

Immigration utopia

Finally some space. With two quick steps she shuffles forward onto the ramp, her right foot leading the way restlessly, knocking into the trailing leg of the tall man just ahead. He turns his shiny head ever so slightly, an indication, surely, that he wishes not to be kicked again. Head bowed, she moves her focus elsewhere, onto the red and white plastic stripes aligned at regular intervals along the wooden planks. It is an established tactic of hers, trying to suppress the waves of overwhelming impatience, rising rapidly from her toes upward like the water in a clogged sink. The wind slaps her across the face as soon as solid ground reappears beneath her. Hastily she swings a leather pouch across her right shoulder and settles into her walking pace, fast enough to distance herself from the fellow passengers. She despises walking behind people, forced to adapt to their constantly changing speeds. But this afternoon is especially bad. Ever since the news broke out everything has been chaos, and all she desires now is the comfort of her small flat, a sage tea and a cigarette. *Give it time, Marie. These things always blow over in the end.*

Two blocks from home Marie is immersed once again in the angst she has witnessed in people throughout the day. An elderly woman, closer to ninety than anything less judging by her bony, lifeless face, although Marie cannot be sure for her headscarf obscures the view a little, grasps her rollator tightly whilst lecturing a young, befuddled man. It is actually more of a rant; disjointedly jumping from one thought to the next. As Marie passes, her focus shifts to youths, to ‘the poorly educated and dishonest immigrants’ keeping her up at night, ‘coming over from every corner of the world to use our parks, occupy our hospitals and take our jobs. This is not what I worked hard all my life for! This is not what I had had in mind for my poor, innocent little grandchildren, having to compete with these dirty, foul, cheating...’

Marie can take no more of it. Placing the palms of her hands firmly onto both ears, she lurches into an immediate sprint, not stopping for air until she had passed the couple sitting on the stairs and pushed open the broken, always open front door to the house. Panting heavily, she grapples for the the key snagged on a loose thread somewhere deep inside her bag. She pulls harder, hoping the worn material will give way to allow her some momentary respite. Relief soothes her throbbing heart as the tingling keys protrude the apex.

Thin white smoke curls gently upwards from her hand, dissipating into the lacklustre framework of glass and wood. The sky has taken on a threatening shade of blue, with thick, oily collections of clouds gathering in the distance. There is a distinct buzz on the streets. She can feel it; she has felt it all day. The fuelling of anger through fear; through individual perturbation. But hidden from superficiality there protrudes some hope, too. Hope copped with disbelief, a disbelief that humanity could indeed reach unprecedented levels of justice.

For this is what it comes down to. If I forget about myself for just one minute, if we all forget about ourselves and our immediate family for just one minute, then this is finally a step towards justice. In the most absolute meaning of the word. Justice and equality. Equality and humanity. Forget what problems may arise; forget what difficulties we will face. If this measure sticks, and if the UN doesn't give in to populist pressure which will surely escalate over the coming months and years, then this would mean that, for the first time since mankind erected borders, our draw in the lottery of birth would no longer be the deterministic, limiting factor on the path which our lives take.

A scratching sound from the street below jolts Marie from her thoughts. Leaning over the window she attempts to locate its source, but the maroon leaves on the brink of abscission create an opaque barrier in her line of sight. As the scratching fades, she leaves the windowsill and wanders across the room, floorboards creaking as her weight shifts from one foot to the other. She switches on the radio and settles onto an old sofa, the smell of which always leaves her reminiscent of the simplicity of her childhood.

'Beep. Beep. Beep. Beeeeep. Welcome to the six o'clock news. The United Nations International Court of Justice has today ruled that every nation must lift all restrictions on the movement of its citizens within the next ten years. The ruling brings to an end months of speculation and controversy. In a joint statement released together with the United Nations Security Council, the law has been declared exempt from the veto power of any permanent or non-permanent member. Along with the ruling, the statement issues a precautionary warning to any nation or collective of nations which attempt to undermine the law, threatening with unparalleled legal action to ensure its universal implementation. The statement continues that it is now the collective responsibility of all nations to ensure the feasibility of this law, hence the ten year grace period until it comes into force. As a final point, the following reasoning is provided for the unanimous decision: in light of the arbitrariness of birth, the International Court of Justice sees this as a pivotal step in ensuring the implementation of human rights for every individual. The ruling that has today been made is the only way to ensure decades, indeed centuries, of injustice is discontinued. As must now be expected of everyone, the court holds itself accountable for the failure to intervene earlier, and requests the full cooperation of every member of society.'

'In other news...' Marie jumps to her feet and turns off the radio. She does not need to hear the rest; she can anticipate it: outrage here, outrage there, protests left, right and centre. After years of medial brainwash this reaction is understandable, I guess. The court is right: it's incredible how long we've managed to ignore the extreme violation of human rights in claiming that some people are illegal across vast spaces of this Earth. And how the politicians, media and even the judicature legitimised this too! Didn't Kant already question this notion?

At this she stops pacing restlessly between the door and windowsill and picks out a small book from her shelf, wiping the dust from the cover. It is a copy of Kant's *'Perpetual Peace'* essay, which she had found on the side of a road one day, thrown carelessly into a cardboard box. Two of the pages slightly detach from the spine as she begins to flick through, delving into misty memories more so than the matter in her hands, in an attempt to relocate the pages on which she had scribbled down some thoughts whilst reading it the first time. *Here it is.* She sits back down and quickly reads the last section of the page with an exclamation mark next to it. *Yes, he did - precisely this! 'Originally no-one had more right than anyone else to any particular part of the Earth.... all men have this right by virtue of their common possession of the surface of the earth, where, because it is a finite sphere, they cannot spread out forever, and so must eventually tolerate each other's presence.'*

That's it. The law that's just been passed is the fulfilment of this position. And considering the original position in John Rawls' sense, this law is the first step towards creating a fairer starting point. This we would all agree to under his veil of ignorance, a theoretical state in which the knowledge of our facts of life are removed before we choose binding principles to direct society. But neither Kant nor Rawls seem to

have been heard. Maybe we weren't ready for their ideas back then. But now that a court has finally ruled in favour of this, and bindingly so, it must be possible, somehow, to change people's attitude; to get them to see the picture differently: that no human is responsible for their place of birth. So no human can be made responsible for it, nor can others take credit for it. That it is simply not fair that the German passport allows access to 173 countries, when the Afghan one allows only 25.

A brief opening in the sky allows a ray of sunlight to pour into the room, naturally lighting the darkened corner in which Marie is sitting. She puts the book down next to her and combs a tired hand through her hair. The sun laps at her face, causing a warming sensation that has deserted her since leaving the comfort of her bed early that morning. She rubs her eyes and attempts to return her focus onto the remaining few hours of the day, wondering involuntarily what Kant would think were he alive today to witness the court's ruling.

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Rain streaming down the tilted window greets the ashes from Marie's half-smoked cigarette. She is sitting on her windowsill, gazing out onto the sparsely lit street. The old lanterns hanging from steel posts seem to be reaching the end of their lives, and a handful have fallen victim to the boundless working-hours of the past winter. It is still early spring but already the leaves are taking on a lush green, stretching and turning in a bid to soak up every last drop of water. An occasional car horn can be heard from the mainland, the echo bouncing on the dyke's gentle rise. *Hopefully a victory horn. What a powerful statement against all the trickery that had been practised by right-wing populist parties in the build-up to this election. Today democracy really did renounce the attempt of overthrowing a legal decision! I just hope they know what they are doing. I know it's morally right, but things in the past which have been morally right proved more harmful than good. But I guess those cases were different. No legal support to fall back on...*

Marie is not alone today in feeling a pinch of salt in her own victorious adrenaline. This nagging thought has been occupying the minds of many Red-Red-Green supporters voting their respective parties into power. It has been a difficult three years for the politicians, too, searching for a delicate balance that caters to the constantly changing trends in public opinion. The right-wing parties were, perhaps expectedly, the first to gain sight of their strategy, turning on the International Court of Justice almost immediately, promising voters the fight of their lives to overturn the law. *How reminiscent of Yonkers back in the late 80's that was. Incredible, I really thought we were heading down that same path. What was his name again, the young mayor who was caught up in it?*

The Conservatie parties found it more difficult to find a common position. Although united to obey the decision at first, a mutual lack of faith into the economic feasibility of the process dismantled any momentum before it could sufficiently gather. It was not until about a year ago that the Green Party evolved into a strong nucleus, uniting both the Social Democrats and Socialists to form a viable alternative to visibly struggling political opponents. A fruitful blend of idealism and social responsibility was born, feeding an opportunity for change. The rest is history, and Marie knows that there will be many other people sitting at

home this evening, reliving or debating the past twelve months and the decisive moments which led to a 79% landslide.

It must have been their ability to change the mindset of the people: to see this act of justice as a real opportunity, and a feasible one too. How scared we all were in those first two years of uncertainty. I think the Greens deserve all the credit they are getting for steering us out of that mess. But still, I wouldn't have guessed that the result today would be so clear. I mean, just three years ago the idea of a progressive tax rise up to a maximum of 75% would have been absolutely unthinkable. And to then use this money for investment not in their own surroundings, but for redevelopment purposes abroad? Even the Social Democrats would have rebelled! That's just the tip of the iceberg, too. The leaflet which they were handing out last Autumn, outlining their 'ten-point-plan for reconciliation'. Every single one of the measures on that list would surely have been dismissed on the grounds of 'economic security' prior to the ICJ's ruling.

Marie's cigarette has gone out by now, and with a quick glance across the dark room she realises that the two red hands of the clock are almost perfectly perpendicular. The leader's address is about to start. She turns on the radio and settles onto her sofa, full of anticipation. *Her speech will surely be looked on in the next century the way we look back on 'I Have A Dream' now: 'But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt.' Beautiful.* As the left hand stutters forward another minute, the reporter summarises the day's result briefly and the stream then switches source, just in time, for the beginning of the address.

'... and gentlemen, my fellow citizens. Let me start with a simple fact that we must all internalise and finally accept: in seven years from now, all borders will open. The concept of borders will forever go down in history as an unjust creation of mankind. But it will, from that moment on, be history. Today humanity has spoken out for humanity.' Furious applause follows, preventing the continuation of the speech for several minutes.

'... But let us not underestimate the magnitude of the challenge ahead. Without question in my eyes, humanity is facing one of the greatest challenges in the modern world. It will be a long process. It will be a difficult process. It will be a reconciliatory process. But embraced it we have. And embrace it we will!' Once again Marie can hear the crowd erupt in a roar of cheers and applause. Goosebumps begin to form on her skin, and the hairs on the back of her neck stand erect. From the very tip of her extremities a sense of release begins to spread through her body, causing each muscle to contract and relax progressively. As her eyes dart across her body she realises that her hands are clenched into tight fists, trapping the bead of her necklace within. She gets to her feet and begins pacing up and down the room, hoping that her rhythmic movement will soothe the vegetative reaction.

'... These past three years have been endless commotion. They have demonstrated the instability of the system that we have for so long considered holy. And they have forced us to listen within ourselves, to go right down to the roots of our own morality and question the things which we have for so long taken for granted. Today, 79% of us have displayed the resolution of this inner conflict, and we have stood by justice. Today 79% of us have challenged the perpetual structures of power in the modern world, and shown that there is an alternative path which we may take. Let us appreciate that on this day we have come together, at long last, to collectively put an end to the suffering imposed on countless of our fellow humans. And I say collectively, because this reconciliatory chapter will require the ardent commitment of every member of society.'

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A gentle breeze causes the water to crawl up the scattered boulders marking the lowermost border to the river. Stretching vertically at the northern end of its body is the old harbour, meandering across the sky in a jagged cluster of lines and curves. To the west the clouds are tinted in a vast spectrum of colours, from shades of red to orange and pink, as the sun begins its evening descent to rise out of sight. Marie has been sitting still on one of the boulders for almost an hour, watching the scenery evolve. Her feet are dangling into the murky water, tickling the skin at the tips of her toes. The whistling wind circulates above her head, trapped by heavy containers anticipating their departure, and she can smell the petrol of each passing boat.

Yet it is eastwards that she has been looking this past hour. Standing on a raised steel platform at the confluence of the river's two arms is a giant screen, purposefully designed to be clearly readable from almost every westward position along the riverbank. Divided into four quadrants of equal size, it shows a series of statistics that have been in constant motion for almost seven years, ever since the Red-Red-Green coalition was voted into power on a manifesto promising revolutionary social reform. Having begun with six years and 300 days and now reading 21 days, three hours, two minutes and 36 seconds, the top left quadrant is counting down the time until the borders open. On its right is a number that, unlike its partner, has been rising increasingly with every passing year. It shows a simple figure representing the amount of money which has been used exclusively for the development and aid of third world countries, under the heading 'external budget.' Every time Marie looks at this particular quadrant she is overwhelmed by a sense of disbelief, untrusting of both: her eyes which read to her the mammoth number and the government which is responsible for ensuring the accuracy of the statistics. But the numbers are correct; the government addressed Marie's worries just two weeks after the screen was built, publishing the sources from which the figures are drawn. It has been a long time since Marie last found herself staring at the radio, disbelieving of a voice reporting once more that the financial aid for a humanitarian crisis is not arriving, or worse: is not sufficient.

The bottom half of the screen has had a less straightforward history. The right-hand side is dedicated to a number representing financial investment, quite like the quadrant above it. In this case, however, the investment is not into third world countries, but for the further development of already developed countries - 'internal budget.' This had been the fastest riser in the initial two years, the governments of wealthy nations certain that the 'problem' would best be solved primarily through extensive work on the social structures within their own nations, to deal with the predicted influx of people. New schools, homes and hospitals were built with lightning speed; potential teachers, doctors, nurses and many other professionals were suddenly spoilt for choice for apprenticeships and university places, and relieved of all financial burdens. At the end of summer five years ago, the first numbers were published as to how far the development had come: on average, three to four million new homes had been built per country; one million more hospital beds made available; an additional 300,000 qualified doctors and teachers expected by the time the borders open. These statistics signalled a historical point, with levels of production at an absolute peak. But they also fuelled an underlying worry: nobody could be sure how many people would come; how this massive resettlement would unfold. Thus nobody could be sure how much development was actually required; how many teachers

and doctors would be needed to provide for the perhaps exponentially expanding population. Would 300,000 be enough? Or 600,000? Or one million? It was in light of this that the the top-right quadrant began claiming larger and larger electrical portions, evincing a new strategy: the internal investment slowed, allowing an expansion to the external budget. It took about a year to find a healthy balance; an equilibrium which eventually fell into place when a fiscal misjudgement was revealed: the sum was underestimated tremendously, and the internal budget grew once more.

For Marie, the quadrant in the bottom left corner is the most interesting of the four. It does not portray any monetary values, but various indicators consecutively shown for several seconds in turn: ‘... support for open borders: 91%.’ *79% seven years ago was already high, but this really is incredible. When 90% was reached a while back I thought it was only a matter of time until the mood swerved.* ‘... job satisfaction: 95% ... average annual population change within the EU: -7.4%.’ Simultaneously to an expansion of the internal budget after the Red-Red-Green coalition was voted to power, the countries within the EU saw a drastic increase in their population. In the first year, the increase from a relatively stable zero to +3.4% took many people by surprise, and nourished the simmering sense of panic to secure a spot within the European borders prior to their opening. Thus it came as no surprise that this number had increased to +8.2% by the end of the second year. It was the exemplary behaviour of the state to broaden their horizon and deepen the external budgets’ pockets which marked the beginning of a shift in mindset: the worries began to lessen, replaced instead by a desire to investigate the new options as to where else, on the sphere suddenly encompassing a much bigger space, life would be worth living. As a result, the peak which was reached five years ago has continuously shrunk since, becoming negative for the first time just over two years ago and showing no sign of stopping without opening the borders.

‘... considering permanently moving to a less developed country in the next 12 months: 13.3% ... desire to experience a different culture in the next twelve months: 87%.’ *People really are being lured elsewhere. I wonder where to? Maybe I should go, too; visit my teacher’s family in Basra. She says it’s a beautiful spot in the South of Iraq, right by the Persian Gulf... Didn’t she say it was one of the hottest cities, too? I would never have to suffer through winter again...*

‘... average number of languages spoken: 3.1 ...’ This last figure is perhaps the most telling of all, for Marie is not the only one to have learned a new language. The increase in teachers has enabled more language courses in and outside of schools. By the end of primary school, most children are now expected to be fluent in two languages, with a further two languages spoken by the end of secondary school. Amongst the most popular languages being learned is Arabic, advantageous for both the individuals and the state due to the expected demographic shift. *Once again, the Greens have got this spot on. How they pushed through their own ideal, against all the pressure that was coming even from within their own camp: to ensure that it’s not just a matter of migrants learning our language, but for us to learn their language, too. That it’s a joint responsibility.*

Marie’s eyes drift away from the screen and latch onto a kayak cutting through the river. It has a long trunk with sharp points at both the front and rear end, decorated with two thin red lines that run parallel from one point to the other. Between them is a narrow gap where the white background shines through, on which small black print has been used to inscribe a phrase. Marie squints but she is too far away to decipher it. White

water gathers along the edge of the paddle, visibly outlining the turbulent zone. The kayak reaches the middle of the river and Marie can see the paddler begin to ease the rotation with which each paddle forces the water out of his way. His neck extends upwards, allowing his line of sight to be redirected away from the rough surface. As the kayak gradually glides to a stop, the ripples begin to fade and Marie can no longer feel the tender swaying of the cold liquid against her toes. She can see the paddler's eyes lock onto something, gazing intently into the distance. She follows his gaze and realises that he, too, is now sitting, almost motionless, in front of the screen, reading the latest figures with apparent delight. After about five minutes, the paddler wakes from a trance and glances around. The northern bank is empty, but as he shifts his body to take in the southern bank, he catches sight of Marie still sitting on one of the boulders. Reaching for the paddles he begins to manoeuvre the kayak in her direction. About ten metres away from the shore, Marie can make out the phrase on the side of the kayak: 'Citizen of the World.' Her thoughts are automatically taken back to a day almost ten years ago, the day when the International Court of Justice made the decision to legally enforce the opening of the borders. She tries to remember her reaction on that day. The memory is gone, but with a deep sense of satisfaction she glances up at the screen again, certain now that any worry she may have had then was unfounded.