Europe's 'Hungarian solution'

Prem Kumar Rajaram

In a speech at a European Union heads-of-state summit on migration in February 2016, Viktor Orbán, Hungary's prime minister, declared that the 'Hungarian solution' to the migration 'crisis' facing Europe had now become 'common sense', adopted by other European countries after a summer in which Hungary's 'illiberal' treatment of migrants had been pilloried.[1] According to Orbán,

> The Balkan route countries and Austria have taken the path of common sense. What these states are now doing is the Hungarian solution: building fences, stopping and returning [migrants]. ... [T]he only way to protect Europe's southern borders is for the V4 [Visegrad 4: the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary] countries to have the same preparations, perspectives and decisions.[2]

The most remarkable thing about this short statement is its geographic imaginary: 'the Balkan route' and 'Europe' awaiting a 'Hungarian solution'. Orbán describes a Europe that needs protecting, the integrity of its geography threatened by an alien 'Balkan route'. The responsibility for protecting Europe lies with the Visegrad Group countries, four recently joined members of the European Union with contradictory relations to the idea of Europe. On the one hand caught in neocolonial labour relations with the old EU, but on the other among the most conservative interpreters of 'Europeanness' – referring to a Christian Europe, under threat from 'Muslim' migrants – these countries have indeed been positing themselves as the vanguard of a forgotten cultural and civilizational norm.[3]

Orbán was more expansive in a press conference, intended largely for the Hungarian media:

> 2015 was a difficult year for Europe, I would add: particularly for Hungary. In a magnitude of millions, without controls, unidentifiable and unknown masses of people appeared in Hungary and at the European Union's southern border. ... [N]ow for the first time the European Union has accepted the Hungarian solution ... we have prioritized border protection and the stopping of the migrant masses. ... We have to stop them; our external borders must be protected and the Schengen Accord must be upheld 100 per cent by everyone.... [T]he Balkan route countries and Austria have finally taken the path of common sense.... [W]hat the countries along the Balkan route and Austria are doing is in reality the Hungarian solution. They have built fences, even if they don't call them fences; they have stopped migrants and have returned migrants. This was always the Hungarian stand. I am certain that the protection of Europe's southern borders is impossible by any other instruments.[4]

Orbán, and he is not alone in this, recodes the events of summer and autumn 2015. It is Europe that has had the 'difficult year', not migrants. A problem is posed – how do we deal with migrants? – but from the standpoint of Europe. The solution lies in reinforcing a European geography bordered against the 'masses' threatening the European Schengen order. Crucially, the solution lies in reminding Europe of its roots: against the disorder of migrants, European best practice must be to uphold Schengen, a

policy of free movement for those who belong; against the alien Balkan route, Europe must assert its own geography. Hungary's illiberal policies towards migrants are a fundamentally European one, and the 'Hungarian solution' speaks to core notions of European community.

The building of fences, restriction of asylum seekers' recourse to juridical review, and arbitrary detention are not new to Europe and have been a core component of asylum policy for the past twenty years. Orbán is effectively asking why Schengen has been suddenly placed under threat by the policies of European states themselves after years of restrictive practice? For Orbán, asylum policy is civilizational: it is about preserving 'Europe' against its cultural other, 'Muslims', even to the extent of transgressing international obligations. The Hungarian Interior Ministry has recommended that all housing and schooling benefits for asylum seekers and refugees be ended and that refugee status be reviewed every three years.[5]

Imaginary geographies

Orbán's imagined geography generates a familiar orderly Europe to be cherished and a faceless mass who do not belong, whose geographical intrusions into Europe – 'the Balkan route' – are alien, chaotic, and to be eliminated. Following the summit, European countries redoubled their efforts to impose quotas and to cleanse the Balkan route, limiting travel to Syrians and Iraqis who could conceivably be cast as 'refugees', thus making the issue about 'illegal migration'. Austria placed a cap on migrants, triggering a domino effect. Macedonia closed its border with Greece to all but Syrian and Iraqi migrants. It is unclear at the time of writing what will happen with Greece. Austria has led an effort to discuss the possibility of re-enforcing border controls and sending migrants back to Greece, while not including Germany and Greece in these discussions. The 'western Balkan route', passing through Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia, is recoded by a strategy of differential inclusion, and in so doing the problem becomes recast as one of illegal immigration. Meanwhile, the European Union, led by a Germany affronted at being left out of this Austro-Hungarian solution, opened discussions with Turkey, effectively 'outsourcing its border security'[6] to a regime with a disturbing human rights record, not only so far as migrants are concerned. The bargaining with Turkey centres on dangling promises of billions in aid and free movement of Turkish citizens within a recovered Schengen area, and, most tantalizingly and least believably, reopening talks on EU membership.

Edward Said, discussing Gaston Bachelard's poetics of space, argues that imagined geographies 'dramatize the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away'.[7] The imaginary geography being deployed here has two aspects. One, as noted, is generative, indeed transformative, recasting Europe as victim while reminding us of the familiarity of its orderly forms of mobility (and the conception of belonging that this validates) while casting 'mass movements' of migrants as disorderly, the undesirable counterpoint to order. As regards the second, as Said notes, an imaginative geography 'can be entirely arbitrary ... because the imaginative geography of the "our land–barbarian land" variety does not require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction'.[8] Moreover, the civilized/barbarian dichotomy militates against the recognition of any such need.

The telling consequence of Orbán's geographic imaginary is that it not only establishes 'Europe' as a space to be cherished by those who belong, but helps foster a project that locates agency and subjectivity exhaustively in 'Europe': in 'European history', in its languages, and increasingly in its political organization. There is a sense of fullness about the imagined geography of Europe, and the Austro-Hungarian solution, contrasted – actively contrasted – with the lack that is seen in the others it names, Said's barbarians or Orbán's faceless masses.

Europe's colonial present

Orbán is not exceptional. He is evoking a Europe that has long been centred on the identification and exclusion of external and internal 'others'.[9] His Hungarian solution points to cultural, political and capitalist geographies that centre on making the violence at the core of European social space – to paraphrase Homi Bhabha on Fanon's racialized colony – valid, and thus unrecognizable as violence.[10] It is this displacement of violence that is particularly troubling, not only because it detracts from the experiences of migrants coming to Europe and instantiates a 'European problem' in its place: it also forecloses the possibility of recognizing the validity and violence of migrant experience. Much of that violence is a consequence of the recent history of European border politics, which centres on a dialectic between expanding external borders through cooperation with third countries and reproducing bordering strategies internally through the growth of immigration detention camps, closed camps for Roma EU citizens, and expulsions of both migrants and Roma.[11]

The force of this violence, however, is not accounted for by histories of the exclusions of the European project. This force adheres because of the totality attributed to 'Europe'. This is a totality that assumes fullness and civilization, a whole world, in Europe and is set against, indeed reinforced by, an imagining of its contrary: the lack and emptiness of those designated 'other'. This is a colonial and racial imagined geography, centred on a separation of interrogator from interrogated, giving the whole world to one and leaving the other in lack: 'A world that is total and in its totality capable of denying [the] ontological validity of the interrogated.'[12] Qassis and Leidereiter write here of the colonial violence in Palestine/Israel. The European project

is also colonial not only because colonialism was the condition that allowed for its economic and political emergence, and not only because of its entrenchment in ongoing neo-imperialist political economies that generate global insecurities and displacements, but also because of this attribution of fullness and the readiness to juxtapose lack elsewhere.

My argument is *not* that it is important to think Europe from a post-colonial standpoint. Such investigations are indeed valuable in helping to recognize the exclusions and oversights that go into narratives about Europe as a clearly bordered 'modernist' project, or as a project of peace, or even as the fount of civilization.[13] Certainly another Europe is not only possible; it already exists. I am, however, interested in the persistence of a colonial mode of rule that is centred, as I have said, on the dichotomies of fullness and lack best represented perhaps by the figure of the interrogator over the interrogated, Orbán interrogating the faceless multitudes. This colonial analytic and mode of rule is also persistent in capitalist modes of production and the connections between the production of surplus capital and surplus populations.[14]

Accounts of 'post-colonial Europe' build on histories that privilege a territorial account of colonialism. What is important for these accounts are the consequences that come from the territorial realization of racialized discourses or narratives. How, that is, are relations of economic and political dependence racial and in what form do they persist in the geographies and economies of the European project?[15]

The conclusion is that we have a postcolonial Europe that is a consequence of this geographic reach, and that is correct. It does not, however, account for the persistent colonial practice of place-making through differential inclusion centring on (at least) the modes of rule I have indicated above. It is important to move away from a territorial account of colonialism/post-colonialism and pay attention to practices of rule or place-making that worked perhaps at their utmost in the colony but were not confined to the colony. This allows, first, for a non-dichotomous history between Europe and the colony focusing on hidden geographies and under-reported histories of connection and common marginalizations and, second, for the possibility of solidarity as practices of connection between groups, 'internal' and 'external', that recognize the commonality of practices of colonial-like place-making exercised upon them.

The production of surplus populations

The European project is, indeed, centred on the cultivation of otherness, against which a narrative valorizing a specific geography is formed. At the core of that project is the foreclosure of the agency of others. This is to say that there exists a hegemonic mode, a way of speaking and narrating about ourselves and others, whose hegemony relies on preventing the possibility of a counter-mode, a counter-hegemonic agency, arising. The relative success of this varies; counter-hegemonic solidarities do arise. The point is not that dominance simply exists; dominance is relative to space and time and is formed through the social relations which constitute it.

The Hungarian government responded to the 'refugee crisis' of the summer of 2015 with a mix of punitive legal measures (including jail terms for people crossing the border 'illegally') and Christian-nationalist discourses identifying deviance and threat that called to mind exclusionary discourses (and practices) directed against internal surplus populations (the poor, the homeless, the Roma).[16] The governing of migration is not separate from domestic political and social processes but rather an outcome of these. Declarations of states of exception are means by which a surplus population is outlined at the edges of the nation-state, and point to ongoing processes of cultivating surplus and unproductive populations at the core. There is, in other words, a dialectical relationship between the management of a supposedly troublesome internal population, like the Roma, and that of an externalized population of migrants and refugees. There is a ready slippage between those narratives that pillory migrants and those that attack troublesome domestic populations. An account of the production of a surplus, people with a tangential relation to the economic and political norm, can suggest a relational understanding between domestic politics and capitalism in Europe and the management of migrants and refugees.

The concept of surplus population accounts for groups of people who are rendered unproductive and left unemployed or underemployed because of the structure of capitalist systems of production. Capital's relation to labour is based on modifying commodified labour power to produce surplus value. Unlike other commodities, labour is unique in that it produces surplus value. The value that an individual labourer produces is reified: it is the central component of a system of valuation that animates capitalist societies. Which is to say that, according to Marx, value is not only about an accounting of relative wealth but also about the register that mediates and organizes social relations in a capitalist system.[17]

Value as the means of mediating social relations is, then, centred on labour, but labour as a productive force that contributes to the accumulation of surplus value. A specific force is then attributed to ideologies about work and productivity, as well as to the justification of dispossession.[18] This has been most obvious in nineteenth-century colonies, where specific ideas about what constituted valued work, and how that work was to be carried out, were used as a means to demean 'the natives'.[19]

Marx's labour theory of value insists that what is being produced through labour power is not simply material wealth but also a way of mediating the social relations of capitalist societies. Informal labour exists as the deviant counterpoint to formal and organized means of labouring. One consequence of this is the growth of disciplinary 'welfare' regimes that are humiliating, punitive and governmental, as schemes to punish or improve the lot of informal workers are implemented by the state (whether to punish or improve often depends on the sector of the population). At a more general level, the domestic surplus population becomes viewed as troublesome blots on the landscape.

A labour theory of value is, then, an account of capitalism as a cultural ideology, producing patterns of valuation that privilege certain ways of being while demeaning or restricting others. Fanon's account of the racial core of colonial society may be useful here in complementing Marx. Fanon poses a counterpoint to the system of value. Against the image of a productive labourer, there is the narrative of delinquent and unproductive work. This is a narrative that becomes embodied in marginalized populations; for Fanon it is the black man. Against the order signified by 'Europe' (meaning effectively the concerted effort by capital through the state to impose its value code on labour and its mobility),[20] there is juxtaposed an undesirable counter-point, the undesired surplus. This is the deviant other within, and it is the chaotic multitude at the border.

This, then, is the link between capitalism as the production of surplus (value and population) and the radical externalization of migrants today. Marx's labour theory of value points to how labour participates in the production of a system that disciplines and controls labour itself. Capital operates along with the state to impose a register of value that valorizes the act of productive, market-oriented labour, imagining as its counterpoint an often racialized myth of the delinquent non-productive labourer. Central to this, in Europe, is the control of labour mobility through Schengen – its onus on free movement being actually a rescaling and regulation of permissible capitalist mobilities. It is the capacity of state and capital to act in concert to produce and maintain a system of value that is important. Central to this is the foreclosure of other forms of mobility and labour as not valid and illegal. This masks a violence that most obviously centres on the existence of a shadowy underbelly, the growth over the last thirty or so years of vast markets for informal labour working in precarious conditions.

The point is that the cultivation of a hegemonic alliance between state and capital allows for a commonsensical notion of permissible and impermissible modes of subjectivity, with the impermissible having their basis for agency foreclosed by this narrative. This common-sense perspective, which Orbán lauds the EU for returning to, allows, indeed demands, the overwhelming distancing of migrants, the images of masses, of barbarians, and the narratives of chaotic and alien intrusions into the imaginary geography of Europe.

Solidarity and social struggles

In Homi Bhabha's memorable take on Fanon, the colonizer is tethered in a Manichaean delirium with the other: 'tethered to, not confronted by, his dark reflection, the shadow of colonized man, that splits his presence, distorts his outline, breaches his boundaries, repeats his action at a distance, disturbs and divides the very time of his being'.[21] The very order, security and privilege of Europe, and the unequal way these are distributed, is linked to its shadowy underbelly: a series of violent marginalizations and exclusions operating within and without Europe. This is not, then, a Europe of order, or of peace, but of exclusions and marginalizations and false solidarities that seemingly connect European citizens but that instead validate an

increasingly unequal set of relations both within individual nations and across nations (witness first the neoliberal lynching of Greece, and now the readiness to expel the country from Schengen).

It is cognition of the shadowy underbelly of violence underpinning a seemingly civic order from which solidarities between migrants and citizens may arise. The awareness of how security and prosperity are not merely related to but are *tethered* to the dark reflection of violent exclusions within Europe and at its borders destabilizes the idea of the continent, disturbing and dividing the very time of its being. It is from here, from this excess of mobility of the other desirous of the space and time of Europe, that solidarity between groups may emerge. Such solidarity may come about through awareness of the way order in Europe is sustained by actively generating disorder at its borders (as well as within, in informal markets), thus questioning several myths of order, peace and security, or by knowledge of common marginalizations between citizens and non-citizens. And it is from here that the migrant may fight the fore-closure of her agency, speaking not as a 'migrant' (an externalizing and falsely unitary term) but as groups and individuals experiencing marginalization and dislocation from the way global capitalism operates.

Notes

I would like to thank Annastiina Kallius for drawing my attention to the term 'Hungarian solution', indeed for coining it before Viktor Orbán. I thank her also for her thoughts on the nuances and meaning of this term. Céline Cantat, Annastiina Kallius and Claudia Aradau offered valuable comments on the article.

1. G.M. Tamas, 'The Meaning of the Refugee Crisis', *OpenDemocracy*, 21 September 2015, www.open-democracy.net/can-europe-make-it/g-m-tamás/meaning-of-refugee-crisis; accessed 24 February 2016.
2. Viktor Orbán, 'Most először az Európai Unióban elfogadták a magyar megoldást' (Now for the first time the European Union has accepted the Hungarian solution), Government of Hungary, 20 February 2016, www.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/hirek/most-eloszor-az-europai-unioban-elfogadtak-a-magyar-megoldast; accessed 24 February 2016; my translation.
3. *Independent*, 'Slovakia Wants to Stop Muslim Migrants from Entering', 9 January 2016.
4. Viktór Orbán, 'Orbán Viktor sajtótájékoztatója az Európai Tanács ülését követően' (Viktor Orbán's Press Conference following the European Council's meeting), Government of Hungary, 21 February 2016, www.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/beszedek-publikaciok-interjuk/orban-viktor-sajtotajekoztatoja-az-europai-tanacs-uleset-kovetoen; accessed 24 February 2016; my translation.
5. Hungarian Interior Ministry, 'Egyes migrációs tárgyú és velük összefüggésben egyes további törvények módosításáról' (Migration Law and Amendments in the Context of Other Acts), 2016, www.kormany.hu/download/6/54/a0000/Tervezet.pdf#!DocumentBrowse; accessed 14 March 2016.
6. 'Turkish Crackdown Leaves Refugees in Limbo', *Guardian,* 10 December 2015.
7. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1985 (1978), p. 55.
8. Ibid., p. 54.
9. Céline Cantat, 'Narratives and Counter-narratives of Europe: Constructing and Contesting Europeanity, *Cahiers Mémoire et Politique* 3, 2015.
10. Homi Bhabha, 'Remembering Fanon, *New Formations* 1,Spring 1987, p. 119.
11. Cantat, 'Narratives and Counter-narratives of Europe'.
12. Omar Qassis and Carmen Leidereiter, 'Of Samideen and Confessors: Interrogation, Humiliation and Identity in the Prison Routines of a Settler-Colony', forthcoming.
13. Gurminder K. Bhambra, 'Postcolonial Europe: Or, Understanding Europe in Times of the Postcolonial', in Chris Rumford, ed., *Handbook of European Studies*, Sage, London, 2009.
14. Prem Kumar Rajaram, *Ruling the Margins: Administrative Rule and Colonial Power in the Past and Present*, Routledge, New York, 2015.
15. Cantat, 'Narratives and Counter-narratives of Europe'.
16. Liz Fekete, 'Hungary: Power, Punishment and the "Christian-National" Idea', *Race & Class*, 2016, http://rac.sagepub.com/content/early/2016/01/11/0306396815624607.abstract; accessed 14 March 2016.
17. Michelle Yates, 'The Human-as-Waste, the Labor Theory of Value and Disposability in Contemporary Capitalism', *Antipode*, vol. 43, no. 5, 2011, pp. 1679–95.
18. David Harvey, *Limits to Capital*, updated edn, Verso, London, 2006 (1982).
19. Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, Routledge, London, 2010.
20. Sandro Mezzadra, 'The Gaze of Autonomy: Capitalism, Migration and Social Struggles', in Vicki Squire, ed., *The Contested Politics of Mobility: Borderzones and Irregularity,* Routledge, London, 2011.
21. Bhabha, 'Remembering Fanon', p. 119.