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***From “united in exploitation”  
to “united in diversity”:  
postcolonial perspectives regarding  
Europe’s economic migration fluxes***

***Abstract***

The current paper engages with the topic and patterns of migration flows to Europe from a historically driven critical perspective. The research is focused primarily on examining the intentions of European States and their immigration policies, either liberal or restrictive, throughout the ages across the pan-European area. The scope of the research is limited to historical migration in Europe, and we employ a retrospective approach to analyse it critically. It is done through the lens of the postcolonial school of thought, as it proves to be the most efficient when explaining fluctuations and

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modulations recorded. These scholars underlined varying push and pull factors that led to migration toward Europe, especially during modern times. Furthermore, we interpret and overlook how the “united in diversity” desiderates are reflected across the EU’s current undertakings, as we employ a critical approach to interpret recent evolutions and draw up prospective avenues holistically. In conclusion, we observe repeating patterns of exploitative systems in the European view of migration, especially toward worker migrants. Hence, we assert that colonial reminiscences remain across some sectorial levels. We advocate that collective intervention is required to eradicate these postcolonial approaches.

**Keywords:** labour market, European affairs, Economic migration, Third World development, human mobility

## Introduction

Nowadays, most of us consider that exploitation, from local communities all the way to global networks, represents elements no longer present in our societal assemblage. Nevertheless, suppose we observe contemporary migratory and diasporic movements, especially across the pan-European territories. In such a case, we can note several indicators that would fit exploitation’s theoretical description, particularly, amongst those considered economically driven immigrants. Furthermore, a glance into current narratives, from the academic or political realms to social media, showcases a tendency to put the latter group into a discourse-driven shadowing by framing such movements as voluntary and, therefore, not exploitative (Sa’di, 2021; Paré, 2022). Whereas we can admit that such movements have cyclically occurred throughout history and represent a rather natural economic phenomenon, we must also note how current-day migration towards Europe, often occurring from lesser-developed countries towards their more advanced peers, or more explicitly, from the Third World periphery to the First World leading powers, is nuanced in the neo-colonialist literature as the coming of *Others* in the group imagery (Junuzi, 2019). The aspect which, if left unhindered and at present rates, can contextualise a suite of challenges both for the host entities and the participants in this dynamic. Hence, this paper seeks to explore, through the postcolonial prism, whether new formats of exploitation might still be present in the guise of what is called voluntary economic immigration, especially, by looking at current frameworks and tendencies found across the Old Continent. Furthermore, we can assume that a relatively limited number of dedicated global policies, norms, or institutions specialised in eradicating root factors can contribute to these immigration flows from the Third to First World countries (Zolberg, 2019; Segal, 2019; Michael, 2021). As such, since it should not be impossible to conceptualise, develop, and implement collectively driven initiatives to solve the commonality of systemic challenges found across socio-economically unstable and politically vulnerable areas, numerous authors argue the developed world’s eagerness to fuel labour flows (Achieme, 2019; Mitchell et al., 2020).

Some authors argue that the Europe of Empires, the one that set the globe’s *modus operandi*, represents one of the first historically well-recorded migrant exploitation

phases. This period represents a turnover moment, one in which several game-changing alignments (from industrialisation and scientific advancements to economic and military might) enabled the major European players to portray themselves as hegemonic Centres and absorb or, more often than not, exploit territories across all corners of the world, through the rapid conquest and subjugation of less-advanced regions (Curtin, 2002). The stories that depict this primacy are numerous, whereas the palette of reasons which would reflect such an expansion includes even more fundamental reasons, ranging from domination desires, trade routes, resource security, and private commercial interests to personal desiderata of leaders. Thereafter, we can mention the Balkans’ colonisation, Mongolian immigration into European Russia, slavery in Northern African routes, or the second mass movement from West Africa (Curtin, 2002). In contrast with other refugee flows, while accounting for the Balkan colonisation project, we can note how it displaced millions of people, especially in Russian, Habsburg, and Ottoman Empires or across Prussia. The primary objective of these movements was resettling of immigrants across continental Europe (Bade, 2003; Lucassen & Lucassen, 2009). These labour migration trends and colonial immigration were accompanied by the transatlantic immigration of indentured servants, who served their masters in return for minimal capital (Bade, 2003, p. 1).

Hence, we follow the trail and investigate Europe’s historical migratory patterns to showcase if the continent still inherits an exploitative approach to immigration or takes steps to improve global conditions, especially across states with limited developments. Also, we understand exploitation as representing a complex and nuanced process, going beyond the traditional boundaries of slavery and moving more towards contextualised societal restraints to one’s capacity, actorness, and agency. Thus, in this perspective also, an overarching abusive market insertion of immigrant workers from unsafe areas, of course, in systems that provide limited rights, preferential income sources, or restricted access to integratory and quality services, can be considered a new expression of exploitative mechanisms or neo-colonialist processes. The policies of welcoming immigrants to European countries of the 1950s and 1960s to boost economic development and fuel growth started to halt during the 1970s due to the protectionist understanding of macroeconomic perspectives (Mueller, 1999). To compensate for the need for an unskilled workforce, especially after World War II (WWII), European countries implemented considerably liberal immigration policies. Through this promotion, they explicitly attempt to gain economic leverage to enhance their growth and financial leadership. Nevertheless, from a critical perspective, it hints at an exploitative mindset. To clarify, we would like to capture readers’ attention to this point. The exploitation, apart from its traditional meaning, tools, and implementation, refers to creating economic and opportunity imbalances and uneven development between the First and Third World from a historical perspective of colonisation and resource transfers, including natural resources and a cheap labour force. Although the concrete meaning of colonial exploitation points out a forced and involuntary servitude for one’s needs, the postcolonial exploitation crystalises that the exploitative mindset is still valid as the power groups would like to gain more and cheap benefits through the people who are in need for the First World countries’ currencies to provide a better life to their communities in their home countries. The

invitation and promotion of immigration to European countries have never been an inclination of pure wish for equality in opportunity. Hence, exploitation, in terms of this research, defines a legacy from colonisation as a mindset to use one's welfare dependency to utilise one's own profitable goals through contemporary and regulated ways, such as branding liberal immigration policies and guest worker programmes.

Otherwise, the study attempts to propose a modelling of these processes based on clear differentiation and classification of immigration inflows into Europe. As such, an analysis of international migration per se underlines its relevance by highlighting historical ties that forged human history and pushed progress, despite the fact that only the last few centuries are regarded as ages of migration (de Haas et al., 2020). In line, the specialty literature further notes that governmental-backed policies on international migration only surfaced throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, especially after the sedimentation of nation-states initiated by several European nations. On the same note, some of the very first studies regarding this subject were published by Ravenstein (1885; 1889) around the same period. Interestingly enough, we attempt to determine motivational nodes for international migration by channelling economic reasons into the spotlight (de Haas, 2011, p. 8).

Based on this perspective, we have focused on the economic push and pull factors that set in motion and drive immigration. The economic origins led us to investigate whether immigration patterns have varied across the centuries, especially in terms of governmental intentions toward it. Furthermore, since the colonial past of Western Powers has not been for a long period of time a subject of debate, as most historians admit that such expansionist tendencies and global conquests have left a strong mark on Third World countries, we must note how the global migration flows brought prosperity mostly to the centre. At the same time, it victimised the other subjugated players (Düvell, 2006; Van Mol & de Valk, 2016). Hence, slavery, colonisation, human trafficking, and other human rights violations are not a rarity in most of the developed world's historical background, as they sought to internally optimise themselves by accumulating wealth from regions that did not possess military, societal, or political capacities developed enough to resist invasion (Hansen, 2002). We can only note how some of the EU's external behaviours across the Global South can make practitioners believe there is an attempt to constitute what is called *Fortress Europe*, which term is attributed to Johan Galtung to indicate the internal consolidation of Europe without isolation (Albrecht, 2002; Koff, 2008; Onar & Nicolaidis, 2013; Celata & Coletti, 2016; Junemann et al., 2017).

Bearing all of these in mind, the first part of the study follows an analysis of migration from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onward, following the works conducted by Lucassen and Lucassen (2009). While admitting that there have been numerous other migratory movements across the ages towards Europe and other developed spheres, we focus on this particular starting point as a way to understand the imperial roots of these movements, only accelerated by exploration or industrialisation ages. Furthermore, the second chapter is aimed at elaborating on the general idea of recent exploitative immigration systems, as the guest worker lies. Also, the third chapter is devoted to interpreting globalised modern exploitation practices (e.g., the skilled labour and welfare narratives) from a postcolonial approach juxtaposed with current modulations

across the realm of international relations, macroeconomic developments, cross-border cooperation, and international organisation studies. In the last part, we include an overview of the topic alongside several incursions into prospective avenues.

### ***1. Reading the migratory movements critically: Postcolonial approach to international migration***

The colonial history of the Global North, such as the European powers, is full of exploitation of labour, natural resources, culture, identity, and religion. The postcolonial approach, in this regard, links its foundation to the continuity of the colonial mindset after the reorganised world order, and it has been well-summarised by Samaddar (2020) to say “the migrant is [still] invisible as it works in the dark mines...”.

Postcolonial theory of migration research focuses on the repetitive, or to put it clearly, heritable formation of migration regulations such as migration control, guest workers programmes, point-based selection criteria, and migrants’ rights in host countries. Furthermore, it also implies the geographical links between postcolonial and formerly colonised countries through contemporary migration routes. The exploitative working conditions of migrants and ignored violations of regulations that may protect the worker immigrants’ rights are perceived as intentions to boost economic development and growth in favour of capital owners and the greater society of the West from the postcolonial framework. The link of these exploitative processes to colonialism refers to the colonial history of Western countries towards the Global South, which has been the main source of labour immigration to the West. As in the case of the post-WWII period, the migratory movements mainly occurred from the postcolonial non-Western countries to the European continent. The descendants of formerly colonised societies who had involuntarily given their labour to the development of West were assigned to the same position for a similar goal by European countries (Nair, 2013).

Remarkably, gaining popularity after the 1970s, postcolonial studies and theory became very disputable approaches, both getting attention and criticism (Rukundwa & Van Aarde, 2007; Gandhi, 2019). The postcolonial writings in the 1980s aimed to “shift the dominant ways in which the relations between Western and non-Western people and their worlds are viewed” (Young, 1998, pp. 8–9; 2003, p. 1) and became widely spread with the end of Marxism. The problem of uneven development and inequalities between the West and the rest have their roots in European expansionism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Young, 2003). The spatial segregation of immigrants in host countries and the tightening trajectory of immigration controls are considered postcolonial experiences. From this perspective, the postcolonial understanding of migration concludes “the persistence of economic empowerment in the West” (Mains et al., 2013, p. 132) through labour exploitation from formerly colonised societies. To put it clearly in a broader context, the actions taken by imperial powers to create or sustain the disrupted economic, social, and political structures in the formerly colonised countries fuelled the migratory movements and displacements while they were

concomitantly imposing the borders, immigration control, and sanctions to only provide this migration as a privilege for the selected ones, who are truly believed to boost the economic development and enhance the growth of the Western countries. The postcolonial lens to migration provides insight into the continuity of the contemporary ways of forced, coercive, and exploitative practices towards immigrant labour (Sadiq & Tsourapas, 2023). Hence, the postcolonial perspective on migration crystallises through the explicit continuation of colonial formations in today's population movements and what is called migration governance by imperialist powers (Çağlar, 2021).

Hence, postcolonial migration as a theoretical framework allows us to employ a critical reading of the migration history of Europe. As the main pillar idea of the postcolonial framework, we approached the migratory flows, their root causes, and the intentions of receiving countries from a critical perspective. Apart from reading the migration history through the lens of the Western ideas that generally implies the benefits of immigration to developed countries via remittances and cultural or educational skill-based exchange, we attempt to scrutinise the imperialist and colonial mindset for promoting and initiating immigration to the West by European powers, especially the labour migration.

## *2. Europe as the axis mundi: historical roots of imperialist exploitation and postcolonial theory*

We can approach imperial processes through different lenses, understanding that they occurred in two main forms: colonisation and mass migration across unsettled (or minimally settled) European soils, a form of inter-regional expansion, and the colonisation of underdeveloped regions, which is set on a global scale. While both greatly impacted Europe's extensive evolution, we seek to expose exploitative systems left behind by colonialist constructs by highlighting the latter. However, as Tofiño-Quesada (2003, p. 143) put it, only when the coin is flipped can we notice the realities of those days and the concrete intentions behind human displacement: economic growth. Similarly, Easterly and Levine (2016) investigated European conquest and colonisation preferences, revealing their historical impact on Europe's economic, political, and societal evolution. Thus, the authors documented a positive and concrete relationship between these endeavours and the present-day primacy of the continent (by rationalising that the colonialist advantages allowed, in some respect, several nations to reach the status of Great Powers and hegemonically dominate the global arena). Furthermore, they indicate that European settlers and settlements, on their whole, were more motivated by economic reasons during the colonisation period than nowadays. Additionally, as noted by Antwi-Boateng (2017), imperial Europe's agenda was implemented to exploit the social, economic, and political spheres across several global pivotal points.

Therefore, as Sherwood (2007) or Pella Jr. (2015) points out, European powers' eagerness to engage in colonialist activities, including the slave trade, as early as the

15<sup>th</sup> century was a reflection of their current geoeconomic, geopolitical, and geostrategic concerns, during a period marked by concerted power competition and inter-continental linkages formation. Hence, the drainage of European resources from relentless conflicts was a determinant factor in their will to transfer resources from other tertiary actors. Therefore, European settlers and settlements, in tandem with local communities, redirected migratory and enslaved person routes toward the main centers, a process which was *longue durée* (Drescher, 1990, p. 416). Indeed, Europe’s colonial approach and increasing commercial activities triggered the demand for migration, namely, the slave trade (Van Den Boogaart & Emmer, 1986). A depleted resource pool was accompanied by a lack of unskilled labour, already either lost as human capital in ongoing battles, dislocated because of them, or exploited to the maximum by the nobles, meaning that a *quasi-omnipresent* need for human capital was felt across the continent. In this regard, entire economic branches were marked by such an approach; for instance, sugar production is often perceived to be synonymous with the history of slavery; as Solow (1987, p. 714) puts it, “European colonization was associated with sugar; sugar was associated with slavery, and slavery was associated with blacks.” Accordingly, Klein (2010, p. 75) notes that “the Atlantic slave trade was one of the most complex economic enterprises known to the preindustrial world. It was the largest transoceanic migration in history up to that time”. Since then, he showcased how vast routes were organised by private traders from coastal regions across the world to provide exploitable individuals, notably between 1440 and 1500 (Klein, 2010, p. 76). Additionally, as competition grew even for the already established colonies, other spheres were drawn on the global map, exploring Asian or American routes; for instance, the Portuguese Empire was the first to draw human resources from the Indian basin (Allen, 2010, p. 53; 2015). As such, an array of locations and people, within or without European borders, have systematically been oppressed by global powers and were marked by this type of practice. In some places, these behavioural patterns were gradually ingrained into the social fabric through propaganda, as is the case of West Africa, which is deeply depicted, including in its shared consciousness, as a satellite of Europe. This dehumanisation of entire regions or nations, branded as a *Barbaric Other*, enabled a deconstruction of their identity and commodification of human lives, which were seen as an abundant resource of cheap or even free labour, aspects that engrained such practices into their prospective developmental pathways and bore repercussions for centuries (Buchowski, 2006; Said, 2013).

Postcolonial migration refers to the following patterns of colonial migration intentions by colonising states toward ex-colonised societies. European countries’ colonial rule and labour demand stimulated the slave trade first, then the economic or labour migration from non-European spaces. The reality, indeed, sheds light on the economic growth and labour migration programmes implemented by developed countries (Lenard & Straehle, 2010; Gallagher, 2015). At this juncture, the postcolonial theory offers a novel understanding of development. The novelty derives from the critical aspect of the postcolonial view on development. Postcolonial theory explicitly refutes the idea of the predominant Western lens to analyse, interpret, and explain political, economic, and social issues (Ziai, 2012). Otherwise, this theoretical



framework allows us to critically evaluate and deconstruct the imposed facts from the Western perspective.

Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, European powers have depended on imperialist and colonialist applications toward *underdeveloped* or *developing* countries regarding Europeans' welfare enhancement and expansion of capitalism (McEwan, 2018, pp. 104–105). Indeed, colonialism has been not only an economic process of exploitation but also a cultural hierarchy (Kothari, 2006, p. 237). The European powers' arrogance against the other places around the world reflected as follows: "Non-European space was imagined as empty and uninhabited and thus available for exploration, exploitation and, ultimately, colonization. It was imagined as morally and culturally empty, but with the prospects of becoming 'civilized' through the processes of colonization" (McEwan, 2018, p. 113). Colonialism is reflected in migration through domination, exploitation, and conquest (Mayblin & Turner, 2022). Hence, migration and colonialism are linked to each other in critical perspectives (Mains et al., 2013). Yet, especially after WWII, Europeans have regarded international migration and refugees as crises. At the heart of this perception is the postcolonial perspective. Once the migration began to be the mobility of non-Europeans or non-white people rather than the invitation of Europeans to compensate for their need for low-skilled and 3D (dirty, dangerous, and difficult) jobs through their labour force, it was considered a problem. As the colonialism era marked racially different people from *Others*, the former coloniser states have had this heritage in their practice regarding refugees and immigrants (Banerjee & Samaddar, 2018). In this sense, postcolonial migrants in coloniser states still have this collective memory of colonial migration (Mains et al., 2013, p. 132).

### ***3. Industrialists' growth and the idealist workers' exploitation***

In the aftermath of the second global conflagration, as Europe was reconstructed from the ground up, so were some exploitative tendencies, making the 1960s become the beginning of continental unification but also that of industrial exploitation in the name of democratic-capitalist progress or socialist-communist revolution (Lieberman, 1998). Around the same time, the Customs Union (1948) was established, followed by the structure that would give birth to the EU, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) (1952). These aspects are worth noting since the varied forms the unifying frameworks took (between 1952 and 1992) were also reflected in the plenitude of approaches toward internal and external immigration. With its subsequent interdependences, evolving globalisation meant that forced migration was transcended by voluntary movements in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, initially implemented by the Nazis during WWII through European labour migration, mostly consisting of Eastern Europeans (Castles & Kosack, 1973). However, after WWII, the guest worker programmes extended from implementers to participators. For instance, the number of labour workers in France by 1970 was around 600,000 Algerians, 140,000 Moroccans, and 90,000 Tunisians as former colonies of the country, including West Africans. The application of guest worker systems varied from one country to another. Yet, the basic characteristics of these systems were limiting the entry of dependents of guest workers



and strictly employing deportation rules to discipline the *foreign labour force* (Castles, 1986, pp. 764, 769). These inter-state arrangements were promoted as universalised training systems, which were directed to fuel economic and industrial renewal in the post-war period, enabling and enhancing practical knowledge transfer towards the origin countries. Indeed, this overall phenomenon, alongside the workers’ remittances, fostered the origin countries’ economic development. In this context, the problem arose from the fact that temporariness was mostly an idealistic notion, especially when accounting for the fact that most of the guest workers settled into the more developed countries, many of them bringing their families or entire communities with them (Castles, 1986, p. 770). Until the 1973 Petrol Crisis, such initiatives fostered Western economic reconstruction and reindustrialisation. They became “a structural necessity for the economies of the receiving countries” (Castles & Kosack, 1973, p. 25), especially as, in most cases, it involved utilising a carrot-and-stick system to exploit unskilled labour from developing countries (Lieberman, 1998). The carrot often took the form of a widespread idea that guest workers would vastly contribute to their origin countries through remittances and know-how spillovers. By contrast, as there was a surplus of persons who sought refuge in Europe, the stick sometimes represented deportation if they did not perform as expected or if their societal contribution was considered insufficient anymore.

By the end of 1976, the Trevi Group was formed *de jure* as a multi-level, multi-actor cross-border mechanism to manage migration control policies (Bunyan, 1993; Guiraudon, 2000). The initial goals to prevent terrorism and provide internal security of Trevi Group were extended in 1985 to cover illegal immigration (Karyotis, 2007, p. 4). The tendency to establish Fortress Europe, asylum, and refugees also put into the agenda to aim the externalisation of migration control. In line with this perspective, the Dublin Agreements introduced the first *de facto* migration management norms in 1990 (Hurwitz, 1999). The historical tool of European countries, readmission agreements, concomitantly started to get criticisms from scholars as instruments to control migratory flows deriving from the mindset of externalisation of migration control (Boutillet-Paquet, 2003; Panizzon, 2012). In addition, several experts consider that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) played a pivotal role when it comes to the evolution of migration after the 1960s across the European continent.

By examining the specialty literature, especially the works related to migration theories relevant to the period, we can note that push-pull factors (Lee, 1966), neoclassical migration theory (Lewis, 1954), mobility gravity (Stouffer, 1940) or dual labour market theory (Piore, 1979) are the predominant frameworks for the 1960–2000 period. As such, pushing factors within the origin country and pulling factors from the origin one become intertwined and result in a migratory movement (Lee, 1966). Similarly, we can note how economic slowdown and overall underdevelopment represent even today pushing factors across Third World countries (Bradshaw & Huang, 1991). Furthermore, higher standards of life, fairer and accessible systems, ample welfare mechanisms, and better economic growth or wealth distribution across Europe formed an entire palette of new pull vectors from unstable regions towards the continent. Furthermore, as current global tendencies indicate, instead of solving and

preventing insecurity or instability, both within its boundaries and abroad, Europe's relatively limited action-taking, especially by its continental powers, is regarded by some authors as an exploitation of vulnerabilities, a window of opportunity through which a flux of cheap labour force is constantly attracted (Peers, 1998; Kabeer, 2004; Lodder, 2019). In this scenario of artificially maintained chaotic systems, neoclassical migration theories proved to be the most widely used framework to approach modern-day migration practices. In this sense, workers are prone to migrate if their overall benefits, welfare, or wages are lower than those of the countries seeking to fill employment gaps (Wickramasinghe & Wimalaratana, 2016).

Moreover, the dual labour market paradigms seem to be better fitted as an explanatory prism for Europe's immigration history after the 1960s, especially in the aftermath of the communist collapse. Through this prism of understanding, a core motivation behind immigration is an increased labour demand across the entire developed countries' spectrum. In other words, migration fluctuations directly result from attraction factors rather than negative modulations in one's country of origin (Massey et al., 1993, p. 440). Therefore, we can note how Europe's demand for unskilled labour skyrocketed after the second global conflagration, as in any postwar reconstruction, representing one of the main enablers of economic development and regrowth. As the postwar data suggests, the instrumentalisation of large-scale guest workers models has resulted in a segmentation of European labour markets, particularly in the main continental actors, between native and immigrant forces. In general, across these countries, the 3D jobs were mostly undertaken by immigrants, as they were often treated through discriminatory lenses. In contrast, native workers were reprofiled towards more skilled positions (Buchowski, 2006). Thus, one can deduce that a negative initial context, coupled with the attraction of a more advanced continent in need of a workforce, led to an exponential influx of migrants through all channels available, an aspect that, in turn, contributed to both an unwelcoming context which systematically propagated unfavourable positions for these individuals and a governmental incapacity to adequately and rapidly adjust to such a large-scale event (due to an entire array of factors). All of this meant the perfect environment for exploitative mechanisms to resurface, as well as the establishment of reward (accessibility to a better market and country) or punishment (deportation to lesser-developed regions) mechanisms.

#### ***4. Globalised assemblages and postmodern exploitations: from skilled labour to welfare***

The post-Berlin-wall fall period represents an extremely relevant momentum in European integration as collective willingness for unity transcended the realm of ideas and became a reality in the 1992's EU. Establishing the communist bloc resulted in the adoption of EU-wide harmonised migration management and control policies, alongside a stronger involvement in development aid across tertiary actors, marking the beginning of a skilled labour demand whilst also providing welfare guarantees for migrants. Albeit numerous improvements registered across the years, both at the

group’s level and across its member states, several schools of thought regard this period as the beginning of a new phase of exploitative systems. However, even they admit a more nuanced and refined process is taking place when it comes to the constraints felt by migrants (Koettl, 2009; Andrees & Belser, 2009).

Even though a universalisation of norms can be observed across EU policies, especially regarding migration, a diversity of legal practices still forms the basis of immigration control and management, especially as more precise matters are left under the national legislators’ will. As such, we can also note that the West-East Cold War divide accelerated human migratory and diasporic movements in the post-war environment, in particular from former communist states towards their democratic counterparts. This dynamic created the first migratory divergence between the East-West spheres, as the general lines of demarcation, even though they no longer were reflected in the geostrategic realities, remained felt across a diversity of immigration policies. For instance, even Northwest European countries, generally regarded as rather grand immigration hotspots, did not present a suite of consistent policies, norms, or practices. However, their discursive attitudes were rooted in the doctrinal and ideological basis of liberal democracy and global capitalism, which would have explained a more proactive approach to the matter of integration, adoption, and adaptation toward migratory trends (Wiesbrock, 2016, p. 160; Freeman, 1995, p. 882). Therefore, authors like Joppke (1998) or Sassen (1996), when witnessing the initial oppression felt by ex-communist migrants, noted that neoliberal actors might have admitted migratory flows either through global political pressure or economic globalisation intertwining, not necessarily based on openness towards the “rest”. Thereafter, these visions can also be confirmed by increased recourse, especially in present-day inter-state relations, to isolationist or autarchic behaviours and dogmatically fuelled nationalist or extremist positions, aspects often closely tied with migratory challenges (e.g., poor integration, radicalisation, and terrorist risks, labour exploitation, organised criminality, societal dissensions, etc.).

Otherwise, the EU’s evolution is tied to the introduction of several immigration and asylum regulations, ranging from the Dublin Agreements, Maastricht Treaty (1992), Amsterdam Treaty (1997), Tampere European Council (1999), Hague Programme (2004) or Stockholm Programme (2010), all of which include extended provisions in relation to migration management and control. As such, we can observe how these aspects were developed through each document, granting new rights to migrants, as the 1992 Maastricht Treaty put the EU-wide common migration and asylum policy on the agenda. Later on, the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty, in this regard, created the legal framework for common migration and asylum policies (Balleix, 2014, p. 2; Lavenex, 2001, p. 25). Thereafter, the European Commission’s intervention in the implementation and conceptualisation of newly adapted migration policies via the Amsterdam Treaty caused expectations for a more liberal immigration policy as it indicated the free movement of people (Karyotis, 2007, p. 2; Stetter, 2000, p. 93). Furthermore, after the Amsterdam momentum, five-year collective plans were developed for common migration and asylum policies as a way to allow for increased integration throughout the community’s bloc. In addition, the Tampere European Council was held in 1999, promoting migrant rights and introducing several ideals

which remain in place to this day, especially regarding their equal inclusion and accessibility to the market. In 2005, the Hague Programme and in 2010, the Stockholm Programme were implemented, both of which further enhanced previous provisions and enabled a more coagulated system of rights granting and fair treatment to be put into motion (Balch & Geddes, 2011, p. 29). These aspects are relevant, as prior to the Tampere European Council, migration was an issue of *ad hoc* committees, creating a void of leadership and high legislative volatility. However, the Council highlighted the willingness of Presidents to establish the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), which was aimed at safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable people (Hampshire, 2016, p. 543). The Hague Programme in 2004 included strengthening freedom, justice, and security and provisioned the establishment of CEAS by 2010, alongside sedimentation of sociocultural and integratory initiatives, including funding mechanisms for the development of tertiary actors (Bigo, 2006, p. 35; Collett, 2008). The Stockholm Programme in 2010 focused on the third countries' role in the CEAS and sought to integrate local entities better and empower grassroots movements as a way to limit or prevent societal risks that lead to mass migration (Cardwell, 2013, p. 57). However, there is a body of works that approach such developments through the lens of modern exploitation, as Zapata Berrora's research (2012, p. 1187) points out that the overarching goal of these initiatives was to "build the citizen's Europe". The latter means that in some member states, interest groups use the EU's umbrella to prioritise actions taken to favor their citizens over migrants in the labour market.

A typical explanation for such a phenomenon lies in the intrinsic nature and features embedded into EU-backed migration policies since the 1990s. Brussels institutions had intentions to better regulate these processes, especially in light of the migration crisis, which shook several member states and even risked their functioning. Apart from these documents and connex initiatives, the EU also introduced the Schengen Information System, Visa Information System, and FRONTEX by the end of 2004 to curb uncontrolled or illegal migration (Meszaros, 2017; Neal, 2009). Additionally, these measures promoting more skilled a higher quality labour immigration, particularly in terms of voluntary economic movements, allowed Brussels to securitise international flows relatively (Demirkol, 2022; Štefančík et al., 2022; Štefančík et al., 2021). Coupled with several member states adopting harsher regulations over the years, backed by a populist rise, this environment created a paradoxical situation where, on the one hand, there is the adoption of an entire suite of initiatives aimed at promoting and sustaining international migration or enabling development in origin countries. In contrast, on the other, there are a series of limits imposed on the same flows. Secondly, by tailoring to the needs of an ever-growing highly skilled private sector, immigration policies tend to favour a brain drain process in which skilled labourers are attracted, sometimes over the acceptance of less versatile and unprepared unskilled labourers or refugees, especially as they necessitate higher intervention and expenditures to be integrated as functioning societal members. Therefore, some continental players have approached this systemic process through cost-benefit calculation lenses, once again creating a barrier and reducing entire populations to a simple statistic.

## 5. Discussion: diversity or exploitation? *The intention of the European powers*

The *unity in diversity* concept of the European Union consecrates liberal immigration policies and the positive and bilateral contribution of migrants to Europe and their home countries. This optimistic view of immigration is naïve, yet we should interrogate the real intention as social scientists. As reflected in the well-known *Great Debates* in International Relations theory, it would not be unfair to claim that the promotion of liberal immigration policies in European countries is *utopian*. By asserting so, we elaborate on our views through the postcolonial perspective of international migration.

The pushing factors, which mean a lesser developed Global South, can be traced back to the actions taken by 16<sup>th</sup>-century global powers, which colonised and conquered underdeveloped regions worldwide, fuelled by a desire to maximise their economic growth and industrialisation. Therefore, the depletion of resources through constant warmongering meant that there had to be extracted from all corners of the globe and brought to the commercial hubs, creating an entire network of systemic exploitation and transferring the necessary workforce needed to sustain such developmental pathways through the uprooting of entire communities from Third World countries. This meant that a servitude relationship was built, at times even inside the continent, from emitters to receivers, driven by a dehumanisation of nations as they were collectively grouped together and portrayed as merely contingent living tools. Their contribution to local and regional economic development is hard to quantify, especially the return on investment for the origin countries.

Taking another step and diving into industrialised exploitative systems and, later on, the more refined and nuanced modern models, we can elaborate on the fact that a large part of the literature oversees exploitation as a contextualised oppression or segmentation of groups. The postcolonial approach to exploitation defines this process in reference to historical practices of exploitation with newer, modern, and contemporary instruments such as what is referred to legal regulations to promote workers' immigration via guest worker programmes and liberal immigration policies. In this sense, a dual labour market, split preferentially between native and immigrant workers, can be regarded as representing an exploitative mechanism as the latter usually encounters 3D jobs to penetrate the labour market as a cheap labour force. Moreover, as most regulations often prompted voluntary economic migration, especially in terms of highly skilled workers in specialised industries, including in the East-West post-communist trajectories, a tendency to oversee refugee or asylum migratory movements can be noted. As the final refinement and implementation of migration norms rest on the shoulders of national bodies or regional agencies, we can also oversee how, even if there is a genuinely positive progression registered at the EU level, the final result might be politically motivated, bringing forth instances of discriminatory practices which limited or even completely restricted access to certain types of migrants to the national markets.

From the securitisation of migration as a trending phenomenon in European far-right parties' programmes, campaigns, and policy recommendations, we could observe

the power relations between the First and Third World countries. The latter, as it has always been, plays the most disadvantageous role due to the hegemonic rule of international law, which was created and imposed by First World countries again (Mutua, 2000). The postcolonial pattern we attempt to unveil is connected to colonialism, the need for economic development, exploitation, and legal justification to do so.

Centuries back today, the European powers had the opportunity to violate human dignity through the slave trade, not to provide free rides to less developed societies to enhance their worldview, education, or skills. The wild capitalism that can be traced back to the colonial era allowed Europeans to fuel their economic, political, and social progress. After achieving greater power in their region after WWII, most European countries encountered demographic and economic stagnation. Employing the colonial mindset in the postcolonial period, they sought the solution in formerly colonised societies to have them back in their countries and utilise them as *tools* for *economic development through cheaper and politically and legally weaker labour force*. Indeed, Marxism emphasises that labour migration creates an industrial reserve army against the local labour force as they represent politically and economically disadvantaged groups who would be able to work for lesser wages and would not be able to demand political rights such as unionisation. Accordingly, “the exploitation of *worse paid* labor from backward countries is particularly characteristic of imperialism” (Lenin, 1964, p. 168). Pröbsting (2015, p. 335) puts it, “[w]hen in the 1950s and 1960s there was near full employment in the imperialist metropolises, the capitalists desperately needed migrants to form an industrial reserve army”. To boost the economic gains and their divine profits, capital owners demanded what is called liberal immigration policies to promote labour migration, as Rey indicated that capitalism is the root cause of migration (Gerold-Scheepers & Van Binsbergen, 1978, p. 28). The uneven development, which was initiated by the First World countries as a consequence of colonial rule (Yin, 2021; Gidwani & Sivaramakrishnan, 2003, p. 188; Hollifield, 1992, p. 571), has resulted in today’s migratory flows.

Apart from the root cause of migratory flows today, the postcolonial perspective of European powers led to strict immigration controls toward whom they decided were not beneficial for their economic and social production. The limits and obstacles of immigrants to penetrate formal labour markets, created by regulations of host countries, have pushed immigrants to integrate into the economy through informal ways, which means they would be implicitly pushed into insecure, low-wage, and dirty or dangerous jobs rather than native workers.

Hence, we approach the migratory flows to Europe from the view of retrospective understanding that reveals the postcolonial mindset of European powers to exploit immigrant labour through contemporary forms such as discriminatory practices, disciplinary immigration regulations, and obstacles. As a result, they, again, achieve a cheaper labour force to fuel their growth, which is a copied intention from the colonial legacy they have had in their backpacks.



## Conclusions

The present paper attempts to underline European immigration patterns through a critical perspective on labour exploitation derived from postcolonial understandings of the concept. As such, we can observe how, from a historical perspective, European immigration flows were initially triggered by imperialist and global expansionist tendencies, showcased throughout the centuries by the continental hegemons. These processes changed throughout the years with a *de jure* introduction of numerous norms and regulations. Nevertheless, we can underline how there is still a necessity further to enhance the protection and integratory mechanisms for modern-day migration, especially economically driven ones, to reach the EU’s “united in diversity” desiderata in a *de facto* manner. The emphasis in this research attempts to state that postcolonial practice has been reflected in the migratory practices in European states after WWII as a legacy of their history of colonisation. The postcolonial perspective on migratory flows in this regard underlines that migration has always been utilised as the economic need for European powers to let foreigners enter their territories. Furthermore, the push factors in the Third World countries have also resulted in exploitative practices of the First World countries causing uneven development in favour of their divine welfare.

As such, we can note how certain players continue to operate cost-effectively, trying to maximise capital gains and seeking economic development through channelling and altering migratory fluxes into certain key sectorial areas. As these persons represent a cheaper and less politically involved group, they are often segmented based on the interests of private entities rather than through a universal logic of human development, not to mention the redistribution of their productivity towards the origin countries. This historical heritage, alongside current tendencies, makes us assert that, even though some changes were recorded at the collective level, especially through EU-driven interventions, there are still some optimisations left when it comes to particular cases, as some actors still are prone to perpetuate a systemic model of united in exploitation from the colonial era and revamp it through their interpretation of what united in diversity means.

The image of European actors becoming more involved on the international stage when it comes to commonly eradicating and preventing negative pushing effects from emerging is a widespread political discourse. Even the shift from humanitarian intervention to The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) has encouraged scholars to hope that the Europeans may intend to eradicate the root causes of migration instead of managing and controlling it, the implementation of this new principle is disappointing as limits on humanitarianism in more liberal European states are still persistent (Newman, 2017). In this paper, we move beyond this common approach by revealing the colonial legacy of European migration. Our critical perspective, along with the postcolonial framework, allows us to underline the root causes of migration, as well. The postcolonial reading of migration requires a quest for the uneven development and restraints to economic growth on lesser developed countries by developed ones, as advocated by Favell (2022, p. 533) that “mainstream paradigms of international migration and immigration politics are irrevocably rooted in the ideas and practices of European colonialism imposed on the rest of the world since 1500”.

This research has revealed the cyclical or repetitive process of postcolonial migration, as claimed by some scholars that it exists (Lesińska, 2014, p. 47) in Europe as a hint of their intentions for immigration. First, over the course of the colonial era, the colonising European powers exploited the natural resources and human capital of underdeveloped and disadvantaged societies. Secondly, the colonisation process resulted in uneven development in favour of European powers in the end. Thirdly, the relatively less developed countries needed remittances and capital to reorganise their economies and gain independence; therefore, they tended to migrate to developed countries. Concomitantly, after WWII, the European countries faced economic collapse, sought a cheap and manageable labour force, and found the solution again in formerly colonised societies through a postcolonial mindset. Fourthly, they implemented liberal immigration policies to attract guest workers to boost their economies. During this, the violations of workers' rights from the view of contemporary human rights perspectives allowed for economic development. Then, reaching what is called limits of immigrant stocks, they discovered *legal regulations* to control and restrict unwanted immigrants in their countries. Fifthly, the deepening imbalance of wealth and growth between European and Third World countries triggered the push and pull factors to stimulate migratory flows. As presented in this scheme, uneven development has been the root cause of both the push factors of lesser developed countries and the pulling factors of developed ones. The link between migration and uneven development is, therefore, the process of exploitation of labour migrants to boost European powers' economic growth.

In the end, we would like to assert that only an inclusive reorganisation of powers can lead to the elimination of discrepancies between member states when it comes to how they approach migration. Although the current tendencies showcase that the overarching umbrella of EU developmental pathways can expand towards this sectorial matter as a way to reduce systemic risks and threats felt across the community from mismanagement of these flows, we are still sceptical about resetting the beneficial mindset of the EU while approaching immigrants. We recommend that not only *international* or *intergovernmental* organisations regulate the immigrants' rights, working conditions, and immigration policies, but global public opinion should be aware of the postcolonial approach to international migration to ask for real humanitarian implementations toward immigrants. Only this after the EU can claim that they are *united in diversity* rather than they are *united in exploitation*. In addition, while neo-orientalist perspectives are still persistent, an increased emphasis should be put on the understanding that migration can represent a double-edged sword (be it good or bad for a society per se) only through the way it is handled. In light of these ideas, future research is encouraged to focus on policy recommendations to eradicate the exploitative postcolonial approaches of Europe to international migration.

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