Coherent Selves, Viable States: Eastern Europe and the “Migration/Refugee Crisis”¹

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Abstract: This essay argues that what is at stake in arguments about the difference between Eastern and Western Europe in the context of migration and asylum politics is the definition of a politically and ethically acceptable threshold of “too many”, which takes on concrete contours in relation to historically formed understandings of coherent selves and viable polities. The argument derives from placing analysis of the alleged political and ethical failures of Eastern Europe alongside those limits of refugee/migrant intake that are considered politically legitimate and ethically justifiable from the mainstream liberal democratic perspective. The essay proposes that in order to understand the European political landscape in relation to migration it is necessary to undertake relational analysis of

¹ Some of the ideas in this essay are drawn from my book *School of Europeanness: Tolerance and Other Lessons in Political Liberalism in Latvia*, forthcoming with Cornell University Press.

the different configurations of the Europe-wide tension between inclusion and exclusion, as well as analysis of the modes of power that differentiate between these configurations of inclusion and exclusion on moral grounds.

Europe (un)bound

Migration, some argue, is today what social revolutions were during the nineteenth century.² Increasing numbers of people around the world have been displaced by extractive or financial forms of capitalism and associated violence. Saskia Sassen argues, for example, that contemporary forms of capitalism work not through incorporation but through expulsion, namely more and more people are expelled from the labor market, citizenship, social security, or from their homes.³ No longer surplus labor, these are now surplus people—not needed by capital and also abandoned by the governmental state.⁴ Many remain immobilized, while others set on the road, guided by imaginaries of places, such as

² Iyaylo Ditchchev, “Borders are back in fashion”, *Eurozine*, February 12, 2016, accessed July 15, 2016, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2016-02-12-ditchchev-en.html>. See also Ivan Krastev’s contribution in this issue.

³ Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, Mass., 2014).

⁴ Tanya Murray Li, “To Make Live or Let Die? Rural Dispossession and the Protection of Surplus Populations”, *Antipode* S1 (2009): 66-93.

Europe, where livable life seems possible.⁵ Looking from a Eurocentric perspective, this has created a widely shared sense that the world has come unbound.

However, the world is neither bound nor unbound. It is unevenly bound and unbound, with different consequences for different people. One new inflection in the current dynamics of bounding and unbounding is that those who used to benefit from the world's unboundedness are beginning to feel disadvantaged by it. For example, there is a proliferation of subjects who both think of themselves as European and feel marginalized or threatened by the world's unboundedness and the associated movement of people. Some worry about culturally and racially defined communities and living spaces, while others are concerned about liberal freedoms, jobs, or public and private safety. Their grievances are difficult to reconcile with those of the people on the move. The "no borders" argument that has been previously used by leftist scholars and activists as a critical heuristic device for pointing to the ethical and political limits of bounded selves and polities seems to increasing numbers of Europeans, scholars and laypersons alike, to misunderstand the current historical moment, which many see as requiring more rather than less borders.⁶

⁵ Hans Lucht, *Darkness Before Daybreak: African Migrants Living on the Margins in Southern Italy* (Berkeley, 2010).

⁶ For an example of the "no borders" argument, see Bridget Anderson, Nandita Sharma & Cynthia Wright, "Editorial: Why No Borders?", *Canada's Journal on Refugees* 2 (2009): 5-18. For an argument that the "no borders" argument is a heuristic device, see Harald Bauder, "Open Borders: A Utopia?", *Justice Spatiale – Spatial Justice*, 2012/2013, accessed July 15, 2-16, <http://www.jssj.org/article/un-monde-sans-frontieres/>. For a recounting of Régis Debray's argument in defense of borders, see Tom Nairn, "Frontiers: A re-evaluation",

Many academics will agree that the uneven dynamics of boundedness and unboundedness are to be studied as relational, that is, as mutually constitutive, and historically situated.⁷ But how are they to be engaged ethically and politically? Indeed, the relationship between boundedness and unboundedness is not just a matter of scholarly interest. In liberal democratic contexts, the ways in which people understand and relate to boundedness and unboundedness, openness and closure, inclusion and exclusion, have emerged as important markers of political and ethical dispositions of individuals and polities. This is especially so in Europe, where arguments about migration and asylum politics have drawn lines between a liberal and normative vision of Europe as a moral community that embraces the values of humanitarianism, human rights, inclusion, and solidarity and people and places that do not live up to this ideal. For example, due to the politicians' and publics' reluctance to accept refugees in the midst of "Europe's migrant/refugee crisis", Eastern Europe has once again emerged as an ideal typical not-yet-European and illiberal subject mired in racialized paranoia about foreigners, exaggerated concerns about self-determination and self-preservation, and timeworn claims of historical

Open Democracy, March 12, 2013, accessed July 20, 2016, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/tom-nairn/frontiers-re-evaluation>. For an example of an argument in favor of limiting migration, see Paul Collier. *Exodus: How Migration is Changing Our World*, (Oxford: 2013).

⁷ For an explanation of the analytical of relationality, see David Goldberg, "Racial comparisons, relational racisms: some thoughts on method", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 7 (2009): 1271-1282. See also Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: 2005).

suffering.⁸ In an Oxford seminar that I attended in the spring of 2016, one political scientist explained this by saying that after the collapse of socialism Eastern Europe did not receive

⁸ It should be noted that the nature of the crisis has been highly contested. Some argue that it is a humanitarian crisis, others that it is a crisis of Europe. It is also politically consequential whether one uses the term “migrants” or “refugees”, for the European governments’ openness to accepting people crucially depends on a strict separation of deserving refugees from undeserving migrants. For interventions that emphasize Eastern Europe’s moral and political failures in the midst of crisis, see Rick Lyman, “Eastern block’s resistance to refugees highlights Europe’s cultural and political divisions”, *The New York Times*. September 12, 2015, accessed October 15, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/13/world/europe/eastern-europe-migrant-refugee-crisis.html>; Jan T. Gross, “Eastern Europe’s Crisis of Shame”, *Project Syndicate*. September 16, 2015, accessed October 15, 2015, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/eastern-europe-refugee-crisis-xenophobia-by-jan-gross-2015-09?barrier=true>; Michal Simecka & Benjamin Tallis, “Fighting the wrong battle: A crisis of liberal democracy, not migration”, *Open Democracy*, September 16, 2015, accessed October 15, 2015, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/michal-simecka-benjamin-tallis/fighting-wrong-battle-central-europe%E2%80%99s-crisis-is-o>; Jacques Rupnik, “The Other Europe”, *Eurozine*. September 16, 2015, accessed October 15, 2015, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2015-09-11-rupnik-en.html>; Ivan Krastev, “Eastern Europe’s Compassion Deficit”, *The New York Times*, September 8, 2015, accessed October 15, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/09/opinion/eastern-europes-compassion-deficit-refugees-migrants.html?_r=0; Rayan Sabet-Parry & Karl Ritter, “Scant sympathy for

proper lessons in political liberalism, while another warned that the dangerous Eastern European nationalisms are now spreading all throughout Europe. These liberal intellectuals excluded Eastern Europe from proper Europeanness in the name of the virtue of inclusion, as well as depicted Eastern Europeans as home-grown barbarians threatening to contaminate the European moral community. Thus, despite complex and contentious debates on the ground, the politicized and moralized distinction between East and West that has long shaped perceptions about Eastern Europe continues to be a convenient discursive tool for making sense of public and political reactions to the “refugee/migrant

refugees in Europe’s ex-communist East”, *The Business Insider*, September 11, 2015, accessed October 15, 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/ap-scant-sympathy-for-refugees-in-europes-ex-communist-east-2015-9?IR=T>; Paul Hockenos, “The Stunning Hypocrisy of Mitteleuropa”, *Foreign Policy*, September 12, 2015, accessed October 15, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/09/10/the-stunning-hypocrisy-of-mitteleuropa-refugees-poland-hungary-czech-republic/>; Gustav Gressel, “Understanding Eastern European attitudes on refugees”, *European Council on Foreign Relations*. September 11, 2015; accessed October 15, 2015, http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_understanding_eastern_european_attitudes_on_refugees4019; Gerard Roland, Gerard “Why the rift between Eastern and Western Europe on the refugee crisis?”, *The Berkeley Blog*, September 9, 2015, accessed October 15, 2015, <http://blogs.berkeley.edu/2015/09/09/why-the-rift-between-eastern-and-western-europe-on-the-refugee-crisis-2/>.

crisis” in Eastern European member states of the European Union.⁹ Europe remains a normative—and perhaps wishful—trope that liberal intellectuals use to orient themselves in an unfolding situation.

Criticism of the conduct of Eastern European polities was also embraced by the liberally inclined amidst the barbarians.¹⁰ In the context of “Europe’s refugee/migrant crisis”, many Eastern European intellectuals tried to shame their compatriots into moral maturity and, by extension, agreeable politics. This suggests that Eastern Europe did receive

⁹ For analysis of Enlightenment perceptions about Eastern Europe, see Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of Enlightenment* (Stanford: 1994). See also Tomasz Zarycki, *Ideologies of Eastness in Central and Eastern Europe* (London, 2014).

¹⁰ For examples from Latvia, see Nikolā Ozano, “Ārzemju skatītāja vēstule slavenam režisoram”, *Satori*, December 16, 2015, accessed January 15, 2016, http://www.satori.lv/raksts/10483/Arzemju_skatitaja_vestule_slavenam_rezisoram; Dmitrijs Golubevs, “Bēgļu jautājums: Satversmes preambula un Latvijas vērtības”, *Ir*, August 21, 2015, accessed October 15, 2015, <http://www.ir.lv:889/blogi/politika/beglu-jautajums-satversmes-preambula-un-latvijas-vertibas>; Ilmārs Šlāpins, “Man arī bēgļi nepatīk”, *Satori*, September 21, 2015, accessed October 15, 2015, http://www.satori.lv/raksts/9983/Ilmars_Slapins/Man_ari_begli_nepatik; Andris Saulītis, “Savējie bēgļi”, *Satori*, September 7, 2015, accessed October 15, 2015, http://satori.lv/raksts/9889/Andris_Saulitis/Savejie_begli; Andris Šuvajevs, “Pieraksti par bēgļiem”, *Delfi*, August 5, 2015, accessed October 15, 2015, <http://www.delfi.lv/news/comment/comment/andris-suvajevs-pieraksti-par-begliem-2.d?id=46298381>.

lessons in political liberalism, and that these lessons were powerful tools of subjectivation.¹¹

They produced individuals who sincerely live the values of openness and inclusion and who experience their compatriots' striving for boundedness as politically maddening, personally painful, and all around embarrassing.

In what follows, I interrogate the limits of this moral stance—within and without Eastern Europe—in relation to what I see as the constitutive tension of Europe, namely the need for bounded selves and polities, on the one hand, and the imperative to profess values of inclusion and openness, on the other.

Coherent Selves, Viable States

Eastern Europe has long occupied the position of Europe's internal other.¹² Orientalizing discourses are thus readily available to make sense of the conduct of Eastern European politicians and people in relation to migrants and refugees. These discourses posit the Eastern European present as Europe's past, namely as a striving for boundedness that the civilized Europe has overcome by embracing the values of inclusion and openness. However, such a morally infused spatial mapping of social norms and political virtues overlooks the fact that being European means both to be bounded, that is, to have a coherent sense of

¹¹ For an extended analysis, Dzenovska, *School of Europeanness*.

¹² Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*; Zarycki, *Ideologies of Eastness*; Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford, 1997).

self as distinct from others, and to continuously strive to overcome that boundedness and come to inhabit the ideal citizen-subject.¹³

This foundational tension was built into Eastern European polities created after the crumbling of empires in the beginning of the 20th century. Culturally and historically defined peoples were assigned to territories, rendering some “state people” and others “national minorities”, while constructing the Eastern European states themselves as “national states with minority problems” that required supervision from the League of Nations.¹⁴ Simultaneously with creating the minority problem with which Eastern European states would have to grapple for most of their existence, post-World War I statecraft also “condemned” Eastern European states to a continuous struggle to ensure that they had nations to legitimate the states.¹⁵

¹³ Boundary-thinking may not be universal, as argued by Fredrik Barth, but it is a feature of European understandings of self and modes of organizing collective life, which Barth links to the institution of private property. See Fredrik Barth “Boundaries and Connections”, in *Signifying Identities: Anthropological Perspectives on Boundaries and Contested Values*, ed. Anthony Cohen, (London, 2000), 17-36; see also Bridget Anderson, *Us and Them: The Dangerous Politics of Immigration Control* (Oxford, 2013).

¹⁴ Jane Cowan, “The Supervised State”, *Identities*, 5 (2007): 545-578; Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, 1951); Dzenovska, *School of Europeanness*.

¹⁵ Post-World War I statecraft in Eastern Europe was, of course, also shaped by nationalist and nation-building efforts that began in the 19th century. But, as in the case of Latvia, not all nation-builders embraced aspirations for political self-determination. In retrospect, however, the birth of the nation-state after World War I is seen as realization of the will of

Thus, in Eastern European political imaginary, a viable state requires the existence of a nation in the name of which the state is established. Moreover, the actual or perceived decline of the nation-state amounts to an existential threat to individuals who have come to see themselves as thoroughly national, that is, as individuals whose sense of self is fundamentally shaped by membership in a national collectivity. For example, as Vieda Skultāns has shown in the case of Latvia, many people's understandings of themselves as individuals are inseparable from their sense of membership in a culturally defined nation.¹⁶ Rather than being a feature of illiberal Eastern European nationalisms, this is a result of European statecraft, which Eastern European states and the international community only too readily reproduced after the collapse of socialism—for example, in the form of the Dayton agreement or through handling of the “minority problem”.¹⁷

The political juxtaposition between illiberal Eastern Europe and liberal Western Europe that also aspires to be an analytical distinction held up for some time following the collapse of socialism, but it is becoming impossible to maintain in the context of the shifting

the people rather than a historical contingency. In this brief essay, my aim is to point to the effects of international statecraft on political imaginary in Eastern Europe.

¹⁶ Vieda Skultāns, “Looking for a Subject: Latvian Memory and Narrative”, In *Empathy and Healing: Essays in Medical and Narrative Anthropology*, (Oxford, 2007), 175-189.

¹⁷ Andrew Gilbert & Jasmin Mujanovic, “Dayton at twenty: towards new politics in Bosnia-Herzegovina”, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 4 (2015): 605-610; Gregory Feldman, “Estranged States: Diplomacy and the Containment of National Minorities in Europe”, *Anthropological Theory* 3 (2005): 219-245; Dzenovska, *School of Europeanness*.

perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of migration. Today, it is not only illiberal individuals or polities that feel threatened, but also liberal individuals and polities whose tolerance and capacity to govern are thought to be running into limits. I suggest that a different analytical and political lens is therefore needed to understand the present. It is necessary to undertake relational analysis of the multiple configurations of the Europe-wide tension between inclusion and exclusion, the existential concerns that emerge in relation to this tension, and the ethical and political dilemmas they generate. There also needs to be sustained analysis of the modes of power that differentiate between multiple configurations of inclusion and exclusion on moral grounds.

The problem of “too many”

To that end, I wish to turn attention from the political and ethical failures of Eastern Europe to limits to refugee and/or migrant intake that are considered politically legitimate and ethically justifiable from the mainstream liberal democratic perspective. For example, after an initial period of processing a record number of asylum claims, Sweden announced that its ability to cope with refugees has reached a limit: there was lack of housing, and the system could not cope with processing so many refugees.¹⁸ As a result, Sweden introduced

¹⁸ Patrick Kingsley, “Sweden calls on army to help manage the refugee crisis”, *The Guardian*, November 10, 2015, accessed December 15, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/10/sweden-calls-on-army-to-help-manage-refugee-crisis>

temporary border controls with Denmark.¹⁹ The Swedish limits were thought to be legitimate, because they were not ideological, but material. They were limits of infrastructure. The fact that the Swedish Deputy Prime Minister Åsa Romson cried when making the announcement boosted the legitimacy of the decision, suggesting that it was a pragmatic decision that went against the political virtues of Swedish society.²⁰ In other words, not only were the Swedish state's reasons for closing borders legitimate – the state ran out of capacity to govern, but one of its leaders also exhibited an ideal ethical disposition by experiencing affective unsettlement as a result of having to take such a decision. Sweden thus showed that the ideal European ethical subject prevails despite various indications that, as Allan Pred has noted, there is racism “even in Sweden”.²¹

The Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán was, of course, the exact opposite. Not only did he exhibit the wrong kind of arguments and conduct, namely advocating for exclusionary politics based on racialized notions of Europeanness and exhibiting solidarity with co-nationals rather than the suffering humanity or other European Union member states, but he also did not seem to be ethically conflicted about it. Whereas Orbán focused

¹⁹ “Migrant crisis: Sweden border checks come into force”, *BBC*, January 4, 2016, accessed February 10, 2016, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-35218921>

²⁰ Heather Saul, “Refugee crisis: Sweden’s deputy Prime Minister Asa Romson cries as she announces asylum policy U-turn”, *The Independent*, November 26, 2015, accessed February 10, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/refugee-crisis-sweden-deputy-prime-minister-cries-as-she-announces-u-turn-on-asylum-policy-a6749531.html>

²¹ Allan Pred, *Even in Sweden: Racisms, Racialized Spaces, and Popular Geographical Imagination*, (Berkeley, 2000).

on the content of the nation in his justification of the closure of borders, Romson focused on infrastructure. Romson exhibited commitment to humanism and universal citizenship, but was forced to recognize the limits of a territorially delimited governing entity's capacity to govern. Of course, Orbán's and Romson's public speeches and ethical performances may not necessarily correspond to the effects produced by the various micro-practices through which both the Swedish and the Hungarian states govern. When analyzed more closely, those might actually produce similar effects, such as denial of entry and/or refugee status to the same racialized subjects. As many scholars have shown, categories or logics of exclusion come to be mapped onto each other, reference each other and, in practice, tend to produce the same effects.²²

I have used Orbán's and Romson's public conduct here to illustrate two ideal-typical cases. Many other variations exist—for example, UKIP's pro-Brexit poster suggesting that the United Kingdom has reached a “breaking point”, or the more-subtle arguments that have appeared in German public discourse about Angela Merkel having single-handedly taken in too many migrants and refugees.²³ Moreover, within the differentiated space of Europe, it is not only Syrian refugees or migrants from sub-Saharan Africa that present the threat of “too many”, but also Eastern Europeans. For example, a local man in Boston,

²² Amade M'charek, Katharina Schramm & David Skinner, “Topologies of Race: Doing territory, population and identity in Europe”, *Science, Technology and Human Values* X (2013): 1-20.

²³ Douglas Carswell, “Farage's ‘breaking point’ posters were indefensible—but I am glad we voted leave”, *The Guardian*, June 27, 2016, accessed June 27, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/27/britain-eu-vote-leave-ukip>

Lincolnshire in the United Kingdom told me that he had nothing against post-EU accession migrants from Eastern Europe, but that “there were simply too many of them”.²⁴ For him, it was not necessarily about infrastructure, though I did hear concerns about lack of doctors and nurses in Boston’s medical establishments, but rather about daily life. He said that he could no longer go to the shop in the morning, greet someone by saying “Good morning!”, and expect to be greeted back in English. I heard a resonant argument from a Latvian woman living in Boston who was concerned about tensions between locals and newcomers. “There are too many of us”, she said. On the basis of this perception of “too many”, Boston’s residents overwhelmingly voted to leave the European Union in the referendum held on June 23, 2016.

The argument of “too many” assumes that a baseline form of life or quality of life must be retained, whether for locals, incomers, or both. Some “too many” arguments can and do get easily dismissed as reactionary from within the liberal political frame. More often than not, those are the ones articulated through the trope of the cultural nation or put forth by local communities, for they are thought to be manifestations of fear, prejudice, and a closed view of the world. The kinds of “too many” arguments that are taken seriously by mainstream liberal politics pertain to the state’s capacity to govern, such as the lack of infrastructure faced by Sweden. But, once again, the juxtaposition between content and infrastructure as the basis for determining the threshold of “too many” overlooks that both

²⁴ Following European Union enlargement in 2004, many citizens of the new member states moved to live and work in older member states, especially those, such as the United Kingdom, Ireland and Sweden, that did not institute a seven-year transitional ban on freedom of movement. Many UK citizens consider that the migration flow was too large.

are linked with substantive understandings of coherent selves and viable polities that come into focus through arguments about conduct.

Conduct and the threshold of “too many”

On the day after the Brexit referendum, I was talking to two Latvian women on the street in Boston, Lincolnshire, trying to get their reactions to the results, when we were startled by a loud reproach in Latvian: “Why are you standing here like this, as if you have just come out of a swamp? Don’t you know how to behave?” After being momentarily immobilized by the sweet sense of home, I caught up with the woman who had reprimanded us and apologized to her for blocking the way. She eventually overcame her discontent and kindly explained to me that “this is why the locals don’t like us, we don’t know how to behave.”

Other Latvia’s citizens living in Boston also link the locals’ dislike of them to public conduct. For example, Yuri, a Russian-speaking man living in Boston, Lincolnshire described himself and his mother’s side of the family, who had arrived in Latvia from Belarus after World War II, as “migrants in two generations” for whom “migration is in the blood”. Yuri said that he sometimes feels negative attitudes from the English, but that he understands them. He, too, is annoyed seeing drunk migrants speaking Russian, spitting on the street, and disturbing life. It’s embarrassing. Once Yuri was sitting with his friend in a bar and speaking English. An English woman had approached them and asked them where they were from. Having found out that they were from Latvia (they spoke English, because one of them did not speak very good Russian, while the other did not speak very good Latvian), she was very pleased and commended them for speaking English, for integrating into the local community. Yuri recalls one thing in particular that the English woman had said: “You can pick up and leave, go back to your country, if things here are not good, but we don’t have

anywhere else to go.” And Yuri understands that. He thinks the incomers should abide by the local customs. It is noteworthy that in his story about proper migrant conduct Yuri invoked his mother’s generation who are often conceived as migrants in Latvia precisely because of perceived failures of conduct, that is, lack of Latvian language skills.²⁵

Conduct is important not only for those concerned with language, but also for those concerned with liberal freedoms and human rights, as is evident from the case of the Danish cartoon scandal in 2005, the criticism of Syrian refugees on the Balkan route for refusing useless items, leaving behind litter and having iPhones, public outrage at the sexual assaults on women on New Year’s eve in front of the Cologne train station, and concerns with the recent attacks in France and Germany.²⁶ While liberally inclined politicians and media labor

²⁵ Dzenovska, *School of Europeanness*.

²⁶ In 2005, the Danish paper *Jyllands-Posten* published cartoons about Muhammad under the title of “The Face of Muhammad”. This triggered protests among Denmark’s Muslims, who considered the cartoons a blasphemy. The protests became international in 2006. The editor of the paper justified the decision to publish these cartoons by invoking the right to free speech, which, he thought, was becoming endangered. For analysis of the Danish cartoon scandal, see Saba Mahmood, “Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide?”, *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2009): 836-862 and Webb Keane, “Freedom and Blasphemy: On Indonesian Press Bans and Danish Cartoons”, *Public Culture* 1 (2009): 47-76. For criticism of migrant conduct on the Balkan route, see BBC, “The refugees telling other refugees to stop dropping rubbish”, *BBC*, September 9, 2015, accessed January 2, 2017, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-trending-34199602>. For a report on the cologne

to argue that it is individuals rather than refugees or migrants at large that are to blame for these crimes and incidents, there nevertheless is a pervasive public sense that there are just “too many of them”, and that it is this substantive presence that creates the conditions for crimes and incidents.²⁷

At the foundation of these concerns—from those about language in the UK or Latvia to those about public conduct of refugees in Germany—is the tension between the value of openness and the need to maintain coherent selves and, by extension, viable polities. The question, therefore, is not who is compassionate and who is not, or who is tolerant and who is not, but rather what kind of practices and attitudes are seen as consequential for particular understandings of the self and the polity and what kind are not? Who gets to decide where the European threshold of tolerance lies? Must the self be radically reconfigured in the name of openness and inclusion or is it permissible to protect some constitutive elements of the self as an ethically, culturally, and historically emplaced being? Are all claims to an ethical or historical core politically and morally suspect? In liberal theories of tolerance, the right to not lose oneself is granted to the tolerant, who must preserve the tolerant core of society and thus not tolerate intolerance that threatens it.²⁸ From the liberal democratic perspective, the same right is not granted to a society that

attacks, see BBC, “Cologne sex attacks: Woman describe “terrible” assaults”, *BBC*, January 7, 2016, accessed January 8, 2016, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-35250903>.

²⁷ For example, Laila Lalami, “Who is to blame for the Cologne sex attacks?”, *The Nation*, March 28-April 4, 2016, accessed June 15, 2016, <https://www.thenation.com/article/who-is-to-blame-for-the-cologne-sex-attacks/>

²⁸ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Princeton, 2013 [1945]).

wishes to protect a core that is articulated as cultural and historical rather than liberal and therefore morally right.

Conclusion

I suggest that what is at stake in arguments about the difference between Eastern and Western Europe in the context of Europe's refugee/migrant crisis is the definition of a politically and ethically acceptable threshold of "too many", which takes on concrete contours in relation to historically formed understandings of coherent selves and viable polities. These, in turn, are variations of the constitutive tension of Europe, namely the tension between the need for existential and political boundedness, on the one hand, and the values of openness and inclusion, on the other.

Within that and for historical reasons, some polities are more concerned with their legitimacy than others. For Eastern European peoples and states, the sense of coherent selves and viable polities is shaped by cultural understandings of the nation as a historical and linguistically defined community. To be sure, there are many people within Latvia and other Eastern European polities, who contest the hegemony of bounded understandings of selves and polities and who criticize too close of an identification between individuals, nations, and states. However, given the hegemony of nationalism and the small numbers of refugees and migrants in Eastern European societies, these liberal or cosmopolitan Eastern Europeans are not forced to define their own threshold of "too many". Instead, they

criticize and shame their compatriots, often comparing them unfavorably to Europe, where “goodness” resides.²⁹

Despite the fact that many Eastern European liberals invoke Western Europe as a model to be emulated, the juxtaposition between Eastern Europe and Western Europe in the context of “refugee/migration crisis”, whereby one is exemplary of exclusionary ethics and politics and the other of inclusionary ethics and politics, is false and does not hold up. Moreover, it obscures the fact that all European states and societies are grappling with the threshold of “too many” in relation to historically constituted polities. That is, all European states are engaged in categorization of people for the purposes of including some and excluding the rest. It is this problem that, in my view, should be analyzed relationally, as well as engaged politically and ethically. It is much more difficult to passionately argue against a particular modality of exclusion when one realizes that the alternatives, too, demand establishing a boundary between inclusion and exclusion, as well as sorting people in ways that are not less, but rather differently violent.

²⁹ Joseph Böröcz, “Goodness is Elsewhere: The Rule of European Difference”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 1 (2006): 110-137; see also Dzenovska, *School of Europeanness*.