

Five minutes with Eva Aldea: “A ‘Fortress Europe’ accessible only to those within would be as much of a failure of the European project as dissolution of the Union”

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Can philosophy offer practical solutions to some of the key issues faced by the European Union? In an interview with EUROPPE's editor Stuart Brown, [Eva Aldea](#) discusses the role of philosophy in framing debates around immigration within Europe, Deleuze's distinction between 'migrants' and 'nomads', and the potential for the EU to change how we think about nation states and our citizenship.



The rise of parties such as UKIP and the Front National has pushed immigration to the forefront of the political agenda in many countries across Europe. Can philosophy provide practical solutions in the context of this debate?

I am acutely aware of the difficulty in turning grand philosophical ideas into practical solutions for society, here and now. Nevertheless, I believe that the European Union as a project does necessitate a rethinking of old ideas of citizenship and migration. Philosophy can at least provide some ideas about where to go with such a rethink.

However, philosophy on its own is not enough to change ingrained ways of thinking. Practical work in the political, economic and cultural spheres is necessary to implement the new ideas that philosophy suggests to us. This practical work has to, in turn, be undertaken both by those in power, whether in politics or in media, as well as each and every one of us. Voting is important (and there is perhaps too little debate on who did *not* vote in the recent European elections and why) but so is our behaviour in terms of consumption of media and how this shapes the portrayal of communities in the UK and across Europe.

[Rosi Braidotti](#) alerts us in her work to the lack of what she calls the “social imaginary” adequate to the new Europe we are already inhabiting. I think this lack is very much responsible for the rise of anti-immigration politics in Europe today. Remedying this lack is a task that requires the joint work of philosophy, politics and personal responsibility.

For the European project to be successful is it necessary that we change how we think about migration?

Yes, insofar that it is necessary to change the way we think about how we all relate to the place we live, whether we move or not. That is, we need to change the way we view citizenship itself, which will directly influence the way we see migration. The old static model based on territorial, cultural, linguistic and ethnic differentiation is becoming a hindrance to the European project, if it is to proceed in its current direction.

To me, free movement across member state borders is absolutely central to the idea of the European Union. As I stated in a [recent lecture](#) at LSE, this position is one borne out of my personal experience as a child of migrants and a migrant myself. As such I find it frustrating and sad that many people do not see that a migrant only wants what we all want: a safe, free and prosperous life. I thus believe it is imperative to rethink not only migration but citizenship itself in a way that fosters compassion and solidarity across national borders.

This needs to begin with intra-European migration but also needs to extend to extra-European migration. As Rosi Braidotti suggests, the European Union is a kind of experiment in post-national identity. This means we have a unique opportunity to define European belonging in an inclusive, open-ended way, not as just yet another re-iteration of an ‘us-and-them’ mentality. A “Fortress Europe” accessible only to those within would be as much of a failure of the European project as I see it, as dissolution of the Union.

You've spoken on the distinction made by the French Philosopher Gilles Deleuze between 'migrants' and 'nomads'. What does this distinction involve and how can it inform our current debates over migration within the EU?

Deleuze's distinction between 'migrant' and 'nomad' is not a matter of actual movement as such, but of the potentialities and possibilities of a particular mode of relating to the place one occupies at any point in time.

Deleuze and Guattari in their *A Thousand Plateaus* distinguish between sedentary or nomadic distribution of land and population. In the former, distinct areas of land are distributed to people. Territory is divided, and ownership of land is demarcated. Any movement across this kind of territory is determined by borders and boundaries. One travels from point A, owned and regulated by a particular people, to point B, owned and regulated by someone else.

In contrast, in the nomadic model, people are scattered across the land, without clear borders or exclusive ownership. Point A and point B still exist, but they do not determine the route between them, rather they are merely relays on a continual trajectory that shapes a fluid, changing concept of 'territory', in opposition to territory determining movement. Indeed, the term 'territory' is now bracketed, as it is no longer operational in the same way as in the sedentary model.

The 'migrant', then, is someone who moves across and according to a sedentary model of distribution of land. He or she is different from the non-migrant, who stays put in their respective territory. A 'nomad' on the other hand is anyone that lives on land where the population is distributed according to the nomadic principle, whether he or she is actually moving anywhere or not.

Being a nomad is thus a matter of relating to space and land in an entirely different way than either a migrant or a non-migrant. This is precisely why it is an idea that is useful for debates about migration in Europe, as well as globally.

Rosi Braidotti has written on the link between the European Union and the 'dis-identification' of citizens with nation-states. Has the European Union already brought about a change in how we think about nation states and our citizenship?

Yes, I agree with Braidotti that the European Union is forcing us to change our ideas of citizenship and national belonging. She also observes that currently we are out of step with actual lived reality in the way we think about these things. This reality has been changed by forces both external and internal to the EU. The political and legal changes to citizenship in the European Union over the last few decades, together with globalisation and the vagaries of the world economy, mean that we inhabit a world where it is increasingly difficult to hold on to traditional ideas of nationality. Thus we are going through an inevitable and often difficult process of 'dis-identification', which can, in Braidotti's words, produce "fear, sense of insecurity and nostalgia". These are the emotions that lie behind the rise in anti-immigration sentiment in Europe today.

It seems pretty obvious to me, however, that privilege and wealth makes this process far easier for some parts of society than others. Thus I propose that the practical steps necessary to change attitudes to migration need to be taken on two fronts. One is the distribution of wealth and the continued development of the tradition of social welfare that Europe has spearheaded for the last 70 years. Social inequality is a fundamental driver of xenophobia, and this needs to be addressed at its root causes.

The second front is, as mentioned initially, the creation an adequate social imaginary, providing representations of ourselves that allow us to move towards a nomadic relationship to the places we inhabit. This means acknowledging the changes we have already gone through as a society, rather than holding on to what Braidotti calls "cherished habits of thought". These habits include the singling out and demonisation in the media of the still so-called "white working class", blaming them for both their own marginalisation and their xenophobia.

However much we as a society enjoy creating a scapegoat, we need to break the cycle of self-fulfilling prophecy by

recognising the already existing connections and communities across ethnic, cultural and national boundaries, and giving these space to grow and mature. This is the responsibility of both the media elite and the average consumer of popular culture.

A podcast of Eva Aldea's recent lecture at LSE is available [here](#)

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Note: This article gives the views of the interviewee, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics. Feature image credit: Dave Levy (CC-BY-SA-3.0)

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About the interviewee

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