11 2006

Cultegration and Borderdoom: New Frontiers of Democracy in the EU

Yann Moulier Boutang

In the first part of my considerations, I will show that the migration issue is a very important one, and because the borders of the EU are an important part of how it is constituted, this issue has been shifted from an economical and political rationale to a broader cultural justification. Riding the wave of nativist and neopopulist sentiments, this kind of justification feeds the enforcement of new principles that are very dangerous for both the imperfect democracy we now have and any perspective of a radical democracy.

In a second part, I will explain the structural link between the regime of the borders separating member states from surrounding countries (the flexible frontier of Europe) and the internal constitution of the labour force. The culturisation of migration policy (*culitics* and *polture*) is closely linked to *Borderdoom*. This produces what I call *cultegration*, a regime, which is itself linked to the semi-slave regime (bridled salariat)[1] controlling permanent settlers, new entrants and minorities, and a good part of their

descendants as a de facto statute. The *inner frontier* is the real cause of the flexible *outer frontier*.

The Shift of the Economic Management of the Immigration Issue to a Culturalisation of the Borders

Europe has been displaying very restrictive migration policies since 1974, although influxes into the EU have roughly reached the figures for the USA from 1975 to 1990 (between one and one and a half million per year for the total entries), and, like the USA, it experienced an acceleration afterwards (1995-2005). Depending on the category of people to be excluded, different types of justification have been set. We can identify three types of justification for the restrictive control of the Front Door (as opposed to the Back Door).

1.) The rationale for closing the borders to the influx of new permanent workers was predominantly an economic one. The level of unemployment for national or native and already present immigrants was so high (between 8 to 12 % of the active population at a macro level and much more at a local level) that no more immigration was thinkable. This argument was almost immediately contradicted by huge tensions in certain labour market segments (services, agriculture, tourism: first industry in the Old Europe). And as soon as economic growth showed signs of recovery (Spain and Portugal starting from 1986, Germany in 1988, UK in the 1990s, etc.) significant exceptions to the "closure" of the border were "tolerated". Undocumented migrations of all kinds (students remaining after finishing their studies, tourists, family members rejoining their parents, children or close relatives, seasonal workers, asylum seekers denied the status of refugee, truly clandestine immigrants) have become a permanent and ordinary

symbol of an increasingly segmented labour market. Nevertheless, all the governments of member states of the EU have stuck to the "dogma" of closing the borders to new active workers[2] and have increasingly promoted the campaign against "illegal migration".

Indeed such flagrant contradictions between facts and the official position of the institutions has contributed to a decline in this kind of legitimisation of closure and simultaneously to the rise of recurring waves of xenophobia and the rebirth of far right-wing parties at significant levels (from the British Enoch Powell and his influence on the Conservative Party in the UK, to the two Schwarzenbach initiatives in Switzerland, not to mention the French Front National, the Flemish fascist party, the Northern League in Italy, or Haider's party in Austria, and recent events in Denmark; now it seems that these kinds of xenophobic sentiments are also playing a role in the upsurge of nationalism and chauvinist parties in the former communist countries of Eastern Europe). Clearly it is a serious understatement to maintain that populism, *nativism* are but a *direct consequence* of this incredible *"malgoverno"* (mis-government) on the question of immigration. This peculiar form of un- or de-government is characterized by a denial of a permanent and structural openness of the movement of people and workers in a globalised world. Obviously this kind of denial and/or hypocrisy among the most cynical leaders of political parties cannot be treated naively as simple ignorance that serious knowledge and scientific expertise should and could dissipate. The denial of the presence and importance of the *shadow people of the EU* (the 14 to 16 million people without political and civil rights within the biggest democracy in the world, with India) can only be compared with the denial by the southern plantation owners in the US of the slaves and freed slaves during the Jim Crow era until the Civil Rights Laws of 1965.

In any case, the legitimisation of the closure of the European border on the basis of economic reasons was seriously undermined by the intensification of mobility due to chaotic globalisation in Africa and the Middle-East, and also due to increasing pressure from the employers (now small firms rather than big ones that prefer to outsource their manufacture) to reopen the border. Consequently, the "technical" question is now more about how to reopen the border so selectively that it would avoid giving space to the autonomy of the movement of the labour force with its inescapable consequences at a political and civic level. However, while the economic rationale for closing the gates of EU has been declining, there have been experiments in raising two other kinds of legitimisation.

2.) The migrant as the last subject un-citizen of the sovereignty of the old nation-state: The repatriation, detention and deportation of undocumented migrants (active population soon followed by families including children) have reached such a point (22 detention camps within the borders of the EU and projects to delocalize them outside the official, institutional borders within the markets of the European Empire in Albania and Libya) that it cannot be seen as a marginal and temporary phenomenon. This kind of permanent and structural exception relies on a political reaffirmation of the sovereignty of the nation-state, and it goes with a vision of Europe as a confederation of nation-states (Schengen Agreement) or as a second life or rebirth of sovereignty as opposed to globalisation. The dreadful politics of the nation-states are further deteriorating as they are slowly but surely dispossessed of their classical prerogatives in finance, money, spending, funding. By describing themselves as "*intraitables*" (uncompromising), a favourite saying among politicians *pour la galerie* ("*une petite phrase*" for the prime time

news on TV), democratic leaders deliberately appeal to *nativism* and *sovereignism*. They know that this is but nostalgia and that the marriage of both gives birth to a reaffirmation of the most reactionary values (on sexuality, marriage, discipline, religion, education, tolerance and so forth). However their calculations are inescapable as long as no correction has been made in the democratic system. We face a situation not very different from England in the 19th century before the reforms of 1832 and 1860. Excluding a significant portion of the population from the right to vote at a national level introduces not only a tremendous bias in the often very narrow electoral swing, but it also creates a very perverse opportunity: xenophobia, or attacks on groups and communities in a democratic system can allow you to gain votes but also to lose[3]. European nativism is inevitable as long as a great portion of immigrants and new settlers are not included as voters and xenophobia is always a winning game. No institutional party has really been able to resist the temptation.

However, this reaffirmation of nation-state sovereignty has been defeated and has revealed itself to be an illusion. The Schengen Agreement had already signified a substantial transfer in competencies. The EU has introduced immigration as a question of common interest, based on the principle of *subsidiarity*. Recently the most valuable result (in terms of its impact on institutions) of the Ceuta & Melilla assault and the new great exodus underway has been Spain's prime minister Zapatero's call for interstate cooperation through the European administration to tame the waves of Sub-Saharan African migrants (in Spain's Canary Islands or in Italy). This will lead to a communization and federalization of the migration issue. *Bene* or *male volens*, nation-states will be condemned to eat their hat.

But in terms of legitimisation, the kind of *Guantanamization* of the management of new influxes of immigrants, the attempts to deport the children and wives of undocumented workers seem more and more difficult to justify, inasmuch as in Europe, including the United Kingdom, public opinion has been very reluctant to sustain any kind of serious suspension of traditional democratic liberties, even under the "warfare" created by bombers in Madrid or London. This is probably why we will see a real decline (although alas! not a vanishing) of the sovereign argument. Will this be enough to put a true democratisation of the EU in the question of borders and the status of immigrant settlers on the agenda? I am afraid not: for two very different reasons. The first one I will develop now is that the legitimisation of the closure of the border (selectively, in this case) has been shifted to the realm of culture. The second reason is that as long as we keep the system of the juridical inferiorisation and discrimination of segments of the labour force through the regime of temporary workers status (bonding contract, restriction to leave the employer, denial of complete civil and political right), the quality of the border will not change. This will be the second part of my reflections. But let us come back to the last avatar of the legitimisation of the Fortress Europe.

3.) Third but not least, a cultural justification for closing Europe off to further migration has appeared. It has taken the shape of neo-populism (a kind of European nativism) that has always been present on the far right wing of the political spectrum. However, it soon overlapped with the debate on extending the boundaries of the European Union, mainly with the entrance of Turkey and the referendum on the constitution of 2005. Riots in the suburbs in France, bombers in England have been read as the common failure of the two opposite models (the French republican monocultural

and the *melting pot* model and integration through pluri-culturalist cultural policies in Britain). In the international context of warfare and the so-called “clash of civilizations” between the western world and Islamic fundamentalism, Turkey's membership has become a divisive question on both the left and the right wing of the political arena. The recent decision by French deputies in the National Assembly about penalising denial of the Armenian genocide by Turkish army is quite enlightening.

Questions embracing culture in the Anglo-Saxon sense of the word (anthropological way of life including the practise of religious cult) as well as the French meaning (values, civilization) have been raised about a presumed Christian or Enlightened “nature” or “identity” of Europe and the so-called “logical”, ethical or political incompatibility of the enlargement of the EU to include Turkey and soon to further countries that will increase its diversity (the Slavic world [Ukraine], the Muslim world with any country of the Maghreb).

The cultural argument will play a predominant role in the coming years inasmuch as the economic argument has been virtually abandoned due to strong pressures for a return to a more dynamic growth.

Politics is a play on and a battle over words before any measure or significant change can be introduced. Ideology as an effective force in politics is above all a "logo-logy", if by logo we mean *logos*, rationale, the way in which words shape in advance the grammar of correct or incorrect sentences. If *culturalisation* of the migration issue (regulations for entry, immigrant new settlers' status in the labour market and in the city, access to citizenship and nationality, “cultural” integration of second or third generations) increasingly becomes the dominant way of dealing with the issue, how can a

political perspective of deepening democracy (radical democracy instead of a reaffirmation of either an obsolete republicanism or an already challenged multiculturalism) intervene? Is there a particular regime of boundaries that would be compatible with a deepening of democracy and could escape the kind of new serfdom that we can call “Borderdoom”?

Cultegration, Borderdoom and Inner Semi-Serfdom

Let us explain the strange words (monstrous, hybrid, if you like): *Cultegration* and *Borderdoom* are used in our title. Let us first consider
the following concatenation of words: culture, integration, *ex-tegration*, desegregation. By inventing the word *cultegration*, we aim to condense integration through culture and religious cult affiliation, just as in real life.

By *cultegration* we mean the specific trope of political discourse, which justifies restrictive policies and limits the rights of the foreign population of settlers. By *extegration* we mean the very peculiar and paradoxical position of the foreign population in modern democracies and states: internally they are integrated, but as foreigners they became altogether integrated as a work force by the end of the 19th century, yet excluded (denied) as human beings.[4] This exclusion can be temporary (the gap between the primo-immigrant status, whose worse situation is that of an undocumented immigrant, sometimes transformed into a “potential terrorist” or prey to the mafia, and naturalization which ends, at least formally, the exclusion from citizenship and the right to vote). So called “temporary workers” are thus excluded from the city (the reign of equality as citizens), even though they are true settlers at the very moment they are incorporated as labour. So

labour is totally *unequal* in our democracies, although their modernity (escaping from the authoritarian and fascist state after the great crisis of the 1930s) consisted of relying upon work (waged) and labour (acknowledgement of the unions) as constituent forces, yet always with this exception for non-citizen workers.

This very peculiar trick is achieved by the nation-state when it enforces the efficiency of its borders. Three modalities of the border can be distinguished: a) The border as a geographical separation between two territories. As such this border does not create special forms of domination; b) The second degree of the frontier or border is what we call the *borderdom*. By this word we mean the ordinary condition of people belonging to a given territory when they enter a different territory for a temporary stay (for tourism, for example, or for business travel). Following the constitution and stabilization of modern nation-state in the 17th century, the entrant is not integrated. He or she remains a stranger. Conditions of admission can be discriminating in comparison with the status or advantages of the native population, but they address the stranger as a foreign non-citizen, *non subject* and generally do not interfere in his or her insertion in the labour market. c) The third kind of border is what we call *borderdoom*. This means something quite different from and worse than borderdom or border. This composite word conjoins border and doom in analogy to *Parishdoom*. Parishdoom[5] was the nickname given by the poor to the *Poor Laws of 1660*, which restricted them to their parish and forbade them to move to another parish (to get married, for example), unless they were in possession of a *pass* that was given to them only if they had a contract of labour. *Borderdoom* hence means today a very particular regime of the frontier imposed on the stranger as worker or on relatives in the

country of entrance. The result of this regime is that the *in-worker* is not an exogenous worker, an *out-worker* (coming for a short period, less than six months). He/she is neither an *endogenous* worker (like all the "national" workers and citizens), he/she is an *inner but exogenous worker*. Whereas labour laws have become a specific kind of laws and have achieved an equal condition for all workers, since the exchange of money for labour (the contract of labour) has been separated from the commercial contract (and this has been accompanied by an enlargement of access to civil and political rights on the whole), the in-worker has remained exogenous. This has created a powerful exception.

There is no better example of this than the clause of the country of origin in the first draft of the Bolkestein Directive. What has been the practise of each member state towards its own immigrants was supposed to be applied to each of its citizens seeking work in another member state. Suddenly the national (autochthonous) citizens have realised the consequences of this artificial status. The labour code that they were subject to was not that of the country where the job was performed, but the laws of the worker's country of origin. In the ensuing vehement debate during and after the referendum on the European Constitution, it was not sufficiently emphasized that this scandalous statute designed for inner workers of the EU was precisely the same as the basis for the employment of third-country immigrant workers in Europe or Apartheid in the Republic of South Africa.

It has been noted[6] that this status is clearly a remnant and a perpetual revival of the colonial condition of subject and non-citizen under the European empires. Hence it is a postcolonial statute.

If we wonder why this statute has been so firmly established and never challenged, we must go back to the true rationale of all that sh..., to put it in Marx' terms.

Borderdom, like serfdom, is a regime of mobility, of the control of mobility (not only of discipline). Borderdoom is the result of this regime upon people.

It is an old and permanent form of primitive accumulation from the very beginnings of capitalism. When the mobility of the poor in the western Middle Ages, the movement of Africans in the course of the disintegration of the Sub-Saharan empires, the movement of the new subject of the modern absolutist state in the 17th century, the flight of millions of the white European proletariat to the New World, the massive emigration of Indians from Bengal, of Chinese and the worldwide multitude from everywhere towards the big metropolises of the North, were all turned into the new serfs, the indentured white servants, the Black slaves, the Yellow coolies, the colonial inner subject of the empires and the under-citizen or un-documented foreign immigrant and temporary workers, we speak of the decomposition, disintegration of these multitudes.

Two points deserve a mention. In each of these cases, peculiar, abnormal forms of the exchange of money and labour are the decisive element. The limitation of liberty is a counter-reaction to a genuine movement of flight, *maronnage*, and breach of the labour contract. As Ira Berlin has pointed out in his *Many Thousands Gone*[7], slavery (let us extend it to the semi-slavery of Europe) is not merely a story of sadism and mental illness: it is a way to extract dependant labour and to protect the already capitalist relationship during primitive accumulation. What is at stake even in the utmost forms of barbarian violence, is that the deprivation of

basic rights has a very rational scope: that is to say, the control of dependant labour through the organisation of society. If we recall Ira Berlin's distinction between a society *with* slaves (mostly domestic) and a *slave society* (within the plantation economy, which was the factory of the first capitalism, the mercantile one), and we expand it to a society with inferior labour or citizen and segmented labour (along the lines of race, gender, caste, colour bar), we must speak of our modern western society (specially the European one) as a semi-slave or bridled salaried society. As Tronti has shown, capitalist control over labour has always followed the *via maestra* of the society in general against the particularity of the worker's interest[8].

Boundaries and barriers (religion, language, colour, nationality, any kind of hetero-designed minorities) have become a cornerstone of the segmentation or split of labour. Since boundaries themselves are not natural, they are constantly shifting. A boundary that is set to divide, decompose, can later become an element of re-composition after it has been appropriated by the multitudes. And vice versa. However, one of the deepest and most resistant boundaries is nationality. Nation (going back to Ernest Gellner's synthesis) is characterized by a unified space of transaction, and an exo-education assumed by the state instead of endo education of the elites. It is no coincidence that education[9], culture, common values, control of the practise of any religious cult are becoming the criteria of selection for the labour market. When the classical division of skilled/unskilled, national/non-national barriers weakens, culture becomes not the way to integrate (this is the fairy tale of multiculturalism or republicanism), but the way to re-segment the already unified multitudes and fragment them into what Hobbes has always said of the multitudes: barbarians, a

population refusing to obey, warriors, bands and rogues. The mob instead of the people as subject of the sovereign.

Cultegration is unfortunately promising a brilliant future in the *warfare* of all against all, unless we demand, as the abolitionists did, and after them the Blacks in the US and the South Africans, the abolition of semi-serfdom on the labour market. Which means in Europe the end of the regime of the pass (residence and work permits) for non-citizen subjects. Otherwise the inner boundaries and bondage of labour, reproduced in everyday life, will produce flexible boundaries and external frontiers of the EU, the detention and deportation camp. And finally *borderdoom, the doom of the border*.

---

[1] For this expression see my book *De l'esclavage au salariat, Economie historique du salariat bridé*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1998. (Italian translation, Manifesto Libri, Roma, 2002).

[2] French INSEE, the most important scientific institute for statistics, deserves a particular mention. For twenty years it maintained that the migration net balance was zero (with as many returnees than new entrants). In early 2000 it had to give up this hypothesis (so useful to the discourse of the government, whether it is oriented to the right or the left).

[3] Yann Moulier Boutang, Resistance to the Political Representation of Alien Population: the European Paradox, in: *International Migration Review*, Special issue: Civil Rights and Socio-political Participation of Migrants, Vol 19, n° 71, Fall 1985, pp. 485-492.

[4] See Danièle Lochak, *Etranger de quel droit?*, PUF, Paris, 1985; see also chapter 2 and 3 of my book *De l'esclavage au salariat, Economie historique du salariat bridé* (op. cit.)

[5] See K. de Schweinitz, *England's Road to Social Security*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1943 and my book on slavery, pp. 290-294.

[6] See Enrica Rigo, Sandro Mezzadra and Yann Moulier Boutang's contributions to the Majeure (Dossier) Migrations en Europe: les frontières de la liberté of Multitudes, in : *Multitudes* 19, Dec. 2004, http://multitudes.samizdat.net

[7] Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone, The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*, Cambridge (Ma.), Harvard University Press, 1998.

[8] Mario Tronti, La fabbrica e la società, in: *Operai e Capitale*, Einaudi, 1970.

[9] The question of education (an alleged degradation of the educational system due to too many immigrant children in school) has played a very important role in the shift towards right-wing positions by influential intellectuals like A. Finkielkraut, R. Debray and J.-C. Milner. See D. Lindenberg, *Le rappel à l'ordre: Enquête sur les nouveaux réactionnaires*, Paris, La République des Idées/Le Seuil, 2002.