerful means to respond to the enormous inequalities that exist between countries and represent an appropriate way to order current migratory flows.

Keywords: 1. immigration policy, 2. border control, 3. human rights, 4. state sovereignty, 5. distributive global justice.

Política migratoria de fronteras abiertas: Un paso hacia la justicia global

RESUMEN

En este artículo se arguye a favor de un mundo en donde las fronteras abiertas sean la regla y no la excepción. Para ello, se presentan dos tipos de argumentos. El primero se basa en el reconocimiento general del *ius migrandi* como un derecho fundamental de las personas. Además de un modo idóneo de ordenar los actuales flujos migratorios, una política migratoria de fronteras abiertas es preferible, al menos desde un punto de vista normativo, a las habituales políticas diseñadas para controlar o bloquear las fronteras mediante la construcción de muros. El segundo se asienta sobre una concepción global de la justicia distributiva desarrollada por los igualitaristas cosmopolitas, se sostiene que una política de puertas abiertas –o, en su defecto, un modelo de compensación económica– constituiría un modo de responder a las enormes desigualdades existentes entre los países.

Palabras clave: 1. política de inmigración, 2. control fronterizo, 3. derechos humanos, 4. soberanía del Estado, 5. justicia global distributiva.

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Introduction[1]

While the elimination of borders has long been encouraged by thinkers who have been dismissed as being utopian and of minor importance, the idea has recently been revived and advanced by respected promoters of neoliberal globalization who, equipped with an ultra-liberal or libertarian ideology, defend the free circulation not only of goods but also, consequently, of people in a world without barriers. Indeed, a wide-ranging, animated academic debate has arisen around the desirability and viability of a world with open borders[2]. The heart of the controversy lies not in the radical elimination of border policies, but rather in controlling borders for the passage of human beings, that is, in recognizing the free circulation of persons.

Freedom of movement around the planet is a basic right of all human beings. The burden of proof falls on those who defend suspending or restricting it. This supposition is the point of departure for this article; however, instead of taking up space to defend this right, we will instead work to show the widespread practices intended to deny it, muddle it, or question its essential character. Also, a second goal, no less important, of this article will be to show that the general recognition of *ius migrandi* as a basic right of persons represents a way to order the current migratory flows that—from a normative standpoint as well as a functional perspective—is preferable to the usual policies designed to control or even block borders through the construction of walls. As a result, we

[2] "Aliens and Citizens: The Case for Open Borders," was published by Joseph Carens in 1986, breaking new ground in this debate. From a liberal perspective, the now-classic article addresses the ethical justifiability of the criteria for admission and selection of immigrants. Since then, he has continued to argue for a world with open borders (Carens, 2013). For more about the current debate on the issue, see Wilcox, 2009, and for a critical discussion, see Hosein, 2013.

will defend a world in which the opening of borders is the rule and not the exception. A third aspect of the article connects with the arguments put forward by cosmopolitan egalitarians who tend to see in open borders a way to respond to the enormous inequalities that exist between countries, arguments based on a global conception of justice. These latter kinds of arguments should not be understood as supplementary to the arguments focusing on freedom of movement as a human right. They belong to a different argumentative approach, particularly used in the debate with those who do not accept the supreme value of freedom of movement.

Recognizing that borders are firmly anchored in the collective thinking of political communities, what follows is a critical work of political imagination that admits from the start the enormous difficulty of constructing alternative mental maps. In the last section of the article, we argue for the need to set in motion a public debate about the opening of borders, and how making innovative proposals—even if they might be considered too utopian—is a wise action to take.

The Right of Persons to Circulate Freely

To speak about the right of persons to circulate freely in today's world is to take a walk through a minefield of paradoxes. To start with, it should be completely normal for the entire surface of the planet we inhabit to be accessible to anyone who is able to move around. After all, the whole planet is the common property of humanity (albeit with the permission of the other animal species that live here), property that each generation receives as an undeserved inheritance. And if the Earth is a common good (and probably the most genuine one), the access to all its different parts must be universally guaranteed. From the aforesaid, a way of conceiving one's relation with the territory can be inferred that obliges and constrains both visitors and hosts (Thiebaut, 2010:550–551).

The continued occupation of a specific territory by a human group—a historical fact repeated thousands of times, be it through peaceful or violent means—generates certain rights of use that nonetheless cannot negate or distort the most basic right of all individuals to interact with other human beings or cancel the obligation to admit individuals from other places. The right to interact as well as the obligation to welcome can be found in an abundance of different cultural contexts[3].

From this type of approach so succinctly outlined, it would be fitting to derive the affirmation of *ius migrandi* as a corollary: the right of everyone not only to move around the planet, but also to change their residence and settle wherever it suits them. The possibility of deciding where to live is a fundamental aspect of human freedom (and in many cases it is also a condition of the possibility to enjoy other freedoms and opportunities). This assertion is completely evident when the person migrating is oneself. No one would deny this fundamental right to oneself. However, it does not always happen the same way when one tries to apply it to others. Then a thousand distinctions are made, nonsense that in recent times has only become more pronounced, such that the distance between theory and practice is abysmal. One has only to refer to the evidence. The free circulation of persons, as well as freedom of residence, is a basic human right, yet the specific way it is regulated suffers from a degree of asymmetry that borders on the absurd, a feature visible even in the most influential text about human rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Its Article 13 proclaims: "*(1)* Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state. *(2)* Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country."

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[3] Hospitality is an extended and timeless custom prescribed by numerous religious traditions. In academic language, the universal duty of hospitality, as well as the correlative right to visit, was presented by Immanuel Kant (2008). Also, the denominated *ius communicationis ac societatis*—the right to travel to other regions of the earth and settle in them in order to enter into contact with other human beings—had previously been theorized by Francisco de Vitoria.

Stated directly: "Emigration is a human right, but immigration is not" (Heller, 1992). This is in fact what can be inferred from current international legislation on the subject, inspired in the cited article from the UDHR. The declaration recognizes the right of every person to leave the country they are a citizen of, as well as the right to return to this country, yet it says nothing about the correlative obligation of other governments to accept their entry in the territory of their own jurisdiction. In accordance with the aforementioned international laws, then, a right to leave one's own country exists, but in fact there is nothing about entering another (Cole, 2000:43–46), except in cases where one is fleeing from political, ethnic, or religious persecution, in which case the right to asylum is applied. This is, incidentally, a right positively protected, but frequently administered in a miserly way by many countries, including democratic ones, which have signed agreements—beginning with Article 14 of the UDHR and continuing with the Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951/1967)—that bind them legally[4].

It is true that international legislation affirms the right to emigrate, but it ignores its logical contrast, the right to immigrate, and as such, the first right ends up being violated. What fails, then, is the cornerstone of the construction: the right to immigrate is not constituted, let alone codified, in a binding way for the potential receiving countries. An individual right is recognized, but no specific obligations for possible recipients involved in its observation are indicated (Benhabib, 2005:19). For its potential beneficiaries, it is nothing more than a conditioned right. As such, there is a considerable imbalance between the unrestricted recognition of emigratory freedom and the factual submission of the right to immigrate to the sovereign decision of receiving countries. Nonetheless, in

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[4] Among people who change their country of residence, there are two important groups which that must be distinguished: political refugees and economic emigrants. In a correlative way, the duties of governments with regard to each group are different, although it is not so easy to justify a different treatment. In the end, the situation of one who must flee from ideological, religious, or ethnic persecution is just as unbearable as having to do so in order to escape poverty.

strict legal logic, the duty to receive is already implicit, because when a right is recognized, the obligation not to impede its realization is established[5]. But while logic and honest interpretation follow their courses, governments neglect the obligations contracted. In the middle of her trip, the migrant then remains trapped *de facto* in a zone of passage, in a vague regulatory zone where her rights are at the very least suspended.

The incoherent regulation of *ius migrandi* becomes obvious when considering the differences in dealing with intrastate and interstate migrations. According to the above stated Article 13.1 of the UDHR, as well as Article 12.1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ("Everyone lawfully within the territory of a State shall, within that territory, have the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose his residence"), there are no restrictions to the freedom of migration inside the states. However, these regulations do not explain why the reasons that can be given in favor of the human right to freedom of movement and settlement within national borders should not be equally valid, in order to sustain a human right to the same freedom with cross-border effects (Carens, 2013:239; against this standpoint, Blake, 2013, 2014).

Reluctance with regard to a complete understanding of *ius migrandi* is created not only within the realm of international law and in political praxis, but also in the realm of academia. It is thus doubted whether the right to emigrate automatically follows the right to freely settle in another country, and this despite the fact that this latter assertion is not a corollary of the first, or at least the material condition to satisfy the right to emigrate. It is not unusual to find typically normativist philosophers who adopt a realistic position on this point:

[5] Despite the above, the matter is not exempt from discussion. It would fit to furnish the right to emigrate with, for example, the *conditional* right to marry. This right, of course, does not imply the obligation of anyone to marry the person that cites said right. However, the counterpart of the subjective right to emigrate is not individuals, but rather governments. When a government guarantees a right, it assumes the obligation to put the legal-political code at the service of the protected plan, so that it can at least be carried out.

There is no right to settle for an extended period in any country of the world, to participate equally with equal rights in its composition, or to enjoy the benefits of its social system of protection. In short, there is no human right to immigrate. The *ultra posse nemo obligatur* principle already speaks against a universal right to immigration; even the resources of a generous host country can dry up. (Höffe, 1999:356)

Bearing in mind these types of arguments in which the functional imperatives of politics predominate implies disregarding not only moral but also other demands derived from human rights. If we assume basic principles like equal treatment and non-discrimination are valid, the burden of proof on this point falls on whoever argues in favor of limiting freedom of movement and settlement:

The onus of proof therefore lies upon a state claiming the right to keep from entering or settling in its territory one who wishes to do so. We must ask in what cases a state has such a right, not in which cases one who wishes to immigrate has the right to enter. (Dummett, 2004:118)

Another different matter is that, from an analytical perspective, there is a distinction between the entrance conditions of immigrants and the legal treatment that must be given to those who are already settled in the country. In principle, they are two points that admit a differentiated treatment. Given the case, pragmatic and current reasons can be given for justifying restrictions on the entry of immigrants that, nonetheless, do not justify the limitation on rights of visit, and vice versa. It is similarly valid to differentiate between entry rights and the rights to belong to a political community, because while it makes sense to raise fewer objections over the first, the second can be confronted with the right of every political community to control the criteria that constitute its identity (Benhabib, 2002:173).

The migrations and, in particular, the massive forced movements of persons recorded after the First World War, and especially during World War II, constitute a background of historical experiences that played an important role in the creation and approval of the UDHR, as they were experiences shared with greater or lesser proximity by all the relevant actors of the time. Free circulation within the country itself, as well as the possibility of leaving it or the right to return to one's own country, were options denied millions of people during those tragic years, a rejection that came at an extremely high cost of human life. It is evident that the UDHR is a historic document, in a literal as well as a critical sense. Given that its achievements and weaknesses have a historical reading, if its validity is to be maintained, the interpretation of *rights of mobility* (set forth in Articles 13 and 14 of the UDHR) should be updated and adapted to the new historical context: These rights were formulated in the context of the Holocaust and the Cold War, and today would have to be reinterpreted in light of the socioeconomic, political, and cultural consequences of globalization to formulate the right to mobility (Estévez, 2012:151). That is precisely the main intention of this article: to examine the possibility of shaping an *open-door migration scenario*, that is, a collection of policies that conceive of migration as one more element in the processes of globalization—and not as a breeding ground for the multiplication of social conflicts—so that it brings about the complete implementation of freedom of movement and settlement.

Walls against Free Circulation

Since the consolidation of modern national states, merely posing the possibility of recognizing the free circulation of persons—and with that, the gradual shaping of a world with open borders—is usually considered a direct challenge to a sacrosanct faculty traditionally attributed to said sovereign entities: controlling their territorial borders and reserving the right of admission. In this

sense, the very existence of sovereign territorial states represents a structural handicap for the free exercise of *ius migrandi*.

With regard to freedom of circulation and residence, countries maintain that their regulation forms part of the *domain reservé* of their sovereignty. The prevalent notion of state sovereignty continues to hinge upon exclusive control of a specific territory and its borders, legal authority that also includes the regulation of foreigner admission procedures. As a consequence, the spontaneity of migratory flows remains conditioned by the constant, although rarely efficient, state endeavors that tend to plan them, orient them, and regulate them. Behind the persistence of territorial borders, one finds an implacable state machinery determined to mark the confines between those inside and those outside, to separate human beings into citizens and foreigners, an exclusive logic in addition to one that is profoundly inhospitable (Bello, 2011). This is not a mere theoretical assertion but rather a verified daily practice.

In principle, according to custom and international law, the act of migrating does not constitute a crime. As a result, if countries took this seriously, they should abstain from deploying any type of policy and legislation designed to criminalize immigration that is not expressly authorized. However, they do just the opposite. The customary practice is to close borders to immigration and the exception is conditional opening. To protect this conduct and serve as a perfect alibi, we are presented with the widespread *obsession about security*, which, raised to supreme importance above all other considerations, dominates space and public discourse. The following comment by a former speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives is a significant expression of that national security rhetoric: "No serious nation in the age of terror can afford to have wide-open borders with millions of illegal aliens crossing at will" (Gingrich, 2005:86).

To close the borders to people, however, it was not necessary to present migrants as potential terrorists. That is only a conveniently timed excuse, as the physical barriers were erected long before, from the moment control of movement of migrants was bolstered

with the fight against drug trafficking, the white-slave trade, and smuggling in general. The objective was no longer to keep two worlds with conflicting ideologies separated, as occurred until the fall of the Berlin Wall, but rather to impede the access of persons who were simply looking to improve their lives. Although the subject of migration was already being dealt with from a policing perspective (if not strictly military), the construction of new walls was promoted after the Twin Towers were demolished. Erected in an attempt to halt illegal immigration, they covered and continue to cover a considerable part of the 3,152 kilometers of border between the United States and Mexico, the longest and most dramatic line separating a rich country and a poor country[6]. Such barriers, equipped with cameras and high-intensity lighting and furnished with thermal and motion detectors, do not, however, prevent both countries from maintaining the most important bilateral migratory nexus in the world.

However, anti-immigration barriers are not an exclusive phenomenon of the United States. In fact, they have proliferated on all the continents and, according to some estimates, adding all those raised around the planet, now reach a total length of some 18,000 kilometers (Rodier, 2012:47). Not as famous as the one cited above but comparable in length is the double row of 2.5-meter-high wire fences that India erected 15 years ago to deter the migration coming from Bangladesh, and which is now more than 2,500 kilometers long. Shorter, but much higher and more modern, are the gates of raised fences to protect the land perimeter of the North African Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla and specifically impede the migratory passage from Morocco. Physical barriers and obstacles have also been erected in different sections of the land border between Greece and Turkey that do not coincide with the Evros River.

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[6] A couple of statistics can be quite eloquent in illustrating this idea and gauging the magnitude of the obsession with security. From, 1992 to 2009, agents of the U.S. Border Patrol rose in number from 4,000 to more than 20,000, and in the first mandate term of Barack Obama alone (2009-2012), the United States deported almost 1.5 million undocumented immigrants.

The closing of borders has become Europe's "migratory doctrine" (Wihtol de Wenden, 1999:28), and the fight against illegal immigration the strategy to implement it. So-called *Fortress Europe* is much more than a handy linguistic resource for journalistic use. It is a tangible reality planned with the goal of trying to contain planetary poverty[7]. Related to this is the tendency observed in the European Union to de-judicialize the processes of detention and expatriation of undocumented persons, with the consequent failure of the right to effective legal protection.

The construction of walls and the militarization of borders is becoming an increasingly common practice, yet it does not detain the international passage of persons. No border is known to be impassible. Border police, armies, observation flights, television cameras, sophisticated systems of sensors: None of these achieve the effectiveness required in the pursuit of their goal. The same can be said of the intensification and refinement of measures of control in airports, the preventative deployment of those controls to points of origin, or the generalization of the demand to for people to have biometric passports. None of these procedures serve to prevent persons from entering a country and even less to detain those who want to leave their own country because they are dogged by desperation. In addition to nourishing a lucrative business that a powerful, promptly generated security industry benefits from (Rodier, 2012:19–45; Andersson, 2014), they just serve to trick the migrants in a more subtle way, to increase their physical risks as well as the prices traffickers charge for smuggling them.

Over time, these methods have increased in sophistication. The latest trend is the so-called extraterritorialization of border control, and the European Union has already become a real expert in

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[7] It is no metaphor, but rather a structured system of control and surveillance: "Fortress Europe consists of three fundamental pillars: a panoptic brain, a common system of control of the borders and a containment zone of allied countries." (Davis, 2008:256). For the joint administration of the European Union's external borders, FRONTEX, was created in 2004. The budget of this European Agency has been increasing exponentially since then.

it. It is about entrusting third world countries—which migrants must pass through before reaching their destination—with the task of closing the channels of communication between countries of origin and those receiving. As compensation for their work, these countries receive development grants or are awarded a privileged status in trade relations. This tactic is completed with the signature of bilateral agreements of readmission and/or repatriation with countries that often possess a less than impressive track record with regard to human rights.

Today, despite all the methods deployed, there are no completely hermetic spaces with respect to migrations, and that has its correlation in the policies followed:

> At present it is not accurate to speak of border closure or policies of zero immigration, but rather of a strict and conditioned regulation. […] As such, the borders are transformed into airtight, strongly symbolic limits between countries that receive and countries that send people. (López, 2005:116)

It instead deals with a selective closure according to the type of person who tries to access state territory. Walls, ditches, and other efforts to seal off the borders possess demagogic content that is difficult to hide: "They are erected as a solution to the problem, when they can only contain some of the symptoms of inequality, and not for very long. They are built to offer a symbol of firmness to the people behind them" (Moré, 2007:15). Indeed, the walls erode the very sovereignty they seek to sustain. The more walled a state is, the more the sovereignty it actually proclaims wanes (Brown, 2010).

The severe policies of controlling the flows and jealous surveillance of the borders—although at times no more than gestures of scant operational capacity in relation to the goal pursued, albeit ones that have negative and palpable consequences for the persons affected—are a handy resource used by many countries to try to convince their citizens that the nations still possess sovereignty and decision-making power. The facts, on the contrary, show that

countries are losing sovereignty and decision-making power completely. On many matters, the processes of transfer of effective power to international authorities (International Monetary Fund, World Bank, etc.) have generated a banalization of state power. For their part, markets, which know no boundaries, are those that define the employment situation and social and economic context, and not the other way around, as would be proper in a democratic system. The logic of the state and the logic of capital confront each other, and in this duel, apparently, the first is at a disadvantage. However, in matters of "emigration, naturalization, nationality, and expulsion," as Hannah Arendt (1979:278) pointed out some time ago, state sovereignty is still practically absolute, such that on said matters "the national state claims its old splendor in asserting its sovereign right to control its borders" (Sassen, 1996:63). This shocking reaction very probably responds to the evidence that these days, realistically speaking, there is little left for a country to monopolize that is not the integrity of its borders, so "the idea of territory" has become the "diacritical point of sovereignty" (Appadurai, 1996:49).

In a world where goods production, trade and finance, communications, transport, and news take place on a unified world stage, where most of the barriers have been lifted and the flows and exchanges have been liberalized, we observe the enormous paradox that the mobility of persons is besieged everywhere (Barry and Goodin, 1992). All the factors that are involved in production have freedom of movement, except workers (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013:95–130). When the borders are not firmly closed, urgent, expensive entry visas are required or limited access quotas are imposed (connected, for example, to the possession of a specific nationality or professional qualification). Migration policies are in fact determined by discouraging and increasingly restrictive ordinances for the admission and mobility of persons—certain persons, always the most vulnerable and with the least resources—across international borders. Here is where this globalized world in so many aspects shows its darker side: a bordered world,

a world for which strategies of surveillance and control of people run amok. With regard to the circulation of goods, the logic of the liberal economy is imposed on the discourse of border control. However, regarding the circulation of persons, the universalist logic of human rights is passed over before this same discourse.

The free circulation of persons has become a coveted factor of distinction and social stratification. The high rate of human mobility, one of the distinctive signs of these times, in fact tends not to be distributed at all equally. On a planet with tremendous disparities in income, resources and opportunities, not everyone can afford—nor is afforded—the luxury of being cosmopolitan. What is more, most of the people who inhabit the planet are not allowed to move freely. For some, however, the crossing of borders is merely a formality. Most countries use the institution of borders following the tenets of distinction and selection, and this practice ends up being expressed in a dual regime of circulation of individuals, a fact perhaps much more serious than the differentiation between persons and goods (Balibar, 2005:83–84). Both distinctions are difficult to justify in normative terms, all the more for those societies that proclaim human rights to be a foundation of their internal governance. These societies have dialectically disarmed themselves to publicly defend weighty arguments against the universal scope of these rights and make borders legitimate obstacles to the free mobility of persons. If they operate like that, as in fact they do, they end up settling in a permanent contradiction, which, as common as it may be, never ceases to create dysfunctional internal imbalances.

Human Mobility and Global Justice

As a general rule, border walls express a patent desire to exclude the most underprivileged people on the planet. Not coincidentally, barriers are erected on the most unequal borders in the world, in economic terms (Moré, 2007). Their maintenance implies banking on the persistence of models of containment that are as

inefficient as they are unjust. Locking up poor countries in their deprivation neither solves nor alleviates the underlying problem: Far from diminishing, the inequalities and differences in development grow. Not only is the policing of borders impossible, but it is becoming more unacceptable in social and political terms, given the enormous cost in materials and, above all, human lives it entails. The migration policies developed by numerous receiving countries, inspired in a philosophy of tight control and even criminalization of undesired immigration, also generate very serious side effects with regard to equity.

The way in which each society reacts in political and legal terms to the phenomenon of immigration is an excellent indicator when it comes to comprehend its basic structure and its conception of justice. Ethnic stratification of the job market, differences in the granting of rights, and residential segregation are among the dark social phenomena that have emerged in democratic societies on facing migratory processes, and that contravene the very principles and values these societies pretend to be sustained on. The real situation that many migrants go through, from the moment they begin their journey until they manage to settle in a new country (if they in fact do so), shows that the implementation of the principles of justice—human rights included among them, of course—is still conceived from the restricted perspective of each country's interests[8]. All along that route, they are the target of multiple restrictions that countries impose on them, often in a discriminatory way, to access and stay in their territory. On limiting the range of application of the demands of justice, reducing it to the group of the country's nationals, the inherent universalist scope of said notion is being substantially altered. Its recipients, that is to say, those wor-

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[8] With regard to migration, the sovereignty of countries is not absolute, but instead limited in general by the respect for human rights: "In extreme circumstances, denial of the right of immigration may constitute a failure to respect human rights or the universal duty of rescue. [...] The most basic rights and duties are universal, and not contingent on specific institutional relations between people" (Nagel, 2005:130). A different matter—and no less important—is determining what specific situations of need sovereignty should yield to.

thy of fair treatment, are all the inhabitants of the planet, and not only citizens of a specific country (Velasco, 2013).

The fact that international migratory movements have become considerable in recent decades is no anomaly, but rather a reasonable response to the great differences in the standard of living between different countries. Differences in income *within* each country, in many cases still highly significant, pale in comparison with the differences that exist *between* countries, such that "at present, it is much more important, generally speaking, to have had the good fortune to be born in a rich country than to belong to the upper class, middle class or lower class of that country" (Milanovic, 2010:129). There are many people who, because they were born on the wrong side of the border, have no chance of ever becoming as wealthy as the poorest people in the United States, Japan, or Western Europe (Velasco, 2016). Migrating from one country to another makes it possible for individuals to transcend national categories that are the key to inequality in the world.

In general, countries always act on the basis of national interests. From there, restrictive migration policies serve primarily to try to protect privileges and preserve the prosperity of a political community and, in particular, those born in each country. Being born in one country or another is merely a question of chance that nonetheless entails an entire series of interlinked effects. The first is being a member of a specific country, a formal condition that bequeaths a world full of advantages for some and condemns others to a life of limited prospects. "We do not deserve to have been born into a particular society any more than we deserve to have been born into a particular family. Those who are not immigrants have done nothing to become members of their society" (Nagel, 2005:128), but nonetheless enjoy an inherited title for the enjoyment of undeserved privileges compared with those who are not full members of society, but live within the same territory. Or put more eloquently:

> To be born a citizen of an affluent state in Europe or North America is like being born into the nobility […] To be born a citizen of a poor

country in Asia or Africa is like being born into the peasantry in the Middle Ages […] Limiting entry to rich liberal democratic states is a crucial mechanism for protecting a birthright privilege. (Carens, 2013:226)

In this way, many people begin life with undeserved social and material disadvantages—arbitrary disadvantages, for certain—just for being born in a specific country, a misfortune that is not a coincidence and one for which they should be compensated (Shachar, 2009). Inside a country, this could be prevented by a contributive system of redistributive taxation and social welfare programs. However, in an interdependent world such as ours composed of countries very unequal in wealth and resources, this seems difficult to articulate. The current system of separate sovereign countries is an unfortunate obstacle to achieving global justice (Nagel, 2005:119). As that is an arduous task, it would be wise to look for ways that foster international cooperation on this subject.

While important steps have been taken in the last two decades to increase and regulate economic trade (for example, giving the World Trade Organization considerable regulatory powers and creating an obligatory jurisdictional procedure for all of its members), it is surprising that nothing has been done to govern international migrations. This negligence is no coincidence, but rather obeys the conviction of many countries that everything concerned with the management of migratory affairs is of their exclusive competence. However, the genuine planetary extent of migratory flows and the diversity of agents involved in them greatly lessens the effectiveness of countries and imposes, as in so many other challenges of our time, the adoption of a multilateral focus to deal more completely with the processes triggered by these flows. For some time now, the conviction that it is not only appropriate but also mandatory to broaden the perspective from which to examine social matters in their complexity and multiplicity has been consolidating in social sciences, as well as political and moral philosophy. There is an awareness that all of us inhabit *only*

one world and that, as such, a merely state-centered point of view is inadequate for dealing with the complex problems that arise in countries. This is also true for conflicts and problems caused by migrations: If countries look for solutions separately, they will run aground within their reduced area of operation.

In this order of things, a previous condition for amplifying the scale of analysis and adopting a global conception of justice is to abandon "methodological nationalism," that is, to over-come that narrow epistemic focus that considers different coun-tries to be the basic way to organize the world and, as such, the basic units for the study of social processes (Pogge, 2005). A more global focus—or, as Ulrich Beck (2006) put it, a "cosmo-politan vision"—appears as a strategic set response to the needs of analysis of a new historical and social reality, apt for a world that is more and more ours, a world where individuals share and are aware of sharing, directly or indirectly, one same finite natu-ral environment. In a global context, where systemic problems of planetary reach are more and more pressing, it is necessary for all countries to pool resources, technology, news services, and also their authority; that is, a necessarily multilateral and coordinated response is needed, one that can also "radically re-structure the world economic system" in accordance with the obligations of justice (Beitz 1979:127). Such a redistribution cannot consist of cosmetic changes or of rhetorical appeals, but instead must have an effect at the structural level.

From this broad view of planetary scope, some theorists of global justice have taken a stand in favor of *the opening of borders* (or at least a migratory policy of *crossable borders*), which is not the same as *a world without borders*. Contemporary debates deal more with the first than the second option, which is considered too radical and untimely (Wellman, 2010). The arguments put forward are much the same as those normally proposed in sup-port of social or distributive justice. It is argued that if equality of opportunities is a basic principle of justice, limiting the op-tion to migrate according to one's place of birth or citizenship

implies unacceptable discrimination (Arnsperger and Van Parijs, 2003:97-105). In this same sense, it is noted that confining individuals to reduced spaces and restricting access to resources available in other countries limit the basic opportunities necessary to lead a dignified life (Loewe, 2010). It is also stressed that, considered from the perspective of distributive justice, restrictions of migrations towards wealthy countries constitute an illegitimate way to try to support unequal participation in the planet's finite resources. On the contrary, through the implementation of some system of global economic governance (which does not require as such the constitution of a world government, but instead the establishment of multilateral institutions with reinforced powers), the free circulation of persons could be a catalyst of global redistribution such that it increases the potential of improving the fate of the most underprivileged on the planet (Arnsperger and Van Parijs, 2003:97–105).

One of the first implications of the idea of justice is the demand to put an end to situations of active injustice, and to compensate those harmed by the wrong that was done to them. But the critical-normative potential of the value of justice does not end there. In the sphere of migration, that is obvious: Behind many human displacements, there are situations of *systemic or structural injustice*, which contribute to aggravating the fate of the most underprivileged even more, a rather frequent form of injustice that should not go without some chance of obtaining compensatory reparation. It does not matter whether such injustices are the result of an explicit wish to hurt or of the apathy or disinterest that keeps certain processes and structures unscathed. What matters is whether they cause "some people's options to be blocked off, and they suffer the threat of hardship, while others obtain significant benefits" (Young, 2011:69). In that case, those who unfairly benefited have to compensate those unfairly harmed. But how does one face the negative consequences of the unequal distribution of the world's wealth? Put more specifically, how does one assign costs of mitigation to these effects?

In a world with blatant inequalities, the most prosperous countries that benefit from this state of things are obligated to contribute to the redistribution of wealth in the world. It is not about mere moral responsibility, but instead international legal responsibility resulting from the complete assumption of human rights (Articles 22 and 25.1 of the UDHR). The responsibility to act when a government fails to meet the basic rights of subsistence is generically attributed to the international community and, more specifically, to each of the particular countries that compose it[9]. The way to handle that responsibility is not, however, prescribed in advance (Beitz, 2009:194–206). On the internal plane, governments normally put different measures into effect to achieve greater distributive equity and try to overcome the most immediate disadvantages that some people suffer, be it through transfers (unemployment benefit, compensatory pensions, etc.) or subsidized social services (education, health, etc.). At the global level, different distributive options along the lines of these measures could be considered:

> International aid is the equivalent of a redistributive fiscal transfer mechanism with a potential to effect dynamic change, for instance, through investments in health, education and infrastructure. Similarly, international trade practices can open—or close—opportunities for poor countries and their citizens to capture a bigger share of the economic pie. (United Nations Development Programme, 2005:39)

Leaving the satisfaction of the duties of justice in the hands of volunteer and interim aid seems quite insufficient: "Justice as ordinarily understood requires more than mere humanitarian assistance

[9] Although countries have an *original responsibility* to respect, protect and promote human rights in their sphere of sovereignty, the international community has the *derived responsibility* to help countries uphold the human rights of their people. This latter responsibility comes into effect only when a particular country fails to fulfil its obligations. Moreover, its enforcement is gradual and flexible: it ranges from holding countries accountable to different types of pressure, or even to measures intended to reinforce the states' capacity to accomplish their tasks (Beitz, 2009:106–117).

to those in desperate need" (Nagel, 2005:119)[10]. Contribution to a system of international compensatory transfers (a type of payment of global taxes) would then be an option, but not the only one, nor always the most effective. A major overhaul of the current trade laws that concede tangible advantages to the most underprivileged countries would be another possibility. Among the possible compensatory measures of global inequalities, there is one more that should be seriously considered. It deals with arbitrating a policy of open borders that, in addition to being a way to implement the human right to free circulation, it would carry out that compensatory function. One of its first formulations is owed to Dummett (2001:70), who proposes that:

> As long as there persists an immense contrast between rich and poor nations, justice, which demands that the rich correct this as quickly and completely as possible, also demands that they do not erect or strengthen their boundaries against the entry of people coming from poor countries.

Through the easing of immigration restrictions in rich countries—above all, with the opening of more channels for legal immigration—we would seek to effectively guarantee the rights to subsistence of people who live in the poorest countries on the planet. Only from a disproportionate exaltation of the national against the foreign can the restriction of access of foreigners be understood as a legitimate mechanism to conserve the resources of a country, for the sole benefit of the citizens of that country. With reason, this resistance that—which the most developed societies show when it comes to sharing their rights and social services with migrants who come from poor countries—has been

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[10] In his *The Law of Peoples*, Rawls contemplates a mere duty of international assistance: "Peoples have a duty to assist other peoples living under unfavorable conditions that prevent their having a just or decent political and social regiment" (Rawls, 2001:37). However, the demand for no institutional arrangement of international reach is assumed. Moreover, just as Rawls conceives it (2001:105–120), satisfying this duty of assistance does not necessarily require transfers of resources.

censored as an expression of an unsupportive "welfare chauvinism" (Habermas, 1992:651–660).

In a setting where the division between the levels of wealth in different countries is enormous, in addition to growing, the rich (or relatively rich) countries would be legitimized in continuing to keep the power to control admission of foreigners into their territory, only if they meet certain conditions and, specifically, if they eliminate the trade barriers towards the poorest countries, if they modify the existing international economic institutions, and/or if they intervene through some kind of redistributive tax in a more just share in the planet's resources; that is, only if they contribute significantly and to the degree their possibilities permit in the global establishment of distributive justice (Kymlicka, 2001:270–272; Pogge, 2002:196–215). One can point to an argument that updates certain ideas from Hugo Grotius and Immanuel Kant (2008) in favor of this position[11]. Earth, our planet, is originally common property of everyone who comprises humanity, and this situation—which does not question the private rights of usufruct—imposes conditions on its use. One of them is that countries that underuse their lands and other natural resources have the duty either to admit immigrants from countries with people with fewer resources per capita, or compensate them for denying them access (Blake and Risse, 2006[12]).

[11] The range of doctrinal sources is, however, much wider. Even for the most inspiring eminence of possessive individualism, John Locke, the private appropriation of common goods, like the earth, is only legitimate if there remains "enough, and as good, left in common for others" (Second Treatise of Government, Chap. V, "Of property", §27). It is equally known that also for Christian philosophy, at least in the work of Thomas Aquinas, private property deeds, far from being absolute, are conditioned by the satisfaction of obligations with respect to the whole society.

[12] Referring to an idea of Grotius's, which Kant (2008) made his own afterwards ("the common ownership of the earth"), Blake and Risse's argument is that all the members of humanity have an equal moral right to the planet's physical resources, and that from this assumption, normative limitations are derived in legitimate regimes of property, including immigration regimes. What these authors propose is, essentially, that countries do not have an unlimited or unconditional discretionality in their policies of immigration admission.

This migratory approach inspired in an idea of global distributive justice is quite close to the emphasis on reparation, that the so-called post-colonial theory postulates. Fair distribution on a global level is not at all incompatible with compensation for damages caused by the colonial past. Both perspectives defend the obligation to compensate for damages unfairly infringed caused throughout Western colonial history, whose disastrous legacy has too often given rise to the emergence of failed states. These countries are precisely those that nourish the main contemporary migratory flows, so it is not difficult to recognize the presence of the descendants of the old colonizers in the new displacements that arrive now as immigrants in conditions that frequently violate human rights.

Of course, it is appropriate not only to question the idea that migrations from poor countries towards richer ones make it possible to have more equitable access to the planet's finite resources, but to even think that the international transfer of resources to fight global poverty would be much more efficient than the admission of migrants to wealthy countries (Pogge, 2005). Even in that case, it is difficult to deny that a possible opening of borders to migratory flows entails relief from the severe poverty that afflicts the population of so many countries: not a radical solution, but a partial answer. Leaving aside the normative consideration—not at all banal—that the capacity of deciding where one wants to live is a basic and unnegotiable element of the freedom of every human being, migrations have an enormous instrumental value insofar as they represent an opportunity to improve the development not only of the people who migrate, but also of the different countries involved, both of origin and destination. If, from a strictly economic perspective, reasons of efficiency are agreed on to justify the liberalization of trade, similar reasons can be put forward in favor of human mobility and, in particular, labor mobility. This way the world would improve in its levels of redistribution and, as such, equity.

The migratory effort is, very probably, the one that offers more returns to the individuals on the adventure of social mobility, far beyond the processes of upward social mobility through education, work, changes in the redistributive model, or changes in access to public goods (Korzeniewizc and Moran, 2009:107–109; Rodrik, 2011:286–287; De la Dehesa, 2008:117). If we keep this in mind, it is inevitable to reach the conclusion that the obstacles to mobility that are imposed on those workers seriously violate the principle of equity on a global scale. In a world without extreme poverty, the intensity of migratory flows would very probably diminish. But this is not the case, and potential migrants cannot be asked to wait for the results of a convergence of the levels of quality of live life on a global scale, a possible convergence whose outcome is nonetheless uncertain. Any means that—without damaging the vital rights of third parties—serves to attenuate the severe levels of poverty in the world must be applauded and even supported on the basis of pragmatic as well as moral reasons. Migrations will be advantageous in the development of the parties involved, as they offer people who undertake them the opportunity to work and possibly send money back home, while the labor force and social capital in the receiving countries are increased (United Nations Development Programme, 2009).

It would also be wise to rid oneself of certain preconceived notions not subject to empirical contrast as is the case of the assertion that the opening of borders is tantamount to legitimizing a form of invasion, peaceful though it may be, or encouraging an enormous influx of migrants that renders the sustainability of the receiving countries unviable. It is often forgotten that migrating is not a simple option and that it implies several existential ruptures that are not usually confronted if one does not have powerful reasons (Brock, 2009:194–195). Instead, the tendency of people is to live in their own country, where they have their family and know the language, so that there are reasons to sustain that migrations will continue to be

a relatively minority phenomenon (as of 2012, some 216 million people, 3.15 % of the world population, live outside their countries of origin [United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2013]). Furthermore, the assumed practical impossibility of simultaneously maintaining a policy of open borders and a vast welfare state is based on superficial calculations that do not consider the net economic contribution of the immigrant population. Moreover, these calculations ignore the need recognized by numerous developed countries to compensate, via new immigrant workers, the growing deficit of their pension systems resulting from the concurrence of a low birth rate and a long life expectancy.

Certainly, there are different ways to handle the general responsibility of alleviating poverty in the world and diminishing global inequalities. Choosing the way is something that is left up to governments. In any case, rich countries have to let the others participate in the sharing of the common pie. As concerns migration, the practical consequence drawn from that is not at all banal: it It is not obligatory to open the borders, but rejecting this option has its price. If countries did it, they would then be obligated to offer alternative solutions. They would maintain their traditional discretionality regarding the closing of borders (one of the few areas where countries still maintain a certain remnant of their tainted sovereignty) but the margin would be severely reduced and it would not be free.

In many cases, certainly not in all, the transgression of borders is only a small symptom of a bad pandemic called global poverty and injustice. It is difficult to try to control international migratory movements without implementing fundamental measures that balance the distribution of wealth and make it possible for all countries to share the benefits of globalization equally. One cannot fight against a serious illness, let alone try to eradicate it, by fighting only the symptoms.

The Utopia of Open Borders

If for a long time the main question that was in the background of the philosophical and political reflection about the phenomenon of migration was the right to emigrate, at present the point of controversy instead turns around immigration rights and the corresponding state obligations to admit foreigners and even naturalize them. Related to this change of focus is the universal recognition of the *right to emigrate* as a human right (Article 13.2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) and as such, its consolidation as a protected right. Now we need to go one step further and recognize the complementary *right to immigrate*, without which the proclamation of the first is no more than empty words. It is in this scenario of debate where the opening of borders acquires its most complete significance.

It is quite possible that the proposal as we have just outlined it, despite the internal coherence that it might have, could be labeled *utopian*. In today's world, a world still adjusted to the model of sovereign national countries, a world that is still Westphalian (as the principle of non-interference in internal affairs is still in effect and national borders still deserve maximum international protection), the free circulation of persons certainly presents itself as something for which the right circumstances for its effective recognition still do not exist. But it is also true that this particular utopia is in the same line of those that have made the world move: a utopia of a world without slaves, or the utopia of a world without a subordinate gender, to mention only two examples of social goals that in other times seemed completely unobtainable. The proposal formulated here is, instead, a micro-utopia, which does not try to be a perfect world, a paradise on Earth, but simply to show a way to avoid or at least mitigate the great and constant evils generated by the obsession with control in which most contemporary countries are trapped, a little utopia concentrated on the prevention of damages caused by that controlling desire.

The value of utopian thought as a potential motor for social change is quite obvious. However, the formulation of a utopia will only be useful if, in addition to being desirable, it satisfies minimum requirements of viability and, as a consequence, outlines a possible path. There are numerous material conditions that must come together for it to be put into practice and that must be considered (Somek, 1998:410). An open-door immigration policy—or, alternatively, a global system of indemnification that compensates poor countries for the closure of borders—would completely reconfigure the state of affairs. That new scenario is not only a desirable horizon, but also a proposal not less viable than others sold as being more reasonable. Without falling into naïveté, it is worth asking whether in fact the opposite option advocated from positions self-designated as realistic is not much more utopian. And with that question, one does not allude exclusively to the complete closure of borders, to the "zero immigration" policy so desired by some chauvinist populisms, but also to the simple hope of maintaining migratory flows under state control. Next to the reiterated inconsistencies that the political administration of these flows generates, the opening of borders presents itself as a dignified reasonable option to be taken into consideration. It is time that a public debate about a policy of opening was taken up in earnest, and it should also be discussed whether the costs/benefits balance that said policy causes is more or less favorable than the balance resulting from a policy of absolute containment of migratory flows.

The most important social changes throughout history have not been the result of inexorable structural processes, but rather a product of human intervention through political mobilizations and social struggles. The limits to what is possible are not drawn by the limits of what really exists, as what is real, in addition to being contingent, can be modified. Meanwhile, keeping in mind an option located beyond what really exists, not beyond what is possible, is essential to be able to critique that increasingly widespread perspective that presents human mobility as a potential threat to the established order.

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