Review Essay

Beyond humanitarianism: Normatively approaching immigration and integration

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International Political Theory and the Refugee Problem

Natasha Saunders

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Integration of Immigrants and the Theory of Recognition: ‘Just Integration’

Gulay Ugur Goksel

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In recent years, refugee ‘crises’, mass migration and the integration of refugees have been widely and intensely discussed, both in the public sphere and in political theory. However, it appears that there is little consensus on how to normatively approach these phenomena. One of the reasons could be that mainstream political theory, heavily influenced by John Rawls, has tended to define political justice mainly within a nation-state and has ignored mass migration as a political issue for a long time. One of the most famous statements by John Rawls is that societies are nationally closed and thus they provide a ‘more or less complete and self-sufficient scheme of cooperation, making room within itself for all the necessary activities of life, from birth to death’ (Rawls, 1993, p. 18). This nationally closed perspective can (at least partially) explain why political theory has been struggling with the issue of mass migration to Europe, especially since 2011. Despite political theory’s increased interest in mass migration, recent debates on the ethics of migration have often focused on the rather narrow question of the right of nation-states to exclude

others. While Kantian authors (e.g. Pogge, 2002) tend to argue in favour of open borders and are committed to ethnical universalism, others (e.g. Miller, 2016; Walzer, 1983) highlight the exclusionary nature of nation-states and the right of their citizens to determine the extent of migration (mainly in terms of democratic self-determination), given the potential impact on culture and the socio-economic situation within the receiving society. The radically universalist positions highlight the arbitrary discriminating function of national borders, while alternative perspectives point to nations as the principal *loci* of justice. As a consequence, the political theory of migration seems to be split down the middle on the obligations that receiving societies have towards migrants, largely perpetuating the classical cosmopolitan-communitarian divide. Thus, we get little clarity on the key question of what obligations receiving societies should have with regard to refugees and migrants beyond humanitarian protection.

Two recent books – *International Political Theory and the Refugee Problem* by Natasha Saunders and *Integration of Immigrants and the Theory of Recognition: Just Integration* by Gulay Ugur Goksel – offer some answers to this question.

International Political Theory and the Refugee Problem approaches the ‘refugee problem’ in a Foucauldian way by arguing that the political discourse on international refugees has constructed, from the very beginning, the refugee (as) a problem *for* the receiving societies (and the international community), rather than a problem to be solved *for* the refugees (Foucault 2003). In other words, the very framing of the figure of the refugee reveals the state’s role and the management framework within which political solutions for the so-defined *problematique* of population displacement have been formulated: states and the international community thought of solutions in terms of management, rather than as a humanitarian issue. In her analysis of the League of Nations’ (LN) dealing with the 800,000 Russian refugees caused by the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, Saunders shows how the political practices of managing the refugee problem began crystallizing with the rise of governmentality as a regime of power. One of the essential arguments of the book is that population displacement has become a ‘problem’ for states only at the beginning of the 20th century, when the state was changing its character from the administrative state of the 18th century (for which population was an economic resource rather than burden, with the consequence that immigration was encouraged) to the governmentalizing state (concerned with the population control within its borders, with the consequence of discouraging immigration) (p. 61). Saunders highlights that the governmentality approach to the control of the population and the necessary linking of a fixed population to a fixed territory goes beyond the mere racial or nationalist framing of the nation-state in the early decades of the 20th century. Her analysis of the League of Nation’s dealing with the Russian refugees is very illuminating, as it shows the very beginning of the functioning of the LN High Commissioner for (Russian) Refugees and their framing of the refugee problem as a ‘burden’ for the receiving states (p.

39), rather than a problem for ‘unfortunate’ refugees (p. 32). Here, the argument shifts away from the Foucauldian analysis and uses Hannah Arendt’s work to highlight the subjecthood of the refugees. Against this backdrop, Saunders suggests viewing refugees as displaced people through the prism of the Arendtian concepts of worldlessness and superfluity, as ‘what the refugee thinks or does is of absolutely of no consequence to anybody’ (p. 182). Arendt argued that losing one’s place in the world is not only losing a legal status, but it is also about being denied one’s own identity.

However, displacement does not seem to be only a characteristic of refugees, as it also symptomatic for contemporary politics in a larger sense, plagued by the lack of permanence and crumbling belonging. In this sense, national citizenship does not guarantee political agency anymore, as citizenship needs to be enacted to become meaningful. That is why Saunders focuses on various types of refugee-led political activities, including refugee protests, refugee self-organization in form of NGO’s or the City of Sanctuary movement. This argument links very well with the growing research on *non-citizenship* and highlights the relevance of political agency by the refugees, while showing that the mere management of the refugee (as) a problem is not only insufficient but also reproduces the problematic framing, focusing on finding ‘a physical place to put refugees until such time as they can return “home” again’ (p. 182).

Since modern societies are becoming more alienated and worldless themselves, refugees might be the ‘most symptomatic group of contemporary politics’ (p. 187), at least if we take Arendt seriously. In the political sense, the sensible approach to the refugee problem should consist in creating spaces for the refugee inclusion and their political agency, rather than excluding and ‘governing’ them. Saunders uses Arendt as a response to Foucault’s approach to governmentality, highlighting society’s potential to deal with its own problems, which is very much in tune with the arguments advanced in Foucault’s lectures at the Collège de France in 1975–1976. Still, there is one aspect that Saunders’ Foucauldian approach seems to overlook. Even though Foucault’s conceptualization of state development rejects clear-cut historical breaks between various forms of statehood, for Foucault the current period of statehood is supposed to be characterized by neoliberal governmentality, featuring increasing impact by societal groups (lobbying actors, NGOs, etc.) on the government, the shrinking of state responsibility and the marketization of governance. It seems, however, that for some reason, immigration remains a central (or at least a controversial) concern for the state, rather than a priority for individuals, groups and markets.

The issue returned with a vengeance in Europe during the so-called refugee crisis in 2015, as migration became the central focus of state activity (and interstate controversy) and political mobilization by governments and political parties. Can it be explained as a residue of the biopolitics of governmentality or rather a re-run of the early 20th century? It is striking how much the practices of the League of

Nations in the 1920s, in particular the interstate controversies about the Russian refugees, resemble the conflicts between the EU members about the Syrian and Iraqi refugees in 2015–2016. For that reason, the question remains whether (and how) the current realities of the nation-states as socially closed political and identity systems (with consequences for the political discourse on migration) can be overcome in order to formulate solutions that are international. In some countries, the negative politicization might have some transformative effects for the society in question. For instance, in Austria in the early 1990s the politicization of migration from Eastern Europe and the Balkans did not only bring right-wing populist parties to the fore (and for some time in government), but also spawned coalitions of migrant supporters, including NGOs and both the Catholic and Lutheran churches. In this sense, mass migration and the mobilization around it did impact societal change, which (to some extent) impacted policy: several of the anti-migration regulations were declared unconstitutional by the Austrian Constitutional Court.

Against this backdrop, research in political theory should offer more comparative studies on how the ‘refugee as problem’ discourse becomes dominant, and how the ‘refugee-as-bearer-of-rights’ discourse sometimes imposes itself. Foucault does not appear to offer an answer to that, as he focuses mainly (though not exclusively) on the so-called biopolitics of governmentality as the imperative of modern statehood. However, the biopolitics of migration can be questioned by societal actors and this may even find its way into legislation.

On a different note, for Saunders, the worldless status of refugees is closely connected to their being deprived of the right to ‘contribute, through labour, work, and action to the co-constitution of the common world that gives individual lives a meaning ...’ (p. 182). This is also the *Leitmotif* of *Integration of Immigrants and the Theory of Recognition: ‘Just Integration’* by Gulay Ugur Goksel. Goksel is less concerned with the international status of the refugees but rather with immigrants in general and the aspects of ‘just’ integration. She draws on various theories of multiculturalism and recognition in order to advance a concept of ‘just’ integration, and, similarly to Saunders, highlights the value of labour and work to improve migrants’ sense of agency. Primarily, Goksel uses the theory of recognition developed by Axel Honneth, who (inspired by Hegel) differentiates between three spheres of integration – family, state and society. In these spheres, specific mechanisms of social integration are present: love, rights and solidarity. All three mechanisms contribute to a full-fledged integration of individuals into a modern society. While love and friendship are responsible for the development of self-confidence in early life, the provision of legal rights on an equal basis is essential for the emergence of self-respect. Finally, solidarity remains in a close relationship with self-esteem, which can be constructed only by the recognition of ‘particular qualities that characterize people in their personal differences’ (p. 47). In this sense, self-esteem relates strongly to the value system of a modern society. In a modern

society, as opposed, for instance, to a class divided society, the esteem sphere becomes individualized.

This Honnethian framework goes beyond the debate on symbolic recognition and group rights, since recognition processes are very concrete, targeting subjects' different traits and abilities. Against this backdrop, Goksel argues that social recognition is related to a constant reinterpretation of the social worth of one's skills. In this sense, integration does not only require that a given immigrant find work on the labour market within the receiving society, but that her skills are recognized. Only then can the capitalist market produce self-esteem, rather than mere subsistence. This is Goksel's key argument, highlighting that there is often a 'gap between the official expectation from immigrants to integrate and the possibility of that very expectation being fulfilled by immigrants ...' (p. 51). There might be practices that create barriers for immigrants seeking to enter 'into the social, economic, and political spheres of the host countries' (p. 58).

The issue Goksel raises concerns the symbolic and ethical order of the society, which on its own (regardless the redistributive activity of the state) can produce feelings of misrecognition. Against this background, 'citizen-ation' policies – such as affirmative action for the disadvantaged migrant groups, dual citizenship or support of immigrant NGOs – might not be sufficient to generate self-esteem. Goksel offers seven elements of a self-esteem-centred 'just integration', including a mutual adjustment process between the host society and the immigrants, democratic negotiation among free citizens, individualization as the value horizon (in particular in the context of oppressive minority groups) and cultural recognition of individual immigrants (not just group-based recognition, as liberal multiculturalism would have it).

The self-esteem argument is highly relevant in light of the debate on political integration mechanisms. Political theorists leaning towards republicanism have great faith in citizenship and participation. However, as Goksel points out, political participation by immigrants cannot be reduced to their naturalization alone, as the voting rates of naturalized citizens are themselves very low: the legal status of citizenship is not identical with its exercise.

In the empirical parts of the monograph, Goksel fleshes out her approach with regard to skilled immigrants in Canada and Syrian refugees in Turkey. The Canadian case is very instructive, as the country is often viewed as a humanitarian, open-armed immigration country. According to Goksel, this should not hide the fact that immigrants struggle with poverty in Canada (even in the second generation), are employed below their skill levels and are often disrespected. One of the reasons is that Canada seems to systematically devalue the labour of immigrants, which in turn has impact on their self-esteem and thus hinders their social integration. Goksel argues that despite its immigration-friendly image, Canada offers a 'fantasy recognition order' (p. 112), as immigrants are offered limited opportunities to find meaningful employment, in contrast to their education.

The ‘post-immigration realities’ (p. 113) are often unpleasant, as immigrants suffer from labour market discrimination, misrecognition of their foreign education and labour experience (‘lack of Canadian experience’) and devaluation of their skills (p. 118). Goksel describes the process of recognition of foreign credentials by Canadian authorities as a long, complicated and demoralizing one. (p. 131). This is not merely a question of injustice, but also one of failed social integration, since devalued and discriminated immigrants can often only turn for recognition to their ethnic communities, thus exacerbating the problem of integration-resistant ethnic enclaves. Goksel argues that Canada has generated a highly asymmetrical system, in which the country’s economic growth draws heavily on foreign labour (for whose education Canada did not pay), but then the public and the state use double standards, withdrawing recognition for immigrants’ skills on the labour market, thus damaging their self-esteem via denigration, disrespect and shame.

The issue of getting meaningful work is also relevant for Syrian refugees in Turkey, many of whom are day labourers without legal contracts, job security and social benefits. In addition, many of the refugees, in particular children, suffer from mental health issues due to the experience of violence and forced displacement, which inhibits children’s ability to attend school and adults’ ability to find a meaningful job. The legal uncertainty regarding their status in Turkey, their unprotected basic rights and limited financial support by the Turkish state additionally aggravate the problems of self-esteem. Moreover, due to a widespread misconception according to which refugees are provided with better welfare programs than Turkish citizens, there is growing societal rejection of refugees in Turkey. In other words, Syrian refugees have virtually no chances of upward mobility in Turkish society and are largely dependent on informal employment, which makes them vulnerable to exploitation.

Goksel’s Honnethian approach sheds light on various types of integration pathologies, occurring both in highly advanced immigration-orientated societies such as Canada and in socio-economically less prosperous countries, where migrants are subject to exploitation. Still, several questions remain unanswered in the book. One of them is the complicated relationship between majority culture and minority cultures. The author is aware of the potentially illiberal tendencies that are present in strong collective identities of migrant cultures to which individual migrants can fall prey, especially if rejected by majority cultures that thwart their self-esteem. Still, she seems to partially avoid the uneasy question of what to do with the repressiveness of strong collective identities and how much intervention into the illiberal practices of minority groups the liberal state should undertake. As Ernest Gellner argued in 1994, apart from the tyranny of kings, there is also a tyranny of cousins (be it in religious or nationalist-chauvinist forms, or both), which might not be less severe. But what to do when both types of tyrannies occur at the same time? This might be the key question, ignored by liberal multiculturalists, of how to explain how much mutual change can be expected of both the

majority society and the migrant minorities vis-à-vis each other, beyond the (almost trivial) statement that both the receiving societies and the migrant cultures need to change somehow in order to find a mutually acceptable *modus vivendi*.

Both monographs contribute to a necessary shift in academic discourse on immigration beyond discussions over humanitarian protection, the right to exclude and the debate about universal vs particular rights. They both try to uncover deeper mechanisms of constructing the refugee problem. Moreover, they are concerned with immigrants' agency, their limited opportunities to integrate into receiving societies and the state-generated barriers to their integration. While Saunders offers a critique of conceiving of refugees as a burden to the receiving states, Goksel shows exploitative double-standards of the labour market as a 'social pathology' inhibiting the development of self-esteem by immigrants. Both books offer fresh perspectives on how a research agenda in the political theory of immigration could be advanced in future – a topic that will certainly accompany the discipline in the upcoming years.

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