
BORDERS AND DE-BORDERING
IN THE 21ST CENTURY:
TRANSFORMING POLICIES OF EXCLUSION
TO POLICIES OF INCLUSION

21世纪的边界和去边界化：
从排斥政策走向包容政策

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With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, a new era of open geographical spaces and unparalleled mobility was to replace an ideologically and politically divided world. However, instead, the post-Cold War period ushered in a new era of walls with over 77 border walls and fences being built around the globe. With the rise of more and more such “hard” borders, migration and its economic, political, social, humanitarian and moral implications, have turned into some of the defining issues of the 21st century (Vallet, 2014). At the same time, calls for softer and more porous borders have been proliferating. Economists have long pointed to the economic benefits of open border policies. Classic economist John Kenneth Galbraith (1979) already argued that open borders are and historically have been effective solutions to enhance economic growth, address global inequality, and reduce global poverty. Besides the economic advantages of more open border policies, scholars have also increasingly maintained that a global economy imposes regulatory and moral challenges that have not yet been adequately addressed.

Instead of national institutions we need a “transnational architecture for decision-making” (Mostov, 2008, p. 124) in order to be able to deal with issues of political and human rights of populations on the move. Moreover, a global economy in which borders are soft for goods, services, and a privileged global citizenry, but hard for the socio-economically disadvantaged amounts to a form of “global apartheid” (Legrain, 2014, p. 324). Thus “closed borders are one of the world's greatest moral failings, but the opening of borders is the world's greatest economic opportunity” (Taborrak, 2015). In order to establish a new economic paradigm based on more freedom of movement, open borders, and transnational cooperation, we therefore urgently need to shift the public discourse on such matters by disseminating evidence-based messaging as to the advantages of such an economic paradigm shift.

Action Item 1: Establish more Open-Border Policies

The economic and social benefits of more open borders are well established. With a graying population in many industrialized countries, long-term economic sustainability depends on more open border policies. Besides, the economic advantages of more porous borders for both migrant-sending as well as migrant-receiving countries, scientific studies have also established that a more diverse workforce boosts innovation, and that more integrative policies enhance social cohesiveness and development (Jones, 2019).

As a case in point, the scientific enterprise itself is a paradigmatic example of how porous and open communities can advance scientific and technical knowledge. Global scientific collaborations have benefited national and international communities. For instance, in the United States, one-third of all Nobel Prize winners in physics in the past seven years were foreign-born; and 40 percent of science and engineering

PhDs are conferred on immigrants. Moreover, science diplomacy has been championed under President Obama’s administration as a major foreign policy tool to enable transnational collaboration with countries to which political channels of communication had been severed. The Obama Administration was well aware at the time that collaboration across diverse communities builds trust and solidifies communities. However, such community-building and transnational collaboration calls for more open-door policies; this is the case in science and politics, but also in social life in general.

Action Item 2: Establish more Transnational Networks for Collaboration

The need for collaboration and therefore also for “transnational architectures of decision-making” has become even more urgent in light of the 2020 global health crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic, that entailed the global spread of a virulent and deadly virus that does not respect political borders. The fall-out of this pandemic puts into stark relief the lack of transnational collaboration and trust, and the failure of bi-national policies and science diplomacy at a time when politicians are increasingly retreating into nationalist rhetoric while consolidating and hardening political borders (Colglazier, 2020). At this time, the value of transnational institutions – whether in science or in policy – have become the bearers of the torch in such dark times. Indeed, the urgency of a unified global response to a global threat has given rise to unprecedented collaboration across scientific communities (Apuzzo et.al., 2020). Consequently, the urgency of such a global threat may yet transform how we think about the value of trans-border collaboration and cooperation and the utility of more porous and open borders.

In 1969 the Apollo moon shot provided an extraordinary photograph of planet Earth suspended in space. It transformed how we thought about the biosphere, climate change, health and human interconnectedness. The 2020 Covid-19 epidemic is another historic moment that reminds us that political borders are not only not visible from space, but they also don't stop deadly viruses. Consequently, the need to rethink the function and utility of borders in light of global health security is yet another 21st century problem that hopefully can be addressed through establishing and institutionalizing more transnational networks of collaboration in science, politics and policy.

Action Item 3: Change the Discourse on Migration

By 2016 there was an ever-increasing shift to the political right underway in many countries around the globe. The previous focus on openness, integration and collaboration (as exemplified by the establishment of the European Union post-WWII) increasingly became replaced with a focus on closures, exclusionary policies and nationalistic agendas. At that time, political protagonists, capitalizing on media images of migrants seemingly streaming across borders, increasingly hijacked the discourse on border policies, demonizing migrants as “dangerous others” that ostensibly threaten national security. With the proliferation of misinformation concerning issues such as migration and borders, it is vital to communicate more evidence-based messages concerning these matters.

Such messages should emphasize the long-term benefits of more open borders for economy and society, as well as the legal and moral precepts and values that have been fundamental to post-WWII democratic governance, which include upholding human rights, the right of asylum, and protection from persecution. Scholars have also increasingly drawn on the African concept

of “*ubuntu*”¹ in order to think about notions of human solidarity, togetherness, and responsibility towards others. The meaning of “*ubuntu*” is frequently communicated through the telling of stories as a powerful pedagogical tool for communicating knowledge and wisdom. Thus, we need to transform the stories that emphasize the need for exclusionary policies to stories that point to the benefits of openness, integration, and collaboration.



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1 The concept of “*ubuntu*” derives from humanist African philosophy and is part of the Zulu phrase “*Umntu ngumntu ngabantu*”, which means a person is a person through other people. Accordingly, community is understood as the building block of society, signifying our common humanity and oneness. It is also defined in terms of the phrase: “I am, because you are” (see also Oppenheim 2012).

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