



# The Problem with Nationalism and the Crusade for Open Immigration

**Rather than Close the Door, Let Us Embrace Migrants and Take Pride in Cultural Diversity**

By **Gina Kawas** on Wednesday, March 19, 2014

Nationalism, an idea introduced to us from our earliest years, is not only an ideology but a widely and staunchly held worldview. When growing up, at home as well as in school, nationalism is portrayed as a mandatory requisite that one must feel: love for our country and culture above all others. Our elders teach us to love our flag and national anthem and to embrace our history.

For nationalism to exist, though, a sense of belonging to a nation must also be present. And by nation, I refer to a group of individuals (or citizens) who live in a defined territory and are organized under a legal structure. They do not necessarily have to share similar characteristics like culture, language and symbols.

In many ways, nationalism fosters the sentiment that one's nation is superior to others, promoting racism and xenophobia. Such sentiments lead to the condemnation of immigration, and in the most extreme of cases, there is even opposition from extremist groups towards the importation of goods that aren't made in their own country.

If we look back, history has taught us that the emergence of nationalism has led to global catastrophes: both the First and the Second World Wars, for example, represent the epitome of the dangers of nationalism. While there is nothing wrong with feeling some sense of belonging to a specific place, state rulers have used nationalism to justify conflicts and disguise injustice under the banner of patriotism.

The visceral opposition to immigration in several countries, from Europe to several US states, stems precisely from the strong prevalence of extreme nationalism and xenophobia. Political Parties such as the National Front in France or the British National Party in the UK, propose the expulsion of immigrants and the creation of societies where a "pure" race prevails.

Immigration prohibitions, however, hamper individual choice and freedom of movement, whereas endorsing immigration enriches countries economically and culturally, even when it comes to illegal immigration. So instead of creating more and more draconian laws, countries should facilitate the arrival of immigrants — rather than deport them back to their countries.

From a humanitarian and ethical point of view, rejecting immigrants presents a series of moral consequences: it sends individuals back to inhuman scenarios, where they become an underclass whose rights are constantly infringed upon.

### **Immigration Reform in the United States**

The necessity of an immigration reform in the United States is vital. The influx of people crossing the border illegally and risking their lives, especially from Mexico and Central America, continues unabated, and in the thousands every day.

The US response to this situation has been the counterproductive militarization of the southern border in a way never seen before, almost emulating the North and South Korean border. These measures do not diminish the amount of attempts to cross the border, given that the determining factor of migrating is not the amount of barriers in a border, but the economic situation of the country they desire to enter.

It has become imperative to formalize the illegal situation of the more than 11 million immigrants who live without documentation in the United States. A path that leads to legally entering the US must be found, because deportation and the increase of spending on border security (US\$4.5 billion) are clearly not an option.

The legalization of undocumented immigrants would reduce illegal crossings and the wasteful spending on building walls and paying border patrols. It would also decrease human rights violations — such as shootings at the hands of patrols — and would help spur economic growth: immigration can increase employment opportunities, as they start new businesses, and contribute through taxes.

Recent academic research suggests that, on average, immigrants raise the overall standard of living of US workers by boosting wages and lowering prices. One reason is that immigrants and US-born workers generally do not compete for the same jobs; instead many immigrants complement the work of US employees, generate managerial positions, and increase their productivity.

Immigration allows for remittances to be transferred to the migrants' countries of origin. In doing so, they contribute to the economic growth and development of the migrants' home countries. According to the World Bank, remittances in 2005 represented about 25 percent of Guyana's and Haiti's GDP, whereas in Honduras, Jamaica, and El Salvador, they were 22 percent.

In 2012, remittances surpassed \$406 billion, and they estimated that this number will continue to grow, increasing 8 percent in 2013. Several studies show that remittances have a positive impact on poverty alleviation and financial development in many developing countries.

As for the case argued by many detractors of immigration, who criticize it by affirming it promotes terrorism and a threat to internal security — particularly towards those who identify as Muslim or Arab — Daniel Griswold of the Cato Institute brilliantly exposes that immigration and border control are two separate issues: terrorist attacks by foreigners are not a result of open and liberal immigration policies, but are caused by the failure of bloated immigration bureaucracies to keep out the small number of foreigners that do pose a threat to internal security.

The rapid increase in the number of immigrants worldwide is a tendency that will not stop. In 2005, there were approximately 191 million individuals living outside their countries of origin. By 2010, this number had increased to an estimated 214 million, and it will keep increasing.

So instead of opposing immigration and closing the door to migrants who look to improve their lives through hard work, countries must implement policies that embrace immigration and take pride in cultural diversity, leaving behind xenophobic and racist attitudes, the exclusion of immigrant groups, and the undeserved perception of the immigrant as the enemy.