



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Peeling an onion: the 'refugee crisis' from a historical perspective

Lucassen, L.A.C.J.

Citation

Lucassen, L. A. C. J. (2018). Peeling an onion: the 'refugee crisis' from a historical perspective. *Ethnic And Racial Studies*, 41(3), 383-410. doi:10.1080/01419870.2017.1355975

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licensed under Article 25fa Copyright Act/Law \(Amendment Taverne\)](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3202805>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



Peeling an onion: the “refugee crisis” from a historical perspective

Leo Lucassen

To cite this article: Leo Lucassen (2018) Peeling an onion: the “refugee crisis” from a historical perspective, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41:3, 383-410, DOI: [10.1080/01419870.2017.1355975](https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1355975)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1355975>



Published online: 04 Aug 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 7102



View related articles [↗](#)




View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 6 View citing articles [↗](#)



Peeling an onion: the “refugee crisis” from a historical perspective

Leo Lucassen  ^{a,b}

^aInternational Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands; ^bInstitute for History, Leiden University, Leiden, Netherlands

ABSTRACT

This paper asks a simple question: why did Western and other European politicians become so alarmed and, in some cases, downright apocalyptic at the rise of asylum seekers in 2014–16, especially compared to the previous refugee crisis in the 1990s? This paper argues that in 2014/2015, a “perfect storm” developed, bringing together factors that in the past had been largely unrelated and then converged with new ones. Peeling the onion of societal discontent with migrants and refugees has revealed five necessary and sufficient conditions: (1) discomfort with immigration and integration of colonial and labour migrants from North Africa and Turkey (1970–80s); (2) growing social inequality and widespread pessimism about globalization (1980s–); (3) A growing discomfort with Islam (1990s–); (4) Islamist terrorism (2000s–) and (5) the rise of radical right populist parties (2000s).

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 8 May 2017; Accepted 11 July 2017

KEYWORDS Refugees; migration; social inequality; populism; islamophobia; terrorism

Introduction

In the summer of 2015, facing a rapidly rising influx of asylum seekers, the Dutch government – unprepared despite early warning signs – frantically sought municipalities willing to accommodate temporary centres for asylum seekers, preferably with a capacity of 1,000 or more. The ensuing protests from localities were to be expected, especially from those that already had a disproportionately large share of asylum seekers among their inhabitants. Similar protests had occurred in the 1990s, when still greater numbers of asylum seekers entered the Netherlands and other Western European countries. Nor was the depiction of asylum seekers as a burden to the welfare state and as potential criminals unprecedented. What was new in this case was the apocalyptic tone of mainstream politicians and commentators, who – like the leader of the liberal party (VVD) in Parliament – asserted in October 2015 that the large number of predominantly Muslim asylum

CONTACT Leo Lucassen  leo.lucassen@iisg.nl

© 2017 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

seekers would lead to the implosion of the welfare state, followed in January 2017 by an open letter from Prime Minister Mark Rutte to the Dutch population associating refugees with rejection of Dutch core values.¹ The discourse of liberal Dutch politicians barely concealed the rhetoric of Geert Wilders, the leader of the radical right Freedom Party (PVV). In September 2015, Wilders urged “resistance” to asylum seekers reception centres, because these “Muslim testosterone bombs” aimed to assault “our women” and sheltered terrorists intent on destroying European and especially Dutch society. Incited by the toxic rhetoric from Geert Wilders, small groups of extremists attacked temporary reception centres, while others disrupted local meetings convened by the authorities to notify the public about plans to accommodate asylum seekers temporarily. Although in most cases no serious incidents occurred, there were violent protests in localities in the fall of 2015. Extremists intimidated local politicians and those in favour of housing asylum seekers. In other countries, the government message reproduced radical right populist discourse, including systematic dehumanization of refugees in British tabloids and the symbolic threat by the Danish government to invoke the “Jewelry Law” to confiscate money and valuables from asylum seekers at the border. This measure was not implemented, but its message was clear and reflects the alarmist tone of the debate. So far, only in Germany – apart from the Pegida movement and the radical right Alternative für Deutschland – have mainstream politicians largely abstained from such discourse.

The main question I address in this paper is why the xenophobic, Islamophobic and apocalyptic reactions by radical right-wing parties and movements resonated far more broadly than in the 1990s and were adopted in part by mainstream parties, both in the Netherlands and throughout the European Union (EU) in general. This is not to claim that asylum seekers were welcomed in the 1990s. Also then part of the population, as well as politicians, thought that too many were coming and that part of them were abusing the system (Kushner and Knox 1999, part 5; Schuster 2003; Jeffers 2012). And also then, laws were changed to reduce the numbers of applicants. The crucial difference with the present, however, was the absence of an anti-Islam rhetoric and publicly voiced existential fears of Europe’s sheer cultural and demographic existence being at stake due to unlimited of poor (Muslim) migrants from Asia and Africa.

So what has changed in the past twenty years? The obvious answer are the unprecedented numbers and cultural diversity of asylum seekers since 2014. With respect to the former, that is true to some extent. The number of asylum seekers from other continents arriving in the EU in 2015 was unprecedented and countries like Sweden and Germany had never seen such high numbers of asylum seekers in recent history (Figure 1). For most other countries, however, like the Netherlands, the numbers in that year mirrored previous peaks in the 1990s. Moreover, when we look at the total numbers per half a

decade and compare the 1990s with the first half of the 2010s, then the numbers and origin in recent years do not deviate significantly from what Western Europe experienced two decades ago (Figures 2 and 3). To the contrary, the total numbers in the years 2011–15 are lower than those in the first half of the 1990s. Furthermore, the sudden increase in numbers in 2014 and especially 2015 had a clear cause, the civil war in Syria, and there was no sign that an indifferent mass of poor migrants from the Global South had been unleashed. To the contrary, three quarters of the asylum seekers originated from a limited number of war zones: Afghanistan, Iraq, the Horn of Africa and, of course, Syria (Figure 4).

Apparently, something else has been going on. The aim of this paper is to identify the necessary and sufficient conditions to enable the recent shift in perception and reaction to the arrival of asylum seekers and other migrants. To this end, I will review history in stages, testing possible explanations and factors, and will unveil the broader context of the moral and public panic concerning refugees. Before we start peeling this onion, let us first examine the numbers and origins since the 1980s.

Asylum seekers: numbers and origin

By far, the highest numbers of refugees in Europe were produced at the end of the Second World War, when ten to twelve million refugees and displaced persons, coming from twenty countries and speaking thirty-five languages, were looking for a new place to stay, and camps in Germany and Austria were packed with people (Bade and Oltmer 2011, 74). Many were forced to wait years, until any country (whether in Western Europe or North America) allowed them to settle there (Kay and Miles 1992). When this flux of displacements finally stabilized in the course of the 1950s, requests for asylum plummeted and remained low until the 1980s, largely due to the Iron Curtain. In Western Europe, refugees amounted to only few thousand per year. The exceptions were after the Hungarian Revolt in 1956 and the Prague Spring in 1968, when hundreds of thousands escaped to the West,² where they were welcomed as victims of Communism. Most states stressed ideological and other similarities of the refugees to their own population, although in practice some were much more restrictive behind the scenes than their superficial welcoming rhetoric suggests (e.g. the Dutch government towards those from Hungary) (Ten Doesschate 2011). These refugees from the Eastern block could and did invoke the Geneva Convention on Refugees from 1951, which by 1956 had been ratified by virtually all Western European countries. This Convention was limited to Europeans who fled their homeland with a “well-founded fear of persecution.” From October 1967 onwards, however, the Convention was globalized by the “Protocol relating to the status of refugees,” submitted to the General

Assembly of the United Nations. Initially, this Protocol did not lead to higher numbers of refugees moving within and to Europe. These numbers remained below around 20,000 per year (Figure 1).

Change started in the late 1970s, when refugee numbers increased from around 25,000 in 1975 to over 150,000 in 1980. This coincided with an expanding catchment area. In the 1980s, about 60 per cent came from the Third World, including one-third from the Middle East (Lebanon, Iran), 15 per cent from the Indian subcontinent (especially Tamils from Sri Lanka) and the remaining 10 per cent from conflict regions in Africa (Loescher 1993, 111; Messina 2007, 44). The next spike in the numbers was in the 1990s, caused initially by Bosnians and Croats fleeing the Yugoslav Civil War. Former Yugoslavs seeking sanctuary in Western Europe were soon superseded numerically by refugees fleeing the escalating conflicts in the Middle East (Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan) and the Horn of Africa (Somalia) in the same decade.

Then, as Figure 1 also shows, the numbers started to decrease after 2000. The turmoil in the Middle East subsided temporarily, as, in 2001, Afghanistan was invaded by American troops who forced the Taliban to retreat, while Hamid Karzai entered office following free elections in 2004. A new constitution followed, and for a few years, peace appeared possible. Approximately five million refugees were repatriated after 2002, some forcibly from Western countries such as Germany. In Iraq, Saddam Hussein was chased out in 2003,

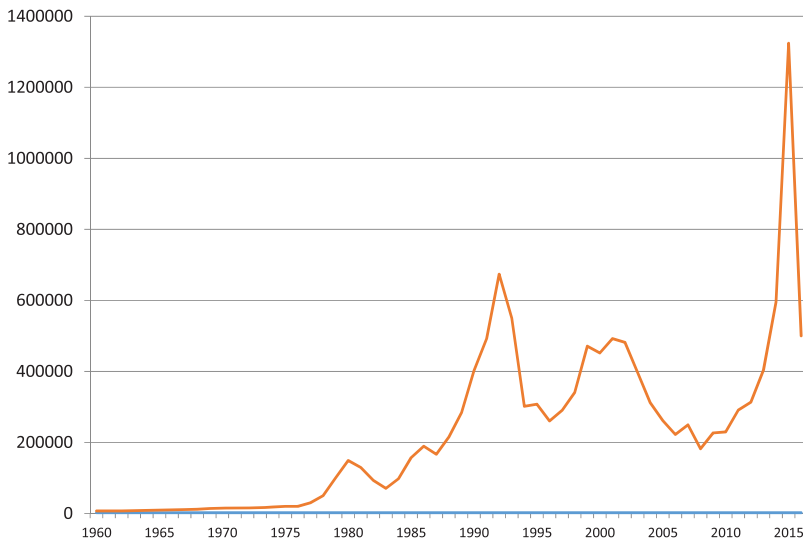


Figure 1. Number of asylum seekers in Europe (1960–2016). Source: <http://www.unhcr.org/statistics/STATISTICS/3c3eb40f4.pdf>; <http://www.unhcr.org/4d8c5b109.pdf>; <http://www.unhcr.org/551128679.pdf>; <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7203832/3-04032016-AP-EN.pdf>; <http://www.unhcr.org/statistics/STATISTICS/44153f592.pdf>; http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/acp/60_05a/pdf/annexes.pdf.

and an international coalition was installed to stabilize Iraq. After the Americans departed in 2011, however, the Iraqi state largely collapsed, enabling the rise of IS and once again causing large numbers to flee the country.

In both Iraq and Afghanistan, occupation by troops from the United States and other nations, therefore, did not bring long-term stability, and violence and chaos prevailed after 2010. This coincided with the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2013. The consequences included an all-time high of 1.3 million asylum seekers in the EU in 2015: one million whom came from outside Europe and the remainder from the Balkans. As Figure 2 shows, however, the recent numbers are not that exceptional, and whether the second decade of the twenty-first century surpasses the record of 4.2 million in the 1990s remains to be seen.

The fact that the presentation in Figure 2 differs from Figure 1 is explained by the logarithmic presentation, which is necessary to make the trend of Hungary visible. Due to the small numbers of Hungary (and the very large numbers of Germany), a normal presentation as in Figure 1 would make the trends of most countries invisible. Only in Germany and Sweden did the numbers for 2015 clearly exceed the annual highs from the 1990s.

In seeking to explain the current extreme reactions, we should perhaps focus less on the numbers than on the composition of the asylum seekers and especially on the share of Muslims among them. In the 1990s, the refugees tended to be perceived as predominantly Europeans fleeing the

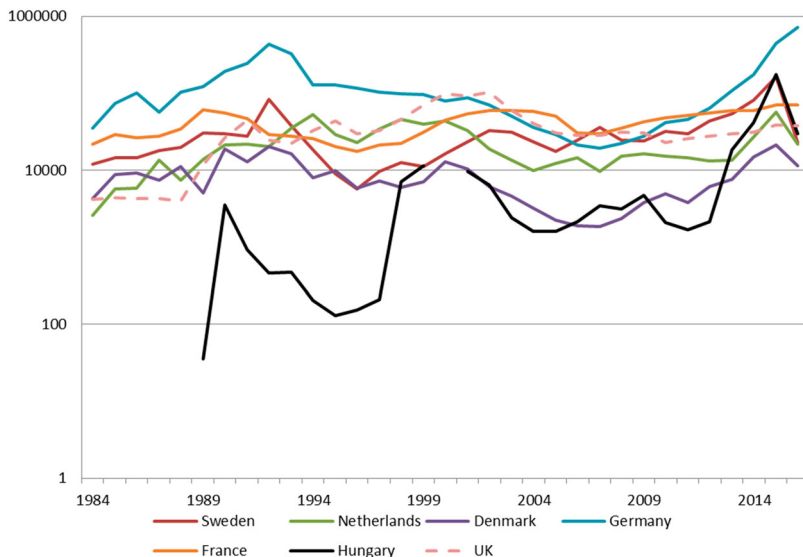


Figure 2. Logarithmic presentation of asylum seeker numbers in seven European states (1984–2016). Source: see Figure 1.

Yugoslav Civil War, whereas nowadays, Muslims from the Middle East and Africa account for the bulk of refugees. Among the asylum seekers in the 1990s, former Yugoslavs did indeed figure prominently, with Bosnians (who happen to be Muslims as well) in the majority. On the whole, however, these European refugees constituted a minority back then. In recent years, migrants from Kosovo, Albania and Bosnia have joined asylum seekers from the Middle East and Africa in large numbers (approximately 300,000 in 2015), most heading for Germany. The next figure, based on the origin of asylum applicants in twelve European countries,³ shows that already in the 1990s most asylum seekers came from regions in other continents, especially the Middle East Asia and the Horn of Africa.

The final argument often invoked against admitting asylum seekers at present is that Western European countries are still having great difficulties integrating the refugees from the 1990s and have not yet, in a manner of speaking, “digested” the millions of other Muslims, especially because they remain hostile to the core European values of democracy, separation of church and state, gender equality, acceptance of homosexuality and freedom of speech. Apart from the fact that many Europeans (not in the least in e.g. Hungary and Poland) do not wholeheartedly subscribe to such liberal values either, longitudinal research shows that most refugees from countries such as Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan who came to the Netherlands in the 1990s generally do support these values and in this sense have adapted relatively quickly, while their children do quite well at school (Dourleijn and Muller 2011; Engbersen and Dagevos 2015; Maliepaard, Witkamp, and Jennissen 2017).

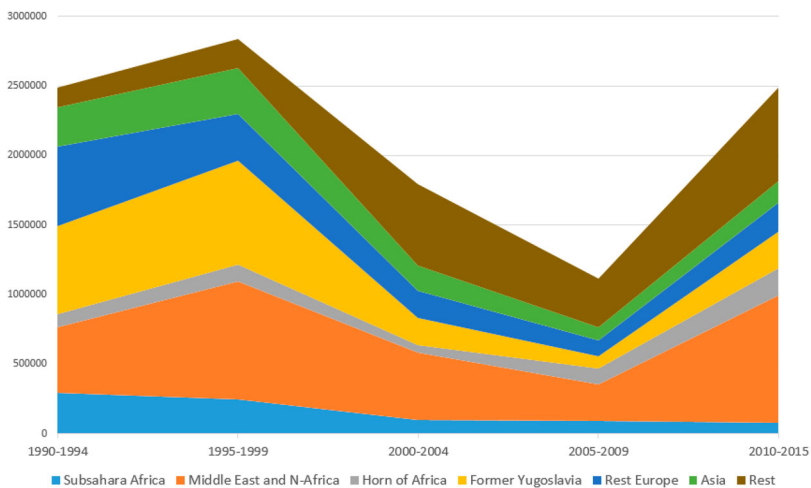


Figure 3. Origin of asylum seekers in twelve European countries 1990–2015. Source: UNHCR 2001 and following yearbooks.

Finally, the argument that “we ain’t seen nothing yet” holds that due to high rates of fertility, poverty and environmental degradation in parts of Asia, the Middle East and Africa poor countries will “empty out” in the coming decades (to use Collier’s (2013) term) and will try to jump ship, unless the EU fortifies its borders even more. The problem with this argument is that it does not align with the facts. As the following table shows, in recent years, the bulk of asylum seekers has come from four circumscribed conflict areas: Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and the Horn of Africa (Somalia and Eritrea). The share of West and North Africans is negligible, whereas the number of West African migrants trying to reach Italy through irregular means in 2015 constituted 0.08 per cent of the total Sub-Saharan population and 0.04 per cent of the population of the EU, not exactly emptying out.

While the combination of high fertility rates and poverty does not guarantee higher migration to Europe, migration and demographics research suggests a different scenario. First, the “emptying out” thesis of Paul Collier in his book *Exodus* (2013) is not supported by facts but is purely a suggestive imagery devoid of any awareness that people do not migrate without a second thought. Moving requires money, contacts and some guarantee that their risky adventure is viable. While thousands of young men (in any case more than women) may believe that European streets are paved with gold and want desperately to board a boat in Libya or Morocco, they are a very small minority (Flahaux and de Haas 2016). Moreover, as recent research on Sub-Sahara migrants to Libya shows, 80 per cent of them have no intention whatsoever to go to Europe and are circulatory labour migrants looking for

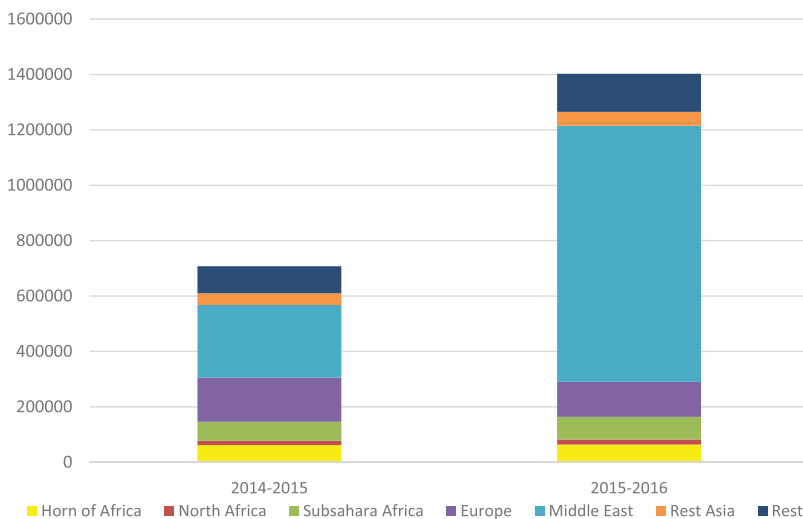


Figure 4. Origin of first-time asylum seekers in the EU (July 2014–June 2016). Source: Eurostat.

job in North Africa (Molenaar and El Kamouni-Janssen 2017). As for the fertility thesis, birth rates in South Asia, the Middle East and Africa have decreased considerably since the 1970s (Groth and Sousa-Poza 2012). As we saw above, the percentage of West Africans among the irregular migrants coming to the EU may have increased somewhat in the past years; especially in Italy, they constitute a very small fraction of the population at risk in Sub-Saharan Africa.

At this point, we may conclude that the highly negative reactions to asylum seekers in the past few years cannot be attributed to their numbers, their countries of origin or the failure to integrate on the part of previous groups, who in a manner of speaking might have spoiled prospects for the current ones. Nor are predictions about poor countries “emptying out” in Africa and Asia supported by facts. This raises the question as to what has changed since the 1990s. Below, I will discuss five key differences that together offer a more convincing explanation, starting with the much greater visibility of and media attention to asylum seekers.

Visibility and the construction of fortress Europe

One reason why politicians, journalists, commentators and scholars have embraced the idea that the EU is under siege by millions of downtrodden migrants from other continents is that migrants and asylum seekers became far more visible in the 2010s. Whereas in the 1990s most simply crossed borders over land in Eastern and Southeastern Europe, often travelling by bus, train or even airplane, such border crossings progressively became more difficult and have been replaced by risky travel routes across the sea, to the Greek islands, Lampedusa and other Italian shores. The prevailing idea that in the process of enlargement and enabling internal freedom of movement the EU has forgotten to protect its outer borders is therefore less convincing than it might initially seem (Jeandesbosz 2015). This argument can even be reversed: in the late 1980s and 1990s, especially after the disintegration of the Eastern block, borders were much more porous than nowadays, because countries in Eastern Europe – as well as Turkey – did virtually nothing to stop Afghans, Iraqis, Iranians, Somalis and others from transiting their territory. In 1993, this changed, when the EU adopted a new policy of protecting and controlling its outer borders that had major consequences for irregular migrants and asylum seekers. Rather than fortifying the external borders with fences, gates and barbed wire, the policy served to bring about a far more effective paper barrier. The basic idea had already developed in the United States in the early nineteenth century and was labelled “remote control” by Zolberg (2006, 110–113). Over the course of a century, a full-fledged bureaucratic system came about, coordinated by a federal visa office in Washington, DC, building on earlier experiences restricting Chinese

(1882) and other Asians (McKeown 2008). With the 1917 *Immigration Act*, prospective migrants were checked not only upon entry in the United States but already at the points of embarkation, at that time the major harbour cities in Europe (Hamburg, Liverpool, Antwerp, Rotterdam and Naples) by American consular officers or employees of shipping companies. In the summer of that same year, the United States followed the example of Germany, France and Great Britain: pursuant to a joint order by Secretary of State Robert Lansing and Secretary of Labor William Wilson, aliens coming to the United States had to present passports containing valid visas before embarkation (Zolberg 2006, 240–241).

The entry into force of the Convention on Controls on Persons Crossing External Frontiers on 1 November 1993 was based on the same principle and required people from almost all countries in Asia and Africa to apply for a visa prior to leaving their country.⁴ Without such a visa, carriers (airlines, as well as shipping and bus companies) refused to take passengers on board, as they risked high fines and were forced to return passengers to their point of departure. This new EU visa policy served mainly to deter unskilled migrants and to keep the number of asylum seekers as low as possible. The policy took quite a while to implement and for years lacked any visible effect; slowly, it changed the migration dynamics of asylum seekers and other migrants deemed ineligible for an entry visa.

The main result of the visa requirement was that those who wanted to request asylum or find irregular or other work in the EU became increasingly dependent on human smugglers who charged high fees for taking them across borders, hiding them in trucks at first and later increasingly resorting to boats. Data on border deaths in the Mediterranean suggest a substantial surge after 2000, and especially from 2013 onwards, although it needs to be stressed that the various NGOs and scholars who have gathered these data depend to a large extent on (shifting) media attention for people dying at Europe's borders (Last and Spijkerboer 2014; Last et al. 2017). So, although the data on border deaths should be dealt with prudence, it is interesting to note that while total applications for asylum decreased sharply after 2000, the number of deaths soared, suggesting a growing dependence of asylum seekers and other migrants on smugglers and sea routes.

Shipping asylum seekers by boat in the Mediterranean already started in the 1990s, when most recorded deaths occurred in the Adriatic Sea between Albania and Italy, after the regime change in 1991, and again during the anarchy caused by the implosion of Ponzi schemes six years later.⁵ On 8 August 1991, the freighter *Vlora* arrived unexpectedly in the Bari harbour, carrying between ten and twenty thousand Albanians, and a mass exodus got under way. According to the Italian census of 2001, this exodus by sea resulted in approximately 700,000 Albanians settling there, increasing to about a million around 2004 (almost a third of the total Albanian

population) (King and Mai 2008, 65). Albanians dying *en route* to Italy were recorded until the turn of the century but were soon surpassed by deaths in the Western (Morocco–Spain) and Central Mediterranean areas (Libya–Italy). Some incidents were covered extensively, such as the small ship that sank between Malta and the Strait of Sicily in December 1996, carrying 283 young male migrants from Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka (Carter 2013, 62).

The first record of migrants drowning between Turkey and Greece is from 1998, when on 31 December nine people from Kurdistan died in the Aegean. Incidents in the Eastern Mediterranean would multiply, as Kos, Lesbos and other islands became destinations of smugglers, carrying asylum seekers from Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran. Others were killed in minefields or drowned in the Evros, which separates Turkey from Greece.

Other signs that regular entries became difficult include hundreds of reported deaths of people trying to cross border rivers in the 1990s, especially the Neisse and Oder at the Polish–German border, as well as the Danube, Morava, Tisza and Sava rivers in Eastern and Central Europe. Others were killed in minefields in the border area between Greece and Turkey, including a couple of Iraqi men on 30 June 1996. Finally, migrants hid in trucks, which in several cases led to mass suffocation. The most notorious incident concerned fifty-eight Chinese who died in a lorry that arrived in Dover, coming from Zeebrugge on 19 June 2000. The fifty-four men and four women may have boarded the vehicle in Greece.⁶

These gruesome incidents indicate that, by the end of the 1990s, reaching EU member states safely had already become more difficult for asylum seekers from outside the EU, and that irregular travel had become commonplace. Initially, ineffective border control in most former Eastern block countries and Turkey meant that most migrants had little difficulty crossing into these countries. Border deaths remained low, and the more risky sea routes were avoided whenever possible. Over time, however, the visa regime forced migrants to take greater risks. While this made the journey by migrants more visible than ever, only in 2013 did the coincidence between the effects of the visa regime and rapidly rising numbers of border deaths capture the attention of the media. Since then, Europeans have witnessed almost daily television, Internet and newspaper coverage of seemingly endless numbers of boats arriving at Greek and Italian shores.

Terrorism and Islam

Although the heightened visibility clearly furthered the impression that refugee immigration had spun out of control, and that the EU borders were very porous, these visual effects alone do not explain why the responses were far more panic-stricken than those two decades earlier. The fear that Islamist terrorists, especially members of ISIS, might be hiding among the

refugees would seem to be at least as important. Anxiety for Islamist terrorists has mounted since 9/11 and the series of attacks in Europe since 2004. This new wave of terrorism has its roots in the 1980s (Mockaitis 2008), inspired by the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the subsequent rise of the Islamic regime led by Ayatollah Khomeini. Simultaneously, the barbaric war between Iraq and Iran (1980–88) and the occupation of Afghanistan by Soviet troops in December 1979 created a fertile ground for anti-Western Occidentalism-inspired terrorism (Buruma and Margalit 2004). After the unsuccessful attempt to blow up Manhattan's Twin Towers in 1993, the danger of this new terrorist wave for Europeans and Americans became clear only on 9/11/2001. This unfathomable attack propelled the Clash of Civilizations proposed by Huntington into public view, linking the security issue to the perception of Islamist terrorism as a weapon in the existentialist battle between Islam and the West, with the ultimate aim of turning Europe into "Eurabia" and establishing Sharia law (Ye'or 2011, see also Huntington 1996). Such conspiracy theories, which are strikingly similar to the late-nineteenth-century anti-Semitic premise that Jews are scheming to rule the world (Werbner 2013), serve to legitimate extreme anti-Muslim discourse and behaviour. Adherents of this Islamophobic rhetoric believe that Muslims are unable or unwilling to embrace the core values of Western societies. The phobic nature becomes more pronounced in the frequently expressed view that Muslims always hide their true nature and conspire to take over Western societies. This *Taqiyya* accusation of wilful deception, disseminated by many radical right populist politicians in Western Europe and North America (Vossen 2016), mirrors the anti-Semitic notion of purported or actual Jewish world dominance. The only difference is that Jews were held to accomplish this control via the press and financial institutions, whereas Muslims were expected to introduce their norms and legal principles (*sharia*) gradually through increased immigration and fertility, enabled by naive *dhimmi* multiculturalists (Ye'or 1985. For a nuanced historical contextualization, see Emon 2012, 1–2).

Concerns about terrorism, however, are much more recent. Although Islamists perpetrated terrorist attacks in France back in the mid-1990s (Kepel 2002), these acts did not instigate general fear of Muslims in that decade, let alone lead them to be identified with asylum seekers. The *Groupe Islamique Armée* responsible for these bombings was associated mainly with extremely violent conflicts in the former French colony Algeria and was not viewed as part of an alleged war of Islam against the West.

Whereas most Europeans attributed the 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington DC to American interventions in the Middle East, the bombings in Madrid in 2004 and those a year later in London made clear that European cities had become targets as well. Moreover, the bombs that exploded in London were placed by homegrown terrorists, sons of migrants from Pakistan

and Jamaica. As [Table 1](#) shows, this radicalization among children of immigrants was especially visible in France and Belgium, among descendants of labour migrants from North Africa (Algeria and Morocco). This intensification of terrorism coincided with a sharp increase in asylum seekers coming to Europe. The 2015 terrorist wave started with the shocking Paris murders of twelve journalists of the *Charlie Hebdo* weekly in January and multiple attacks at the Bataclan concert hall and elsewhere in Paris in November, killing 130. In the Spring and Summer of 2016, Islamist terrorism seemed to become pandemic, with the bombs in Brussels in March and especially the series of assaults in July and August, in France (Nice), Belgium and Germany ([Table 1](#)).

The pattern in the few cases involving asylum seekers (in Germany in 2016 and Sweden in 2017) differs from those in the attacks in France and Belgium.⁷ In those three incidents, individuals (from Afghanistan, Syria, Tunisia and Uzbekistan) acted on their own and probably suffered from psychological disorders. Apart from the rejected asylum seeker from Tunisia (Anis Amri), who killed twelve people with a truck in Berlin, the only casualties here were the perpetrators, who were shot by police. Many Europeans, however, hardly cared about the specific backgrounds of the terrorists, and asylum seekers often became inextricably linked with terrorism. This association even led U.S. President Donald Trump to propose a complete ban on immigration from various Muslim countries, including Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, in February 2017 soon after he took office. Although this measure was found to be unconstitutional by the Supreme Court and a federal judge in Hawaii, it shows once again how closely perceptions had linked refugees with terrorism.

The failure of multiculturalism?

While asylum seekers may have been very minimally involved in terrorist attacks, in nearly all cases, the offspring of former guest workers and colonial migrants from Islamic countries participated and consequently caused existing discomfort with immigration and integration to become linked with the refugee question. Whereas in the 1990s these two domains had been largely separate, the social and cultural problems of Turks, Moroccans and Algerians suddenly became intertwined with the refugee debate, in terms of terrorism and integration alike. General fear of Muslim migrants was further increased by the emigration of “foreign fighters” for the Caliphate in Iraq (Bakker and Singleton 2016; Chaliand and Blin 2016; Nance 2016). Apart from countries such as Jordan, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia, the Belgian “production” of radicalized youth was by far the highest as a share of the total population, followed by Denmark, France and Sweden. Germany, however, despite its sizeable Muslim population and record number of asylum seekers, scores much lower ([Table 2](#)).

Table 1. Overview of major Islamist-inspired terrorist attacks in Western Europe between 11 September 2001 and May 2017.

Attack(s)	Name(s) of perpetrators	Country or countries of origin	Background	Number of victims (deaths)
Madrid, 11-3-04	Jamal Zougam and 37 others	Morocco (25), Spain (5); Algeria (3), Syria (2), Egypt (1), Tunisia (1), Lebanon (1)	Foreign trained terrorist	201
Amsterdam, 2-11-04	Mohammed Bouyeri	Netherlands (of Moroccan descent)	Radicalized in the Netherlands	1
London, 7-7-05	Mohammad Sidique Khan; Shehzad Tanweer; Hasib Mir Hussain; Germaine Maurice Lindsay	UK from Pakistani parents; Jamaica	Radicalized in the UK	52
Toulouse, 19-3-12	Mohammed Merah	France of Algerian descent	Radicalized in France	4
Paris (Charlie Hebdo), 7-1-15	Cherif and Said Kouachi	France of Algerian descent	Yemen trained jihadists	12
Paris (Bataclan etc.), 13-11-15	Abdelhamid Abaaoud, Brahim Abdeslam, Salah Abdeslam and at least 6 others	France and Belgium of Moroccan and Algerian descent	ISIS operatives	130
Brussels, 22-3-16	Ibrahim El Bakraoui, Najim Laachraoui, Mohamed Abrini, Khalid El Bakraoui, Osama Krayem	Belgium (Moroccan descent), Morocco and Sweden (Palestinian descent)	Radicalized petty criminals, ISIS operatives	32
Magnanville, 13-6-12	Larossi Abballa	France (Moroccan descent)	Radicalized petty criminal	3 (incl. Abballa)
Nice, 14-7-16	Lahouaiej Bouhleh	Tunisia	Radicalized petty criminal	86
Würzburg, 18-7-16	Riaz Khan Ahmadzai	Afghanistan	Asylum seeker	0
Ansbach, 24-7-16	Mohammad Daleel	Syria	Asylum seeker	1 (Daleel)
Normandy, 26-7-16	Adel Kermiche and Abdel Malik Petitjean	Algeria and France (Algerian descent)	ISIS supporters	1
Charleroi, 6-8-2016	Khaled Babbouri	Algeria	?	1 (Babbouri)
Berlin, 19-12-16	Anis Amri	Tunisia	(failed) asylum seeker	12
London, 22-3-17	Khalid Masood (Adrian Russell Elms)	UK	Radicalized petty criminal	6 (incl. the attacker)
Stockholm, 7-4-2017	Rakhmat Akilov	Uzbekistan	Rejected asylum seeker	4

Source: Various Wikipedia entries (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_terrorist_incidents_in_2016), as well as <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3560603.stm> (Madrid 11-3-2004); <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34832512> (Paris 13-11-2015). <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>. <https://thereligionofpeace.com/attacks/europe-attacks.aspx>.

Table 2. Absolute number and relative share of foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria at the end of 2014.

	Number	Share in total population (1/1,000,000)
Jordan	1,500	234
Tunisia	2,250	205
Saudi Arabia	2,000	69
Belgium	440	39
Denmark	125	22
France	1,200	18
Sweden	165	17
Austria	125	15
Netherlands	225	13
UK	550	9
Australia	175	8
Germany	550	7
Canada		4
Spain	75	2
United States		0.3

Source: Bakker and Singleton (2016) (ICSR, February 2015).

Paradoxically, descendants of migrants from North Africa are more susceptible to radicalization than those of Turkish descent, although the latter group is more cohesive. Children of Moroccan and Algerian descent experience greater exposure to discrimination and are more easily disappointed. This may be especially true for those from countries that had colonial ties with the country of settlement (e.g. France).⁸ Having been socialized partly in the language and culture of the colonial motherland, with its renowned ideology of equality, daily reality in the isolated *banlieues* may cause greater frustration and rancour. This sentiment spread in part to Brussels, which appeared an ideal operational base for French-speaking Islamist radicals from Belgium and France, often cemented by family ties (Soufan and Schoenfeld 2016).

The nature of integration and extent of isolation and marginalization are possible additional factors. Combined with a lack of colonial ties, relatively small immigrant neighbourhoods and decentralized policing, they may explain the absence of homegrown terrorism, including on the part of returning foreign fighters in the Netherlands, most of whom have Moroccan roots (apart from Dutch converts to Islam). Despite rising xenophobic sentiment towards descendants of Moroccan and Turkish migrants in Amsterdam, segregation has not intensified among the majority in these two groups, and the existing concentrations are highly dynamic (Musterd 2011, 376). Finally, research on schools and migrant neighbourhoods reveals that Dutch policies towards integrated neighbourhoods are relatively effective and have averted a massive “white flight” (Ong 2014).

Homegrown terrorism among children of former guest workers from North Africa derived from extended social and psychological marginalization of immigrants, whose integration has been the focus of intense political debate on “failed integration” and “parallel societies” since the 1990s

(Lucassen 2005). The background to this context was the extensive family reunification of former guest workers from Morocco, Algeria and Turkey in the late 1970s and 1980s, which coincided with the protracted economic recession that followed the Oil Price shocks of 1973 and 1975. Compounding factors were the deliberate selection of unskilled and poorly educated guest workers and their employment in economic sectors such as textile, mining and shipyards, which soon became obsolete and closed around 1980, due to the global competition from Asia (Lucassen and Lucassen 2015). Integration of these groups therefore started around the time that the men lost their jobs, and their families settled in impoverished sections of major cities, often spatially isolated, especially in the French *banlieues* (Wacquant 2008).

Given the unfortunate timing of their settlement, in addition to the low human capital of the first generation, many of their offspring – especially their daughters – are doing remarkably well and achieve high upward social mobility, compared to their parents (Alba and Foner 2015). In public perception and political debate, however, they are depicted very differently. The Rushdie Affair in 1988/1989 marked a turning point. After demonstrations in Iran and other Middle Eastern and Asian countries, following the *fatwa* proclaimed against Salman Rushdie by Ayatollah Khomeini, who took Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* as gross blasphemy of Islam, Muslims in Western Europe turned out in protest as well, demanding that Rushdie's book be banned. Many commentators and politicians, not in the least those on the left, were shocked at this reaction, which they saw as proof that migrants from Islamic countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Algeria, Morocco and Turkey were unable or unwilling to integrate. Their obvious social and cultural problems were predominantly attributed to a "backward Islamic culture." This integration pessimism that spread throughout Western Europe in the 1990s was soon embraced by far-right populist movements, such as that of Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands, Vlaams Blok in Belgium and the Front National in France.

In the 1990s, this integration pessimism gradually supplanted previously prevalent political correctness and undermined the consensus among mainstream political parties that immigration should not become an electoral issue. Discussing the alleged failure of multicultural society, however, remained taboo in countries like Germany. Moreover, concerns about the rapidly growing share of immigrants and their children in the population did not figure in discussions about refugees at the time. Refugees remained largely distinct from labour migrants from Islamic countries, and references to unsuccessful integration did not yet permeate the discourse on asylum seekers. After all, the average human capital of refugees varied considerably from that of former guest workers, leading migrants and their descendants along different integration paths (Maliepaard, Witkamp, and Jennissen 2017).

The rise of populism

By the time the number of asylum seekers from the Middle East and the Horn of Africa started to rise again, society firmly believed that integration of Muslim migrants and their children had failed. Commentators and journalists, in many cases also from the left, expressed alarm and were soon echoed by mainstream politicians.⁹ This context suited old and new radical right populist parties, such as those led by Pia Kjaersgaard (1995/2001 Dansk Folkeparti), Pim Fortuyn (2001–2, LPF), Geert Wilders (2004, PVV), Philip de Winter (2004, Vlaams Belang), Nigel Farage (2006, UKIP) and Marine le Pen (leader of the Front National since 2011). They all tapped into the social problems experienced by some children of Moroccan, Turkish, Algerian and Pakistani parents, leading them to drop out of school and to high rates of unemployment and street crime. Additional causes for concern included the rise of ultra-orthodox Salafist interpretations of Islam (heavily subsidized by Saudi Arabia) and the enhanced social visibility of Islam, especially when they inspired young people to resort to ideologically motivated violence and terrorism. In 2004, in the Netherlands, the brutal assassination of filmmaker Theo van Gogh by a man born in Amsterdam of Moroccan descent heightened the controversy over immigration and Muslims. In that same year, former liberal MP Geert Wilders established his Freedom Party, with as its main aim de-Islamizing the Netherlands and stopping immigration.

By the start of the twenty-first century, political sentiment towards Muslims had culminated in a broadly supported consensus that immigration was economically, socially and culturally harmful to nation states (Lucassen and Lucassen 2015; Van Reekum 2016). Immigrants – defined as unskilled and mainly non-European – were portrayed as welfare parasites unwilling to adopt modern, liberal cum national values. Although, as we saw, the roots of this perspective originated before the 1990s surge in refugee numbers, by the second decade of the twenty-first century, it figured prominently in mainstream politics and media. Once numbers of asylum seekers reaching EU countries started to increase again around 2013, this anti-Islam/anti-immigration frame of reference was immediately activated and made for an ambience entirely different from that in the 1990s. Apart from the culturally inspired fear (i.e. of Islam), this problem with social mobility was exacerbated by freedom of migration within the EU.

Globalization, social inequality in the welfare state

Analyses of the rise in populism often attribute this trend to growing inequality and retrenchment of the welfare state, linked to neo-liberal globalization. Many regard this shift as an important underlying cause of the discomfort with immigration among the disadvantaged lower classes and the middle

class alike (Norris 2005, 132; Coffé 2013, 140). More specifically, the protracted effects of the 2008 global Financial Crisis are invoked to explain negative reactions to asylum seekers and labour migrants in general, as in the Brexit case and most recently with the blue-collar support for Trump in the United States.

The exact relationship between neo-liberalism, socio-economic insecurity and xenophobic anti-immigration attitudes, however, is unclear. Limiting the scope to the effects of the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 in Europe reveals vast differences between countries. France has experienced a steady rise in unemployment since 2008, reaching 10 per cent in 2016, whereas this rate has continuously declined in Germany since 2005, falling from 11 per cent to 4.6 per cent in 2015. The Netherlands and the United Kingdom are between these two extremes, with an increase since 2008 and then a sharp drop in 2016 to well below the EU (19 members) average.¹⁰

Other macro trends, especially those pertaining to social inequality, however, reflect closer convergence, with the notable exception of the Netherlands,¹¹ as Table 3 shows.

Contrary to what one might initially expect in the era of privatization and market supremacy, the share of social spending in most European countries in the gross domestic product increased in the period 1985–2015 (OECD). Over time, states seem to pay relatively more in terms of pensions, benefits, health care and so forth, rather than less.

Social spending, however, is not the best measure to assess social inequality. Such public spending derives in part from economic crises, ageing populations and, in some cases, related increases in healthcare costs and does not reflect the underlying changes in the nature of the welfare state and increasing vulnerability of workers. Understanding these structural socio-economic changes requires transcending macro indicators, some of which conceal more than they reveal. In the long run, the expenditure on other insurance programmes (disability, sickness and unemployment) declined in most countries. Social assistance costs, on the contrary, remained constant, because those who previously received social insurance benefits became dependent on this safety net of last resort. Increased pension and healthcare spending results largely from the growth in total volume. Average pensions have declined in most countries since the 1980s, suggesting that higher costs do not equal greater generosity.

Table 3. Income inequality measured by the Gini coefficient (post taxes and transfers).

	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2014
United Kingdom	30.9	33.5	33.7	35.2	35.9	35.1	35.8
Germany	25.1	25.6	26.6	29.7	28.5	28.6	29.1
France			27.7	28.7	28.8	28.6	29.4
Netherlands	27.2	29.2	29.7	29.2	29.5	28.1	28.3

Source: For 1985–2000: OECD Statistics <http://www.oecd.org/social/income-distribution-database.htm> (UK only until 2013).

In the past decade, scholars working on the welfare state in Europe have produced an impressive literature attesting to growing dualization on the labour market, defined as the creation, widening and deepening of insider–outsider divides, between workers with tenured and well-paid jobs and good pensions and those with poorly paid flexible – and part-time – jobs and limited job protection (Palier 2010; 382; Emmenegger et al. 2012, see also Streeck 2008; Taylor-Gooby 2008; Van der Veen et al. 2012a; Thelen 2014; Touwen 2014). This development was first discussed in the 1970s in the dual labour market theory, with especially immigrants locked into the deprived second segment (Piore 1979). Since the 1990s, attention has shifted to the unskilled native working class, strongly emphasizing the recommodification of labour through tightening eligibility, diminishing duration of social benefits and regulations compelling the able-bodied to work (King 1995; Karimi 2017, 148). This stress on the economic value of individual claimants (requiring recipients to work) increasingly determines social citizenship (Langford 2017, see also Panican and Ulmestig 2016). In other words, we note a transition from the traditional social model rooted in industrialization and based on collective social risks (social insurances, collective bargaining, labour market regulation, etc.) to a post-industrial service economy with individualized risks and decreasing solidarity (Van der Veen and Yerkes 2012b, 191).

The shift from fixed to temporary and flexible jobs, as well as a growing share of individuals who after losing their jobs as wage earners now offer their labour as self-employed in the same sector (albeit often without the protection and sources of security they once enjoyed), highlights the growing precariousness of labour (Standing 2011. For a critique of this concept, see Doogan 2009; Seymour 2012). This phenomenon has been on the rise throughout Europe but is the most pronounced in in the Netherlands. Since 2000, the share of the Dutch working population with a fixed contract has steadily decreased, while flexible, temporary and self-employed work is on the rise and nowadays constitutes one-third of the total workforce.¹² Simultaneously, many routine white-collar jobs in the financial sector (e.g. at banks and insurance companies) have disappeared, heightening insecurity about the future of the labour market. The latter is part of a broader process of neo-liberal reconstruction of welfare states. Or, in the words of Karimi (2017, 145): “The state’s neoliberal restructuring role has accentuated the social power of the dominant classes and reduced the capacity of the subordinate classes to use the state as a tool to enhance their social positions.” Even if one does not agree with this straightforward Marxist interpretation, redistributive policies have indisputably become ever more dependent on market demand, leading to deregulation, privatization of publicly owned companies, ceding public involvement in the public sector and “vertical downloading” (pushing social responsibility to lower levels of government or the tertiary sector) (Karimi 2017, 146).

Politics and framing

Whether and how the growing social and economic insecurity of the native population impacts these attitudes to immigrants and more specifically to refugees depends not only on the political economy as conveyed briefly above but also in significant measure on how politicians frame the situation. In attributing blame to immigrants, not only the extent of social inequality matters but also how it is perceived and interpreted. This is where politics enters the picture (Guibernau 2007). The degree to which mainstream parties and governments adopt the way the far right conveys the situation is crucial, in this case, that immigration is inherently bad, and that Islam is a serious problem. In this context, comparing the stance of the two prime ministers of Germany and the Netherlands (Angela Merkel and Mark Rutte) over the last seven years yields interesting insights. Where Merkel kept her distance from the far right and proposed “Wir schaffen das.” Rutte (leader of the liberal party), for opportunistic electoral reasons, adopted part of the radical right rhetoric and in January 2016 promised voters that the number of refugees would be reduced to zero.

In most Western European countries, however, with the rise of far-right populist parties, most mainstream parties have at least in part adopted the position that immigration and Muslims constitute a problem. They threaten our values, undermine the welfare state, work for lower wages and take jobs from native workers. The latter accusations, though largely refuted by academic research (Wadsworth 2015), increasingly prevailed with the gradual opening of the EU labour market for workers from Eastern European member states. While these East Europeans at first still needed work permits, from 2007 (Poles and others from the new member states in the 2004 Enlargement) and 2014 (Romanians and Bulgarians) onwards, freedom of mobility and employment within the EU was a fact. Especially, the hundreds of thousands of Polish workers who entered the labour markets of Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France and the United Kingdom were seen by many as unfair competition and as exponents of the downside of globalization. This sentiment worsened, when in 2008 the global financial crisis led to a sharp rise in unemployment, coinciding with deep distrust of the social and economic system. The crisis caused great uncertainty about the economy and the welfare state. Growing numbers of workers in Europe and North America (also from the middle class) demanded better protection and the reinvigoration of the social contract, which many believed had been unilaterally broken by neo-liberal state policies since the 1980s. Radical populist parties have been very successful in associating the erosion of the welfare state with immigrants, who are depicted either as a burden and/or as competitors on the labour market. The Brexit campaign by UKIP in the United Kingdom, with the widely criticized poster featuring Nigel Farage pointing

at a seemingly endless procession of refugees (based on anti-Semitic Nazi propaganda posters) has made that connection painfully clear. How could the state welcome refugees and offer them benefits, while ignoring their own citizens, populist parties asked rhetorically. This form of welfare chauvinism resonated strongly with natives from lower socio-economic groups (Mewes and Mau 2012).

Erosion of the social contract and globalization play an important role in current depictions of refugees as an existential threat. This process, however, started back in the 1980s and raises question as to why this discontent was not activated much earlier, especially during the 1990s, when the refugee numbers were even higher than in recent years.

Given the political and economic situation in the 1980s and 1990s, scapegoating refugees would have made perfect sense: the neo-liberalist turn, personified by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, coincided with the long economic recession and scaling back the welfare state. At the same time, family reunification of guest workers (1980s), soon followed by sharp increases in asylum seekers (1990s), drove the share of foreign born in Western Europe to unprecedented levels of around 10 per cent. Yet, radical right anti-immigrant parties were absent or largely unsuccessful.¹³

The dominant political correctness in the Netherlands during the 1980s illustrates that the combination of immigration and high unemployment did not automatically incite anti-immigrant populism. The German example is still more interesting. After the fall of the Wall in 1989, Germany faced not only the costs of reunification with the former GDR but also a substantial influx of some three million *Aussiedler*, consisting mainly of Soviet Russians with German roots. Qualifying as citizens upon arrival, these newcomers were offered a fast and intensive integration programme (Dietz 2011). The right to German citizenship was set forth in the 1953 *Bundesvertriebenengesetz*. This migration began in 1950 and by 1987 numbered some 1.4 million, coming mainly from Poland and Romania. Another three million arrived in the period 1988–2015, the overwhelming majority coming from Russia in the 1990s (Oltmer 2016, 65). Added to processing the vast numbers of asylum seekers, these programmes were very costly. Moreover, the German population, especially in former East Germany, regarded these *Aussiedler* not as co-ethnics but as Russian immigrants, despite the symbolic emphasis by the state on their Germanness. And all this happened in a period of far higher unemployment than today (Figure 5). Between 1990 and 1992 alone, 887,000 asylum seekers and 849,000 ethnic Germans made their way to the new Federal Republic.

Reactions to the sudden increase in asylum seekers were mixed. Especially in the former East Germany, but also in the West, right-wing extremist militant groups carried out several violent attacks on homes of asylum seekers (Koehler 2017). In 1991, these attacks totalled 1,483 and reached a staggering

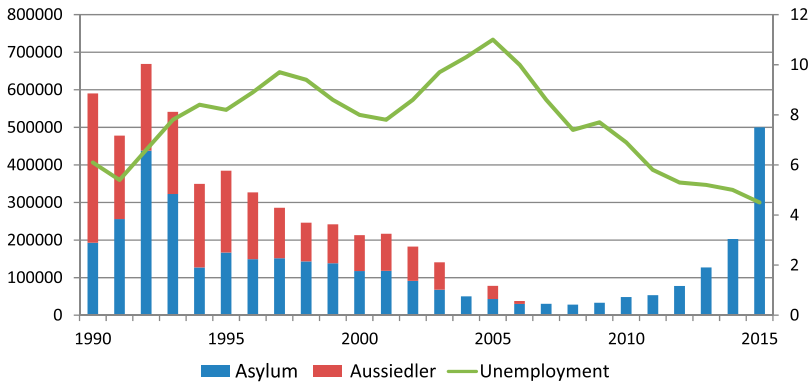


Figure 5. Immigration of asylum seekers and Aussiedler in Germany, in relation to the general unemployment rate (1990–2015). Source: Bade and Oltmer (2011).

2,584 a year later (Larres and Panayi 2014, 206). Politicians, however, averted taking on the migration issue in election campaigns, leaving the arena to neo-Nazi right-wing extremists. This did not prevent German governments from trying to reduce both asylum seekers and *Aussiedler* in number, but these measures were largely devised and applied behind the scenes. In the terms of Goffman (1959): more back stage than front stage.

Conclusion

This paper asks a simple question: why did Western and other European politicians become so alarmed and in some cases downright apocalyptic at the rise of asylum seekers in 2014–16, especially compared to the previous refugee crisis in the 1990s? As I have demonstrated above, the easy answers (unprecedented high numbers, shift to Islamic countries and huge integration problems among previous refugees) will not suffice here. In the 1990s, numbers of asylum seekers were higher in most countries. Moreover, most came from the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. Finally, research shows that considering the bureaucratic obstacles, most refugees and their children have integrated relatively well.

What has changed? This paper argues that in 2014/2015, a “perfect storm” developed, bringing together factors that in the past had been largely unrelated and converged with new ones. Peeling the onion of societal discontent with migrants and refugees has revealed five necessary and sufficient conditions for a full-scale moral panic concerning the arrival and alleged impact of refugees to develop. Such panic has not only carried over to negative media coverage, restrictive policies and hate crimes but has also seriously undermined the principles of the Geneva Refugee Convention of 1951 and its global extension in 1967. Especially, the “Turkey deal” and other outsourcing

proposals by the EU to autocratic regimes in Africa aim to make it virtually impossible for asylum seekers to reach the territory of the EU, thereby de facto eliminating the Convention.

The first two factors originated in the late 1970s, starting with the large-scale immigration from former colonies and family reunification of former guest workers from North Africa and Turkey. This made for general discomfort with immigration and integration (1). As the paper shows, this anxiety was long isolated from the discussion on refugees and was only recently activated as an argument that Europe cannot cope with refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Eritrea.

The second factor concerns the growing inequality and increasing social risks, leading in the long run to a widespread pessimism about the effects of globalization (2). This development is also rooted in the late 1970s/early 1980s, following the global neo-liberal shift. Again, it took a few decades for this trend to influence the refugee debate and became a dominant focus in political discussions only after the global financial crisis of 2008. This turning point was caused not only by rising awareness among unskilled Europeans and Americans that they were losing out to globalization but was also the outcome of political mobilization by left and far-right wing populist parties alike.

These two factors were then joined in the 1990s, especially after the Rushdie affair, by a growing discomfort with Islam. Triggered by the support of migrants from North Africa, Turkey and Pakistan for Khomeini's fatwa and the institutionalization (and hence greater visibility) of Islam in Western Europe, the problematization of Islam (3) started to dominate the public sphere. Especially after 9/11, this led to Islamophobic ideas about "Eurabia" and the alleged Islamization of European societies. Although this conspiracy thinking, which shows remarkable similarities with antisemitism (Renton and Gidley 2017), has no empirical base, the simultaneous growth of orthodox Salafist interpretations of Islam among part of the Islamic migrants and their children, and the radicalization and terrorism by a very small minority, bolstered the persuasiveness of the "Islamization" rhetoric.

This Islamist terrorism (4), starting with 9/11, was a crucial game changer which linked immigration from Islamist countries to possible security threats and associated Muslim migrants in general with terrorism and an alleged refusal to integrate. Initially, refugees remained in the shadow, as numbers dropped dramatically after 2000. By the time numbers started to rise again, after 2011, the association with terrorism was immediately activated, however.

These four factors largely explain the rise of radical right populist parties (5) in Western Europe, which can be considered both a dependent and independent factor. These parties have offered a simple analysis to their voters: rising numbers of asylum seekers and immigration in general endanger the societal

position and culture of the native population, which is neglected by a cosmopolitan (left-wing) elite. The radical right was therefore especially inclined to use immigration as a scapegoat for feelings of insecurity and erosion of the welfare state. This depiction was closely linked to the alleged loss of national sovereignty as a result of the increasing power of the EU.

Finally, this paper argues that the moral panic surrounding refugees in 2014–15 was amplified by long-term effect of the EU visa regime (6), which already was put in place in the early 1990s, but whose effects only became visible with the soaring numbers of asylum seekers after 2011. This sudden rise in the use of smugglers and boats in the Mediterranean, with a strong media appeal, strengthened the idea that one was witnessing an

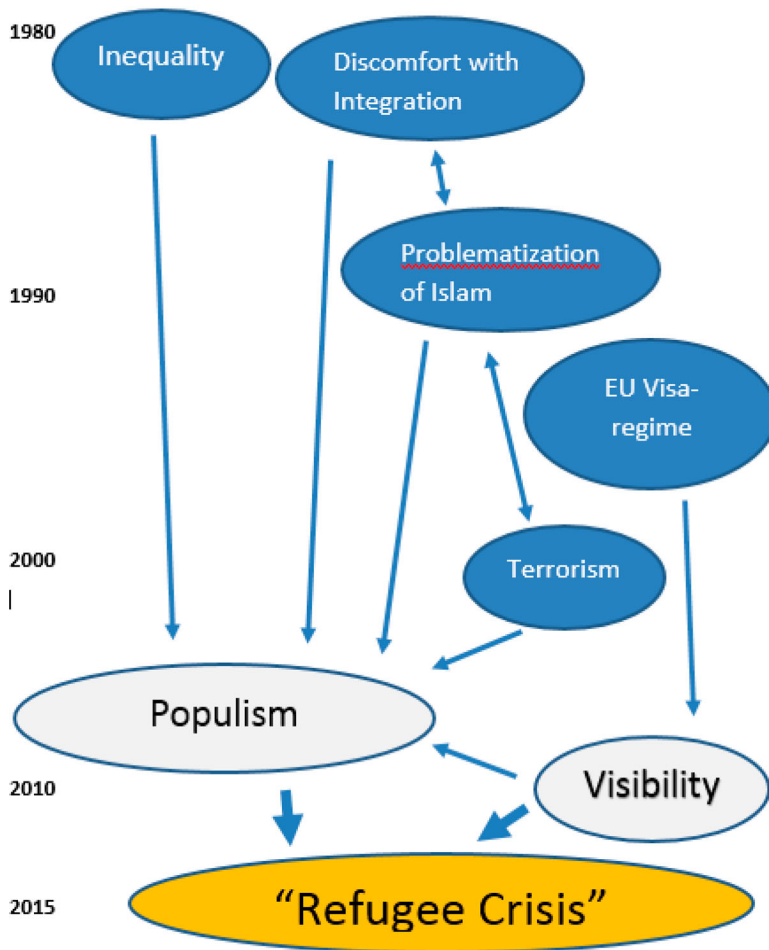


Figure 6. Schematic representation of the main factors that explain the difference in reaction to refugees in the 1990s and the 2010s.

uncontrollable and never-ending flood of people from the Third World, desperately seeking a better life in (Western) Europe. As I have shown, this change in border-crossing practices (i.e. from over land to via the sea) derived from the 1993 EU decision to harmonize external visa policies. The visa requirement for almost all travellers from countries in Asia and Africa before boarding a plane, train or ferry to any EU member states brought about a system of remote control that, combined with stricter border controls of the Eastern land border, created a huge market for smugglers specialized in taking people from the Eastern and Southern shores of the Mediterranean to Greece, Italy and Spain. By the second “refugee crisis”, these effects became visible.

As [Figure 6](#) summarizes, the convergence of these six factors in 2014–15 brought about a “perfect storm” that dramatically changed the context of reception and together form the most important layers of the onion that we have tried to peel in this paper, highlighting that we face not so much a “refugee crisis” as a complex political, cultural and socio-economic crisis.

Notes

1. Halbe Zijlstra in *Algemeen Dagblad*, 10 October 2015 and Rutte’s open letter, published by his political party (VVD) in all Dutch newspapers (<https://vvd.nl/briefvanmark/>) on 22 January 2017.
2. Some 226,000 Hungarians in 1956 and ultimately over 200,000 Czechs in 1968 and subsequent years.
3. Spain, France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and Ireland. I used the numbers published by the UNHCR in their Statistical Yearbooks (starting with UNHCR 2001, which covers the entire period 1990–1999). As the data for Italy were interrupted, I decided to leave this country out.
4. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-93-1039_en.htm?locale=en.
5. This paragraph is based on the ample information provided on border deaths since 1993 by: <http://www.unitedagainstracism.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Listofdeaths22394June15.pdf>.
6. BBR News, 19 June 2000 (‘58 dead in port lorry’) http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/796791.stm.
7. A connection with Syrian refugees was mentioned following the November 2015 attacks in Paris but turned out to concern false identity papers held by two of the perpetrators (M. al-Mahmod and Ahmad al-Mohammed), who pretended to be refugees upon entering the EU at Lesbos on 3 October 2015.
8. This may also influence the rate of mixed marriages (Lucassen and Laarman 2009), which tends to be higher among natives and children of colonial migrants.
9. E.g. Paul Scheffer in the Netherlands, David Goodhart in the United Kingdom, Thilo Sarazin in Germany and Alain Finkielkraut in France.
10. OECD data <https://data.oecd.org/unemp/unemployment-rate.htm>.
11. And other smaller Northwest European countries.

12. Temporary work increased from 15.5 per cent to 20.2 per cent between 2005 and 2015, with the share of self-employed rising from 12.4 per cent to 16.5 per cent in the same period (OECD).
13. In the Netherlands, Pim Fortuyn launched his election campaign only in 2002.

Acknowledgements

This article is the elaboration of my inaugural lecture as Adjunct Professor at Aalborg University on December 2, 2016. Some of the arguments in this paper build on Van Houtum and Lucassen (2016). I am especially grateful to Henk van Houtum, Hein de Haas and Thomas Spijkerboer for their stimulating contributions to the debate on the “refugee crisis” and to Dennie Oude Nijhuis for his advice on the dualization process. Furthermore I thank the participants of the inaugural workshop “Global Labor Migration” at the University of Maryland, 20–21 April 2017 and the comments of anonymous referees of this journal.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

ORCID

Leo Lucassen  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2334-4810>

References

- Alba, R., and N. Foner. 2015. *Strangers No More: Immigration and the Challenges of Integration in North America and Western Europe*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bade, K. J., and J. Oltmer. 2011. “Germany.” In *The Encyclopedia of Migration and Minorities in Europe. From the 17th Century to the Present*, edited by K. J. Bade, P. C. Emmer, L. Lucassen, and J. Oltmer, 65–82. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bakker, E., and M. Singleton. 2016. “Foreign Fighters’ in the Syria and Iraq Conflict: Statistics and Characteristics of a Rapidly Growing Phenomenon.” In *Foreign Fighters Under International Law and Beyond*, edited by A. De Guttry, F. Capone, and C. Paulussen, 9–25. The Hague: T.M.C. Asser Press/Springer.
- Buruma, I., and A. Margalit. 2004. *Occidentalism: A Short History of Anti-Westernism*. New York: Penguin Press.
- Carter, D. 2013. “Navigating Diaspora: The Precarious Depths of the Italian Immigration.” In *African Migrations: Patterns and Perspectives*, edited by A. Kane and T. H. Leedy, 59–77. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Chaliand, G., and A. Blin, eds. 2016. *The History of Terrorism: From Antiquity to ISIS*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Coffé, H. 2013. “Gender, Class and Radical Right Voting.” In *Class Politics and the radical Right*, edited by J. Rydgren, 138–155. London: Routledge.
- Collier, P. 2013. *Exodus: Immigration and Multiculturalism in the 21st Century*. London: Allen Lane.

- Dietz, B. 2011. "Aussiedler/Spätaussiedler in Germany Since 1950." In *The Encyclopedia of Migration and Minorities in Europe. From the 17th Century to the Present*, edited by K. J. Bade, P. C. Emmer, L. Lucassen, and J. Oltmer, 245–250. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Doogan, K. 2009. *Capitalism? The Transformation of Work*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Dourleijn, E., P. Muller, et al. 2011. *Vluchtelingengroepen in Nederland. Over de integratie van Afghaanse, Iraakse, Iraanse en Somalische migranten*. Den Haag: SCP.
- Emmeneger, P., S. Häusermann, B. Palier, and M. Seeleib-Kaiser. eds. 2012. *The Age of Dualization: The Changing Face of Inequality in Deindustrializing Societies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Emon, A. M. 2012. *Religious Pluralism and Islamic Law: Dhimmis and Others in the Empire of Law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Engbersen, G., J. Dagevos, R. P. W. Jennissen, L. Bakker, A. S. Leerkes. 2015. *Geen tijd verliezen: van opvang naar integratie van asielmigranten*. Den Haag: WRR.
- Flahaux, M.-L., and H. de Haas. 2016. "African Migration: Trends, Patterns, Drivers." *Comparative Migration Studies* 4 (1).
- Goffman, E. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday: Garden City.
- Groth, H., and A. Sousa-Poza, eds. 2012. *Population Dynamics in Muslim Countries: Assembling the Jigsaw*. Heidelberg: Springer.
- Guibernau, M. 2007. *The Identity of Nations*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Huntington, S. P. 1996. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Jeandesbosz, J. 2015. "EU Border Control: Violence, Capture and Apparatus." In *The Irregularization of Migration in Contemporary Europe. Detention, Deportation, Drowning*, edited by Y. Jansen, R. Celikates, and J. d. Bloois, 87–102. London: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Jeffers, A. 2012. *Refugees, Theatre and Crisis: Performing Global Identities*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Karimi, S. 2017. *Beyond the Welfare State: Postwar Social Settlement and Public Pension Policy in Canada and Australia*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Kay, D., and R. Miles. 1992. *Refugees or Migrant Workers? European Volunteer Workers in Britain 1946-1951*. London: Routledge.
- Kepel, G. 2002. *Jihad: the Trail of Political Islam*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.
- King, D. 1995. *Actively Seeking Work? The Politics of Unemployment and Welfare Policy in the United States and Great Britain*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- King, R., and N. Mai. 2008. *Out Of Albania: From Crisis Migration to Social Inclusion in Italy*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Koehler, D. 2017. *Right-Wing Terrorism in the 21st Century: The "National Socialist Underground" and the History of Terror From the far-Right in Germany*. New York: Routledge.
- Kushner, T., and K. Knox. 1999. *Refugees in an age of Genocide. Global, National and Local Perspectives During the Twentieth Century*. London: Frank Cass.
- Langford, M. 2017. "The Norwegian Welfare State and Social Rights." In *Social Rights in the Welfare State. Origins and Transformations*, edited by T. Kotkas and K. Veitch, 35–57. London: Routledge.
- Larres, K., and P. Panayi. 2014. *The Federal Republic of Germany Since 1949. Politics, Society and Economy Before and After Unification*. London: Routledge.
- Last, T., G. Mirto, I. Urquijo, J. Harte, N. Bami, M. P. Pérez, F. M. Delgado, et al. 2017. "Deaths at the Borders Database: Evidence of Deceased Migrants. Bodies Found

- Along the Southern External Borders of the European Union." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 43: 693–712.
- Last, T., and T. Spijkerboer. 2014. "Tracking Deaths in the Mediterranean." In *Fatal Journeys. Tracking Lives Lost During Migration*, edited by T. Brian and F. Laczko, 85–106. Geneva: IOM.
- Loescher, G. 1993. *Beyond Charity: International Cooperation and the Global Refugee Crisis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993.
- Lucassen, L. 2005. *The Immigrant Threat. The Integration of Old and New Migrants in Western Europe Since 1850*. Chicago: Illinois University Press.
- Lucassen, L., and C. Laarman. 2009. "Immigration, Inter-marriage and the Changing Face of Europe in the Post war Period." *The History of the Family* 14 (1): 52–68.
- Lucassen, L., and J. Lucassen. 2015. "The Strange Death of Dutch Tolerance: The Timing and Nature of the Pessimist Turn in the Dutch Migration Debate." *The Journal of Modern History* 87 (1): 72–101.
- Maliepaard, M., B. Witkamp, and R. Jennissen, eds. 2017. *Een kwestie van tijd? De integratie van asielmigranten: een cohortonderzoek*. The Hague: WODC.
- McKeown, A. 2008. *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Messina, A. 2007. *The Logics and Politics of Post-WWII Migration to Western Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mewes, J., and S. Mau. 2012. "Unravelling Working-Class Welfare Chauvinism. Contested Welfare States." In *Welfare Attitudes in Europe and Beyond*, edited by S. Svallfors, 119–157. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Mockaitis, Th. R. 2008. *The "New" Terrorism: Myths and Reality*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Molenaar, F., and F. El Kamouni-Janssen. 2017. *Turning the Tide. The Politics of Irregular Migration in the Sahel and Libya*. The Hague: Clingendael Institute, CRU Report.
- Musterd, S. 2011. "The Impact of Immigrants' Segregation and Concentration on Social Integration in Selected European Contexts." *Documents D'Anàlisi Geogràfica* 57 (3): 359–380.
- Nance, M. 2016. *Defeating ISIS: Who They are, How They Fight, What They Believe*. New York: Skyhorse.
- Norris, P. 2005. *Radical Right: Voters and Parties in the Electoral Market*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Oltmer, J. 2016. *Migration vom 19. bis zum 21. Jahrhundert*. Oldenburg: De Gruyter.
- Ong, C. B. 2014. "Ethnic Segregation in Housing, Schools, and Neighbourhoods in the Netherlands." *PhD thesis*, Maastricht.
- Palier, B. 2010. "The Long Conservative Corporatist Road to Welfare Reforms." In *A Long Goodbye to Bismarck? The Politics of Welfare Reform in Continental Europe*, edited by B. Palier, 333–388. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Panican, A., and R. Ulmestig. 2016. "Social Rights in the Shadow of Poor Relief – Social Assistance in the Universal Swedish Welfare State." *Citizenship Studies* 20 (3-4): 475–489.
- Piore, M. J. 1979. *Birds of Passage. Migrant Labor and Industrial Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Renton, J., and B. Gidley, eds. 2017. *Antisemitism and Islamophobia in Europe. A Shared Story?* London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Schuster, L. 2003. *The Use and Abuse of Political Asylum in Britain and Germany*. London: Frank Cass.

- Seymour, R. 2012. "We are All Precarious – On the Concept of the 'Precariat' and Its Misuses." http://www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article_comments/we_are_all_precarious_on_the_concept_of_the_precariat_and_its_misuses.
- Soufan, A., and D. Schoenfeld. 2016. "Regional Hotbeds as Drivers of Radicalization." In *Jihadist Hotbeds. Understanding Local Radicalization Processes*, edited by A. Varvelli, 15–38. Milano: ISPI.
- Standing, G. 2011. *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. Basingstoke: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Streeck, W. 2008. *Reforming Capitalism. Institutional Change in the German Political Economy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Taylor-Gooby, P. 2008. "The New Welfare Settlement in Europe." *European Societies* 10 (1): 3–24.
- Ten Doesschate, J. W. 2011. "Hungarian Refugees in Europe Since 1956." In *The Encyclopedia of European Migration and Minorities. From the Seventeenth Century to the Present*, edited by K. J. Bade, P. C. Emmer, L. Lucassen, and J. Oltmer, 482–483. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Thelen, K. 2014. *Varieties of Liberalization and the New Politics of Social Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Touwen, J. 2014. *Coordination in Transition. The Netherlands and the World Economy, 1950-2010*. Leiden: Brill.
- Van der Veen, R., M. Yerkes, and P. Achterberg. eds. 2012. *The Transformation of Solidarity: Changing Risks and the Future of the Welfare State*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Van der Veen, R., and M. Yerkes. 2012. "Towards a New Welfare Settlement? The Transformation of Welfare State Solidarity." In *The Transformation of Solidarity: Changing Risks and the Future of the Welfare State*, edited by R. v. d. Veen, M. Yerkes, and P. Achterberg, 191–206. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Van Houtum, H., and L. Lucassen. 2016. *Voorbij Fort Europa. Een Nieuwe Visie op Migratie*. Amsterdam: Atlas Contact.
- Van Reekum, R. 2016. "Raising the Question: Articulating the Dutch Identity Crisis Through Public Debate." *Nations and Nationalism* 22 (3): 561–580.
- Vossen, K. 2016. "The Dutch Whistleblower: Geert Wilders as a Figurehead of International Anti-Islam Alarmism." In *L'Extrême Droite en Europe*, edited by J. Jamin, 65–78. Brussels: Bruylant.
- Wacquant, L. 2008. *Urban Outcasts: a Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Wadsworth, J. 2015. *Immigration and the UK Labour Market*. London: Centre for Economic Performance, LSE.
- Werbner, P. 2013. "Folk Devils and Racist Imaginaries in a Global Prism: Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism in the Twenty-first Century." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36 (3): 450–446.
- Ye'or, B. 1985. *The Dhimmi: Jews & Christians Under Islam*. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.
- Ye'or, B. 2011. *Europe, Globalization, and the Coming of the Universal Caliphate*. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.
- Zolberg, A. 2006. *A Nation by Design. Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press and Russell Sage Foundation.