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The Opportunity of Immigration: How Should Britain Manage Its Borders?

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Introduction

The discourse surrounding immigration and refugees in recent years has created a hostile environment in Britain. Throughout my research project, I aim to delve into the history of British Immigration. I will analyse the historical trends as well as the social, economic, and political impacts that immigration has had over the course of history. I will assess the efficacy of Australian and Canadian border legislation, and close by proposing a controlled movement scheme across Europe, similar to previous EU free movement legislation.

Immigration and Discrimination

> *"Outside official sources the term [immigrant] has been used in a variety of ways, and, with a frightening elasticity, it has even been stretched to include those children born into Britain to immigrant parent".*
> - Colin Holmes: "John Bull's Island: Immigration & British Society 1871-1971" (1988).

Colin Holmes offers a comprehensive record of British immigration trends from 1871-1971. He prefaces his findings by stating that immigration has always primarily been for economic reasons, a point with which Jonathan Portes agrees in "Immigration" (2019). He argues that Britain has always been a cultural hub, even before the Noman invasion of 1066. This is interesting to note, considering contemporary attitudes towards "multiculturalism", which will be covered subsequently.

There appears no shortage of discrimination in British history. Jewish people were expelled in 1290 by Edward I who used their financial success to create feelings of resentment amongst the British working class, justifying the Jewish expulsion and seizure of their assets by the monarchy in the eyes of the public. Jewish people were not allowed to return to Britain until the mid-late 1600s. Following WWII, there was an influx of refugees, many of whom would have been Jewish. Not only do housing statistics verify the existence of diasporas across history, but Holmes also notes that for Jewish people and Pakistanis "the threat and practice of discrimination [..] assisted a concentration on self-employment". Robert Winder's "Bloody Foreigners" of 2013 highlights that "newly arrived Jews were chief victims of the anti-immigration lobby" in Britain, with "silly predictions that over seven million immigrants would soon swamp these shores" at the forefront of public discourse.

Black people also faced a similar expulsion in 1601, however "it could not be enforced absolutely". By Georgian times Black people in service roles across the country, though some "could be found in the armed forces; several regiments engaged black trumpeters and drummers." There was an exceptional minority that were able to transcend these roles, but this was not the norm. The transatlantic slave trade, prevalent in the 18th century, ensured a "continuing Black presence" in Britain centred around the ports of Bristol and Liverpool. Holmes notes that throughout history "the majority of blacks were not free". Black people were viewed as a "social problem" following an increase in migration due to the American

war of independence. This resulted in the removal of around 350 Black people under the 1786 Sierra Leone scheme. Although slavery was abolished by 1834 legislation, it really began to fade during the 1760s and 90s, "not so much through the processes of law but as a consequence of the resistance and escape of the slaves themselves". During the wars, Black and Indian troops fought for Britian, though only the Indian troops were permitted on the front lines. Black people have always been predominantly working class in Britain. Post WWII there came demand for this kind of labour and therefore working immigrants. These immigrants were mostly Caribbean: The Windrush generation. Holmes notes that "persistent discrimination was influential in determining the kind of work which was undertaken" by post WWII Caribbean immigrants, with many being "employed below their level of skills and qualification".

Robert Winder tells the story of George Edalji in "Bloody Foreigners". In the early 1900s, there were a string of horse attacks in Staffordshire that resulted in many being put down. Shortly after these attacks, an anonymous letter reached the police force alleging that local resident of Indian descent George Edalji was the culprit. The evidence was circumstantial at best, at there were suggestions of evidence tampering throughout the case. Edalji was eventually convicted and later released once his innocence had been proven. Most notably, this all came at the expense of all he had worked for. Prior to the conviction George had been a well-established lawyer and legal author, owner of his own practice, but was struck from the law register permanently, despite his innocence being eventually confirmed. Though no inference can be made about the overall treatment of people of colour from this story alone, it speaks to a wider picture of alienation that evidence suggests has existed in Britain for centuries.

The European Presence

> *"Even at the height of colonialism in the eighteenth century non-European minorities were overshadowed in size by those diverse groups who arrived from Europe from western, central and eastern parts".*

European migrants have always dominated immigration to Britain. The European diasporas diversified the economy, with 18th century Germans engaging with the mining industry and finance, the Dutch clustering in the countryside for farming, and the Huguenots creating their own schools. The Irish remained the largest immigrant demographic in Britain during this century as well as this nabobs from the East would import slaves or attendants, creating small Asian diasporas. It was sometimes the case that immigrants could engage in the sector of the economy with which they were "already familiar", such as Pakistani traders and Kenyan-Asian businesspeople. During the 20th century, Winder reports "Jews in Parliament, Germans and Italians in boardrooms, Indian civil servants and doctors, lawyers even African missionaries". Though we are limited in the data present during these times, it seems apparent that when immigrants were already wealthy, they were usually able to maintain

their middle-class status, whereas those arriving working class would often remain as such. As well as this, evidence suggests that European migrants had more class diversity, for instance the Belgians and Germans took up roles ranging from labourers to clerks.

Portes attributes an increase in 21st century European immigration to the expansion of the EU in 2004, promulgating more free movement from eastern and central Europe. He reports that the UK were, at the time, in favour of EU expansion claiming that it would solidify relationships with the Polish government and boost the economy.

Sociopolitical Influences

Immigrants played and continue to play a role in the expansion of political thought. The influx of working-class immigrants, particularly from Europe, played a significant role in the strengthening of trade unions. Additionally, the Irish and the Russians aided the formation of the British Communist Party. The likes of Pan-Africans and Indian Nationalists introduced more international political schools of thought. However, there were no immigrants of colour in Parliament by 1971.

Colonialism played a large role in the nature of border trends throughout British history. Many immigrants had come from former colonies, though simultaneously, Britain engaged in emigration to greater degree as a result of "government-assisted colonisation schemes". Despite the large amount of immigration throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, immigrants still constituted a rather small percentage of the population.

Discrimination was rampant in Britain, with a sense of disillusionment of immigrants "fed partly by the procession of legislation to control immigration and the continuing awareness of disadvantage". Though notably there was no evidence of a uniform attitude towards immigrants. In fact, Britain has had a more positive attitude than some of its counterparts, reportedly creating a sense of "positive endurance"; a sense of achievement for their tolerance of "aliens". Perhaps it is this sense of achievement which has empowered the anti-immigrant sentiments of today's public opinion. During the 20th Century, Winder reports lots of differing attitudes. For instance, in 1904 Winston Churchill wrote to The Times in support of "free entry and asylum" and criticised "police interference" which saw "the simple immigrant, the political refugee, the helpless and the poor may be harassed and hustled at the pleasure of petty officials". Conversely, David Hope Kyd, a "parliamentary hopeful", claimed intermarriage was leading to "the extermination of the British working man in the East End of London"; Winder describes this as "a sentiment which might have had more force had he shown any sympathy for the working man before".

The Economics of Immigration

Portes examines the economic impacts of immigration upon Britain, noting that the consensus amongst economists is that free movement/increased immigration results in more specialisation and economic efficiency. In the spirit of nuance, he purports that whilst overall GDP per capita may increase, the direct competition posed by an increased labour supply would leave some individuals at an economic disadvantage. However, he points out that immigration increases both labour supply and demand, arguing that an identically naïve argument could have been made about women gaining the right to work increasing competition for jobs.

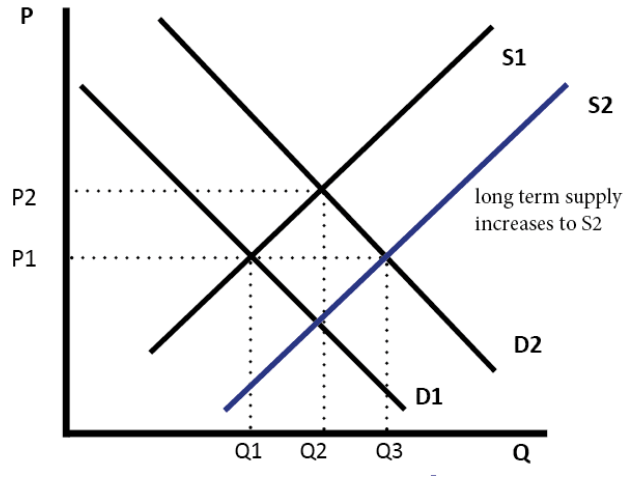


Figure 1: Graph Depicting an Increase in Supply and Demand

Figure 1 illustrates an increase in supply and demand on the price and quantity of goods. Here as supply shifts outwards from S1 to S2, the price point at Q1 remains the same at Q3; quantity of goods increases but the price remains the same. As the demand has also increase, overall consumption of goods increases, raising GDP. Therefore, as a population increase will shift supply and demand outwards, immigration increases consumption and subsequent GDP.

The IMF found that a 1% increase in adult migrant population led to an approximate 2% increase in GDP per capita and Oxford economics found in 2016 that the fiscal contribution of immigrants was slightly larger than that of natives. If the majority of immigrants migrate for economic purposes, it would stand to reason that most immigrants will not only be economically active but plan to remain a such for a number of years.

There is little evidence to suggest migrants come to Britain to take advantage of its welfare system, but rather it is much more likely because Britain harbours an array of economic opportunities. In fact, it was found that a high level of immigration in 2016 would help fund public services for years, with immigrants generating an estimated £25b over their lifetimes. It may be true that immigration can increase pressure on public services such as the NHS,

particularly concentrated immigration, but it is equally valid to note the contribution to NHS funding that immigrants have. Not only this but according to government statistics, 16.5% of NHS workers are in fact not British.

Free movement allowed Britain to benefit from an influx of young skilled workers from Europe, who reported a larger economic contribution than any other migrant demographic. Italy paints a similar picture with an apparent increase in overall workforce participation as a result of low skilled immigrants handling jobs like childcare.

A Hostile Environment

The Syrian refugee crisis dominated European political media for the majority of the late 2010s following an influx in 2015 as a result of their national conflict. Often, discourse surrounding illegal immigration, asylum, and regular immigration is conflated in national discussion, and you will find that the British population will often have uniform views about all three categories rather than differing individual opinions. This is important to note when analysing British attitudes towards "foreigners" in the past decade.

Theresa May delivered on Conservative manifesto promises by introducing the Hostile Environment Policy in 2012, which aimed to make it as difficult as possible for illegal immigrants to remain in Britain, in hopes that this would push them out of the country. This no doubt incited an increased level of hostility towards immigrants as a whole (you cannot tell who has a visa just by looking at them). This has been mirrored by Suella Braverman in recent months with her plight to manage the so-called "small boats crisis". The media have painted small boats as a much more substantial threat than is actually present. Portes notes that only around 20% of illegal immigrants use the methods dominating the media, and it is far more common for an immigrant to be labelled illegal due to overstaying a visa.

There is also limited merit to the argument that Britain takes a disproportionate amount of asylum seekers, after all, Portes claims that about 5% of asylum claims in Europe were made to the UK despite it making up 10% of the European population.

He goes on to address assumptions that immigrants "commit more crime" by assessing the socioeconomic validity of the claim. He states that they make up approximately 12% of the prison population, similar to their proportion of the adult population. He does acknowledge that "detailed research" suggested a "slight increase in property crime" correlating to an increase in refugees but goes on to analyse this through a more political lens.

"It is plausible to think that immigrants would be more likely to commit crimes if they are poorer or have fewer savings or other resources to fall back on if they experience hard times".

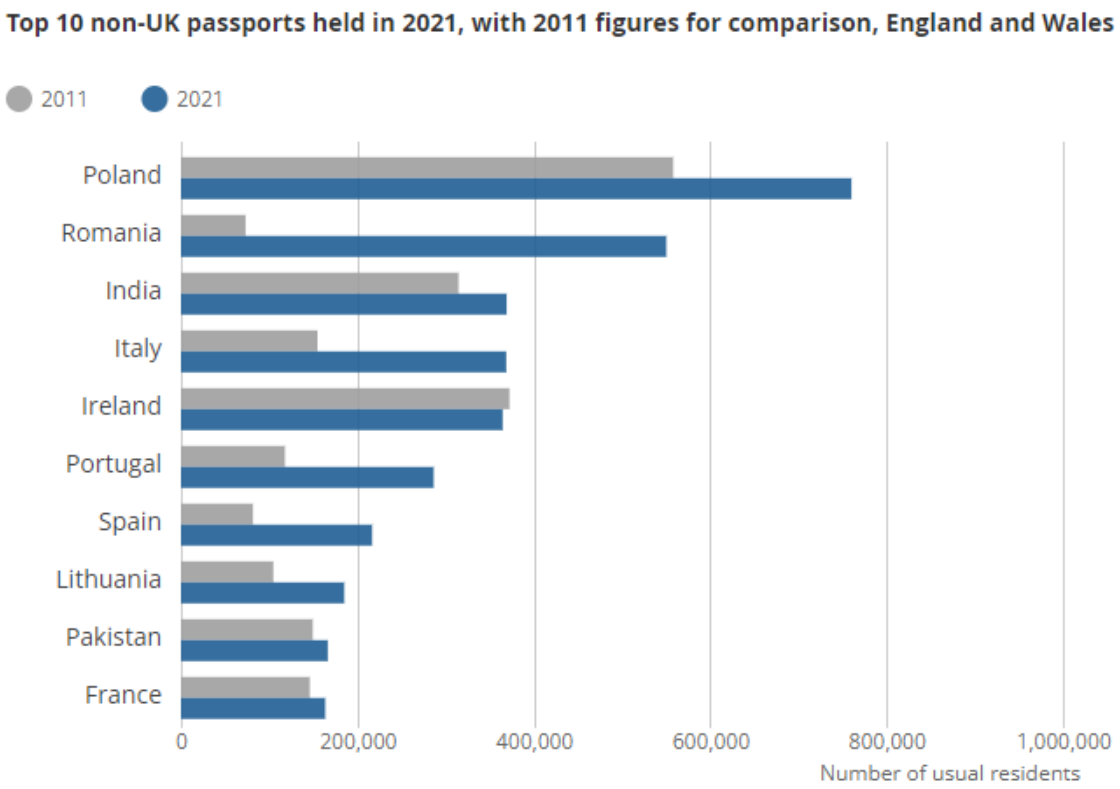
He develops this point, pointing out that:

“Immigrants are also more likely to live in cities and in relatively poor areas, where the crime levels overall are typically higher. So, from the point of view of the general public it may seem logical to associate immigration and crime”.

It is evident that Britain requires development in its deprived areas to increase opportunities for all, rather than letting the government neglect their responsibilities and use immigrants as a scapegoat.

Who Are Our Immigrants?

The increase in immigration into the UK has not come without reason. 2023 saw a 45% increase in work visas, owing to an increase in issued skilled worker visas. In particular there has been a huge increase in Skilled Worker- Health and Care visas, with Care Workers and Home Carers making up 50% of Health and Care visas. This follows on from the addition of care staff to the Shortage Occupation List post COVID. There has been a 23% increase in sponsored study visas, with 24% of all sponsored study visas going to the dependants of students, as well as a 70% increase in sponsorship licenses granted for work and study this year. Family-related visas have increased 110%, with 80% of the visas being for partners, and the remainder for children/other dependants. The UK still runs the EU Settlement Scheme post Brexit (an idea that I shall return to later) which granted 28,986 permits in 2023. Of the 175,142 people offered protection in 2023, 12% were given refugee status or other protection and 88% were given a safe and legal rout to the UK. There was a 19% increase in asylum applications, a figure that surpasses the height of the 2016 European migrant crisis. We have had over a 70% grant rate post pandemic, leaping up from about 33%, as well as 52% more grants of extension than last year. There have been marginal decreases in settlement and citizenship grants compared to 2022 but these numbers are overshadowed by the vast increases in other areas. There was also a 29% increase in enforced returns in 2023.



Source: Office for National Statistics - Census 2021

^Figure 2

Figure 2: There was a large increase in the number of people in England and Wales who were born in Romania
Top 10 non-UK countries of birth in 2021, with 2011 figures for comparison, England and Wales
Units: Number
Source: Office for National Statistics – Census 2021

Rank in 2021	Country of birth	2011	2021
1	India	694,148	920,361
2	Poland	579,121	743,083
3	Pakistan	482,137	623,557
4	Romania	79,687	538,840
5	Ireland	407,357	324,670
6	Italy	134,619	276,669
7	Bangladesh	211,500	273,042
8	Nigeria	191,183	270,768
9	Germany	273,564	263,368
10	South Africa	191,023	217,180

^Figure 3

Figure 1 depicts an increase over a decade in non-UK passports held in all countries bar Ireland. Notably, 8 of the top 10 countries are European and EU Member States. Figure 2 depicts an increase in people born outside of the UK in the top 10 countries except Ireland

and Germany over the same period. Here only 5 of the top 10 countries are European and EU Member States.

Asylum statistics state that Albania was the top nationality claiming asylum in the UK in 2022. In 2021 the top nationalities were Syrian, Afghan, and Venezuelan. That year in Europe, Germany and France had the most asylum applications with the UK being 4th, though this was the 18th largest intake per head. In fact, Italy, Germany, France, and Spain accounted for 70% of all first-time applicants in the EU. Globally about 85% of refugees live in developing countries and 73% live in countries neighbouring their own.

Rwanda: A Safe Third Country?

The recently proposed "Rwanda Scheme" is currently undergoing legal proceedings before the Supreme Court over questions around its legality in international law. Priti Patel drafted a policy that would see "illegal immigrants" sent to Rwanda and never allowed to return the UK. The NPI or "New Plan for Immigration" seeks to:

> *"Improve the fairness and efficacy of the UK so that those in genuine need of asylum can be better protected and supported;*
> *To deter illegal entry into the UK, thereby breaking the business model of people smuggling networks and protecting the lives of those they endanger;*
> *And to remove more easily from the UK those with no right to be here"*

Note the difference between this and Theresa May's Hostile Environment Policy "aimed at identifying and reducing the number of immigrants in the UK with no right to remain". As the amount of people entering the UK has increased, so has the level of hostility towards them by the conservative government. According to the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, an inadmissibility decision can be taken on an asylum claim if they have a specified connection to a third country which is assessed to be safe. A third country is defined as being safe if:

> *"(a) the claimant's life and liberty are not threatened in that state by reason of their race, religion, nationality, membership of particular social group or political opinion,*
> *(b) the State is one from which a person will not be sent to another State- (i) otherwise than in accordance with the Refugee Convention, or (ii) in contravention of their rights under Article 3 of the Human Rights Convention (freedom from torture or inhuman or degrading treatment), and*
> *(c) a person may apply to be recognised as a refugee and (if so recognised) receive protection in accordance with the Refugee Convention, in that State"*

This same criteria has been consulted in drafting the Rwanda scheme and the Home Office have come forth stating that they "do not consider relocation to Rwanda to be a penalty". It has deemed Rwanda to be safe for all groups except the trans community stating that:

"There is evidence of ill treatment of those who have undergone gender reassignment, as well as a general lack of societal acceptance of it in comparison to the UK".

This is said to be:

"Carefully considered as part of the case-by-case assessment when determining suitability for relocation to Rwanda".

Evie Breese of The Big Issue compared the Rwanda scheme to the Australian Offshore detention process. Similarly, to the Rwanda Scheme, Australia's plan was at a huge expense to the taxpayer, costing over £5 billion since 2013, working out to around £1.6 million per detainee. She notes that the same money could have sent each detainee to Eton for 33 years. It was also found that Australia violated the UN Convention Against Torture due to the dangerous conditions on Manus Island. They eventually had to pay £35 million in compensation to the near 2,000 people unlawfully detained there. 74% of the people detained were recognised as refugees and most notably, there was actually an increase in small boat crossings after this legislation was introduced. Australia has now accepted New Zealand's offer to resettle 150 refugees per year from their detention centres.

Learning From Canada's Points System

Arif Anwar's piece: "Canadian Immigration Policy: Micro and Macro Issues with the point-based assessment system" (2014) offers a comprehensive view of an alternative immigration system. Unlike Britain, whose border regulation was incredibly laissez faire until the Alien Act, Canada's borders were closed to all but the UK, New Zealand, Ireland, South Africa, and the USA and a few nations in Northwest Europe. It is said that the shift towards the 1967 Immigration Reform Act was sparked by "an increasingly liberal Canadian culture of government policy" as well as a "growing recognition" that skilled immigrants could fill labour shortages that had begun to take a toll on the Canadian economy. Anwar reports that Canada's system fared far better than the US Immigration and National Policy Act 1965 since whilst theirs was based on "family reunification for existing permanent residents and citizens", Canada prioritised "attracting skilled foreign workers who could fill occupational gaps in its labour market", allowing people to "self-assess, arrive in Cananda and settle without having arranged prior employment or existing family ties". However, describing a system as efficient depends entirely on the expressed aims of the system. Here it is efficient in the regard that labour shortages can be filled seamlessly, conversely, I would argue that this is a robotic system that sees immigrants as assets rather than people.

There are eight streams of admittance for visa applicants:

(i) Skilled workers and professional investors
(ii) Entrepreneurs and self-employed people

(iii) Provincial Nominees
(iv) Quebec Selected Skilled Workers
(v) Canadian Experience Class
(vi) Sponsored Family
(vii) Live-in Caregivers
(viii) Refugees

Of these categories, only the first three make use of the points system. In 2014 the threshold for admittance was 67/100 points. The assessment has weighted categories, with Education having the most points at 25, Linguistic Ability in English or French coming in at second, followed by Work Experience, Age, Arranged Employment, and Adaptability ("defined as the educational ability"). The 21-49 age bracket gives the maximum points within the age assessment category with 10, creating a young Canadian workforce that ensures economic activity for years/decades to come.

Anwar argues that the system is inconsistently weighted, drawing upon the penalisation of older applicants as his example. He states that it is ambiguous what is being measured; more years in education does not directly translate to more success in employment. These are what he refers to as micro issues. On a macro level, he argues that there exists a lack of integration which is even recognised by the Canadian government. By implementing a policy that assesses the value of an immigrant by Canadian standards, they create a bias against foreign trained workers and their relevant qualifications. In fact, they went on to reduce the maximum number of points for foreign experience from 21 to 15.

On a micro level, I would argue that a points-based assessment system can have a binary social effect. On the one hand, economically active immigrants can be seen as providing overall value to Canada and therefore could be received rather well by their local community. On the other, Canada may find itself inadvertently inciting tension between a neglected working class and the new wave of skilled immigrants, much like the British narrative of "they're stealing our jobs". It is important to focus on minimising unemployment, raising living standards, and creating cohesive integration.

Communo-Liberal Immigration Theory

Of Bikhu Parekh's 3 theories of immigration, two were of particular note to my argument: the Liberal view and the Communitarian view. Often, those taking the Liberal view see no need for immigration restrictions. They believe that states should admit anyone who fulfils the minimum requirement for entry, regardless of race, gender, age etc. It is not so much the belief that the borders should be completely open, but more so that they only require minimal restrictions. The communitarian views the state as being bound by common goals, shared interests, and values. As such, those who wish to become members must be willing to comply with these interests and values. Parekh rightfully argues that this school of

thought is painfully ambiguous, and borderline impractical. How do we assess a person's willingness to conform to so-called British values?

My line of argument finds itself centred between these two conceptions of immigration policymaking. Britain should be more welcoming to immigrants and refugees. They should be integrated efficiently into the workforce and should fill British labour shortages. At the same time, albeit I do not believe in only accepting those with this fictitious capacity to accept "British values" in the ordinary sense, I do believe that British values require a rebranding to create a more inclusive environment. As has been outlined prior, Britain has been a multicultural hub for centuries. A fundamental part of the British identity is the influence of other cultures on the national fabric, be it through cuisine, music, or art. If we were to rebrand British values as being notions of multiculturalism, inclusion, and diversity then this would be a set of values to which a liberal immigration system would conform. In essence, in changing contemporary notions of what it means to be British, we combine the Liberal and Communitarian schools of thought, and this can be reflected in immigration policymaking.

Free Movement Post-Brexit

So, what can we learn from Australia and Canada and how can this influence my proposal of Communo-Liberal immigration policymaking? If Australia's detention plan is any reflection of what the proposed Rwanda Scheme could be, I think it reasonable to leave it behind with the Johnson administration. It did not stop the small boats and instead violated international human rights law. Moreover, we must remember that it is a minority of "illegal" immigrants that come via the means broadly published in the media. There are some interesting aspects of the Canadian system that could be adopted, such as prioritising the visas of workers whose skills would fill occupational gaps. However, I would not advocate solely for a points-based immigration system.

To propose the future of the British immigration system, we must identify the role of policy and the contemporary border issues. Rosemary Sales in "Understanding Immigration and Refugee Policy" argues that states claim that their immigration policies are in the national interest which "presupposes the moral superiority of the national over the rights and interests of outsiders". It is true that in implementing or removing border restrictions, a state must take into account its available resources.

This is similar to the floodgates theory, a concept in human rights law whereby the negative consequences of an act may be "so extensive as to relieve the authorities of a prima facie obligation" (Mantouvalou). This is an important factor to consider, a state would be foolish to allow more people into the country than they have the resources to accommodate for. We must account for the availability of housing, of jobs, of national services, when we begin

to make immigration policies. My argument, however, has not been one of restrictive border control; thus far I have advocated for a communo-liberal approach.

As mentioned previously, Britain maintains the EU Settlement Scheme and has a large population of immigrants from the EU. This is noteworthy as it suggests that there is still capacity for European collaboration post-Brexit. I propose the implementation of controlled free movement, whereby European states can collaboratively regulate their visa applications and asylum claims diffusing people across Europe. This system would allow applications to be made to a handful of European countries with their allocation being dependant on the resource supply and/or labour demand of each nation.

Furthermore, I would advocate for further economic integration within Europe, making it easier for working people to transfer their jobs to other countries throughout the continent. In furthering European collaboration, we will be able to accommodate for the rise in immigration and the influx of refugees. This would ease domestic housing pressures as the concentration of immigrants and refugees would disperse across a number of countries rather than the top five nations. Each state would be able to prioritise worker visas from certain sectors to fill their own occupational gaps, and fluid movement through Europe would be encouraged. Furthering this, increasing partnerships across Europe for higher education would encourage more movement of economically active young people, increasing the degree-qualified workforce across Europe.

There is of course the matter of state sovereignty, a huge selling point of Brexit. I would argue that this system allows for states to voluntarily regulate their immigration without neglecting applicants and asylum seekers. In essence, we grant Europe the ability to manage their borders collaboratively and offer immigrants and asylum seekers the ability to live and work more freely across Europe. Moreover, this system would boost European economies as it boosts the labour supply and demand. Europe itself should work to expand its manufacturing industry, increasing demand for labour. Each state should also prioritise putting government spending towards its welfare state, supporting the disenfranchised working class as well as refugees and poorer immigrants. The strong socioeconomic and political connections would allow European countries to increase their trading, perhaps to the extent of being able to reduce the number of refugees by imposing economic sanctions on other countries for human rights abuses.

Conclusion

In closing, Britain has been a multicultural hub for centuries and working people built this country, many of whom were immigrants. There has been a dominance of European immigrants in population data over the years, owing to proximity and availability of economic opportunity. The EU itself has also furthered this through free movement and the EU Settlement Scheme.

The consensus amongst economists is that immigration is good for the economy. It increases both the demand and supply of goods, increasing overall economic output of a country. Immigrants have also helped to diversify the British economy as well as playing a role in the strengthening of workers' political rights; they have been integral to various aspects of British history.

The proposal of the Rwanda Scheme has pulled us further from bolstering the economy and creating cohesion within Britain. In implementing a similar scheme, Australia violated human rights and put incredibly vulnerable people at risk in inhumane detention centres. The Rwanda Scheme would be an affront on human rights and modern international solidarity.

Though Canada's points-based system does have its merits, it suffers from an institutional bias and to an extent dehumanises visa applicants. I have argued that a nation should be able to tailor its border control to its economic demands and resource supply, but I also maintain that this must remain balanced with empathy. At the core of this is integration, creating a cohesive society where the government does not stir tensions between the neglected working class and working immigrants.

Immigrants and refugees have been used as political talking points, stirring up an anti-alien sentiment throughout British history and generating a hostile environment at times. To tackle the contemporary border issues in Britain, we must reframe our dialogue, seeing opportunity instead of crisis. An influx of working people is great for economic growth and in turn raises the standard of living, but only when accompanied by adequate policymaking. The government must expand Britain's demand for labour by funding the manufacturing industry and small businesses. They must work to increase integration to create a stronger sense of community or "Britishness". We must not forget our history, the positive impact immigrants and refugees alike have had on Britain, and the need for empathy in our border policies.

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