



JIM'S READING CORNER

You cannot accuse Giles Merritt of beating about the bush; the subtitle leaves no doubt about the message he wants to get across. The title is a bit awkward: who does it refer to? The people who move to Europe and cannot be stopped?

To say upfront that we need more migrants is courageous at a time when many Europeans see migration as a threat for their societies and their identity. It is to be hoped that most of the readers will be open to rational argument.

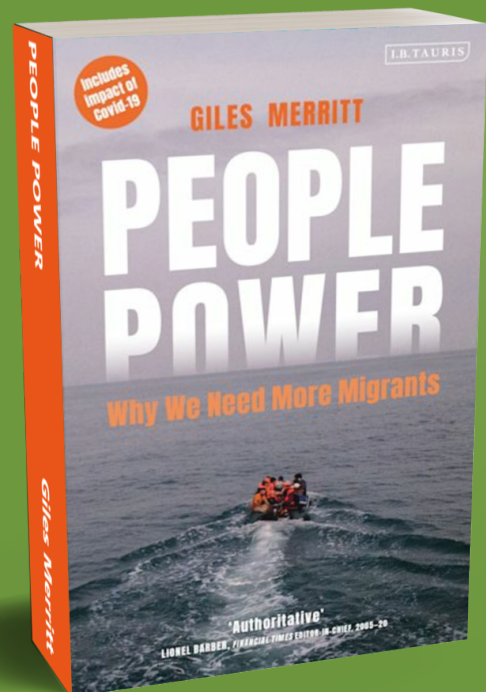
The basic thesis is simple. It is a fact that Europe's population is both declining and ageing. The ratio between the active population and the retired is bound to worsen, which will have a negative effect on growth and will put the pension and social security systems under increasing strain. This is a strong PULL factor. We find in "People Power" a wealth of figures that underpin the author's theory, which is quite compelling. Under the condition of course that migrants integrate into the system and actually contribute to growth and well-being. This is certainly not automatic nor a given. That is why Giles Merritt puts a lot of emphasis on integration. Integration of course at best takes time and at worst never happens. As Merritt notes, *"immigrants are more likely to be unemployed and rely on Social Security assistance than native workers. [...] Only half of the migrants find work within the first 10 years of their arrival."* (page 83).

The second part of the equation concerns the PUSH factor. The economic and social situation of Europe's neighbors, particularly in Africa, is such that the numbers of those who want to enter the EU are swelling. If you add to this the growing pressures of asylum seekers that are seeking refuge from war and oppression by coming to Europe, you talk about millions of potential migrants, which worries many Europeans. Giles Merritt makes a strong point against putting the emphasis on *"stemming the flows"* in a purely defensive fashion. This should not prevent the EU from trying to better control its external borders (like do the US, the Australians, the Canadians and just about everyone else in the world). It is a bit unfair to talk about fortress Europe while Europe is by far the continent that takes in the most refugees for instance. Compare the European figures for instance to those of Australia or Japan or the rich Arab countries, and even to those of Canada and the US.

The situation in 2015 when the EU lost control of the situation at its external borders is not one we want to see again.

PEOPLE POWER: WHY WE NEED MORE MIGRANTS

BY GILES MERRITT





Because if we do, the conditions for the serious and dispassionate debate Merritt calls for are just not given.

On the issue of migration and Islamist terrorism, Giles Merritt rightly states that the conflation of migrants and terrorism is vastly exaggerated and unfair. I would simply be a bit careful with the argument he makes that most of the Islamist terrorists are not migrants but people born in Europe. That is correct, of course. But we are confronted here with a delayed effect of the failure to integrate a certain number of migrants and their descendants. Some people will argue that this pleads for limiting immigration. Others, like the author, will say that the lesson to draw is to have much better integration methods so as to avoid negative developments later. There is a bit a similar comment one can make about the fact that even without fresh immigration the number of Muslims in Europe will expand inevitably. That will not persuade people who are skeptical about immigration from Muslim countries to further increase arrivals into the EU. I would however add two remarks here. The first and obvious one is to point out that inferring from a few rotten apples the impossibility to integrate Muslims in Europe is unacceptable. The second is that a climate whereby the perception of the numbers of Muslims in Europe is vastly superior to the actual figures is unhealthy and is being used by some to whip up fears of “losing control and identity”. *

Giles Merritt is far from naïve and he does not underestimate the many challenges of migration. While he puts the emphasis on the positive effects, he does recognize the difficulty of integration, the short term increase in budgetary expenditure as a result of migrant inflows, the problems caused by a lack of education. He thinks that these challenges can be overcome with the right dose of political will, wisdom and long term planning. And above all a comprehensive migration policy covering all the aspects, including legal migration. He is right in saying that more channels for legal migration could help lower the pressures of illegal migration. The European Council, from 2015 onwards, has actually tried to set out the elements of a comprehensive policy. But it has not yet managed to agree on revising the asylum policy, nor has it dared really address the issue of legal migration.

A FEW MORE SPECIFIC POINTS AND COMMENTS:

Page 9: “*Migrants are an investment, not an unrecoverable cost*”: as we said above, that depends on whether integration succeeds. One of the reasons many people in Europe are opposed to

migration is because of the problems encountered with second or third generation immigrants. This does not, however, explain the strong negative attitude to migration in some of the central and eastern European countries who have very little immigration and who often have the biggest demographic imbalances. Here the argument is emotional and identity-related more than anything else.

Page 20: There is a reference to “*Misunderstandings and muddled official thinking*”. The first example given is the fact that refugees and economic migrants have become interchangeable labels in the public mind. Giles Merritt’s answer to this is to overcome the “*rigid legal distinction*” between the two. This is an interesting proposition. It does raise some questions however: wouldn’t that create more confusion rather than less? And if you lump the two together, and treat everybody like we now treat economic migrants, would you not risk killing the Geneva Conventions on refugees and deprive true refugees from protection? On the other hand, if you treat them like you treat refugees now you vastly increase the pool of people who “*have a right*” to come to Europe. As Merritt writes a few paragraphs later: “*One in ten of the world’s quarter of a billion displaced people has fled to escape persecution or the dangers of conflict; the other nine are economic migrants in search of a better life. Add to them the 750 million people that Gallup pollsters say, ‘would migrate if they could’, then the world’s footloose population numbers are over a billion people.*”

Giles Merritt mentions a second example of muddled thinking concerning the confusion between migrants and EU citizens availing themselves of the rights the European citizenship gives them. They are indeed two altogether different things. Something the British Brexiteers consciously ignored in order to whip up anti-EU feelings.

Page 31: Merritt refers to a major turnaround in the United States concerning the attitude towards migrants, citing a figure of 62% believing that their contribution strengthens the US. I am not certain what exactly this figure refers to. But in any case, the situation is not exactly the same between the US and the EU: America’s geography is different, so is the size of the country, and there is one dominant language which happens to be the global language right now. Apart from that, in terms of refugees, as pointed out on page 30, the number of people granted asylum was cut from 30,000 in 2018 to a quota of only 18,000 in 2020. This is really puny compared to the number of asylum seekers being accepted in Europe!

*I recommend here to read an excellent book about “A Brief History of Islam in Europe” by Maurits Berger (Leiden University Press). Berger provides a fascinating and dispassionate account of 13 centuries of relations between Islam and Europe.



Page 34: Merritt talks about the *“elusive goal of managing migration”*. *“Whether driven by hunger or ambition, migrants will keep on coming, whatever the barriers in the way.”* In this logic, he calls for managing *“greater flows of migrants”*. Again, the argument is correct in itself; there will always be irregular migration, as you also see in the U.S. with people moving in from Latin America. But we should avoid giving any impression that we just have to accept that there is not much we can do about people coming to Europe will lead to more and more flows since the pool of candidates is near infinite. I believe we must try to manage migration, if we want to have a chance to transform it into a positive factor for our economies and societies, which is Merritt’s key concern.

Page 65: there is a reference to a scholar pointing to Sweden’s impressive growth in 2016, *“the year in which immigrants were arriving in unprecedented numbers.”* But the massive inflows cannot explain Sweden’s growth in that same year; as Giles Merritt explains, it takes years to become settled and to find a job and to start paying taxes and to contribute to growth. The Swedish government itself, which it should be recalled has probably the best record in terms of migration in the world, considered that the massive flux of 2015 and 16 was not manageable, and they introduced border controls with Denmark!

Page 94 & Page 123: *“Fortress Europe? Good luck with that!”* I commented on the use of the term *“fortress”* above. Trying to protect your external borders is not building a fortress. I am rather pleased that the EU invests EUR 14.4 billion (out of an overall migration envelope of EUR 25.7 billion) over the period 2021-27 into border security. Because without that we will never win the argument on the need for immigration. Besides, we will kill Schengen: if countries have the feeling that external borders are not managed correctly, they will start reintroducing internal border controls, as we have actually seen happening after the 2015 events. Incidentally using the terms *“breaching the walls of fortress Europe”* is unfortunate because it conjures up the idea of a hostile takeover that is precisely the fear of many Europeans.

Page 135: *“What these statistics tend to obscure is that second-generation immigrants rather than newcomers are often at the core of gang violence.”* This is true, but not reassuring. It again raises the issue of integration. It reinforces of course the call in the book to do much better in terms of handling migration and migrants.

One additional remark: there is nowhere in the book a reference to the fact many Europeans, particularly young ones, believe that the ideal of maximising

growth, which is a key tenet of *“People Power”*, is outdated.

They would argue that the acceptance of lower growth linked to an increase of productivity could help manage Europe’s demographic woes. I simply want to flag this point which in itself would warrant a new book by Giles or others.

To conclude I would say that *“People Power”* is an extremely worthwhile and important contribution to the difficult debate about migration. It is salutary to have the case for more migration made in a dispassionate way, based on a lot of research and facts and figures. There is no doubt that migration will remain a major test for the EU over the coming decades. There are no panaceas or easy solutions. That is why we need an informed debate looking at all the issues and we need listening to each other. In this sense Giles Merritt renders an enormous service to all of us. If I have made a few critical remarks or raised some questions it is because I take the book and the arguments seriously. I hope that many more people will read it and that it will make them reflect on what is one of the major challenges confronting the EU and indeed the world.