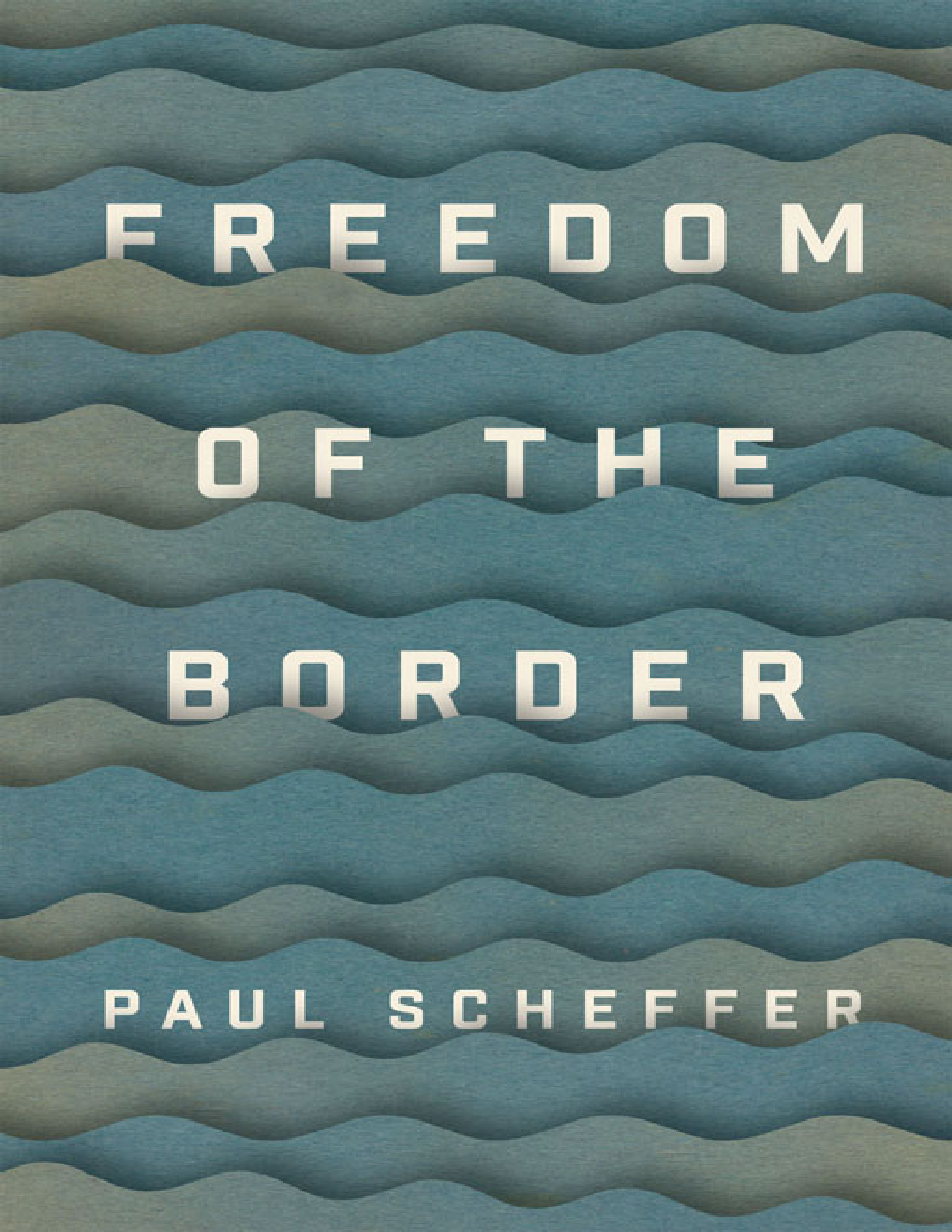
FREEDOM
OF THE
BORDER
PAUL SCHEFFER

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Freedom of the Border

Paul Scheffer
Translated by Liz Waters

polity

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Acknowledgements

In the summer of 2015 I was asked to write an essay for Philosophy Month, which occurs annually in the Netherlands. With images of the refugee crisis in mind, I chose ‘dealing with borders’ as my theme. The essay was published the following spring under the title ‘The Freedom of the Border’. It prompted many reactions, which set me thinking further on the subject. A long series of readings and public debates sharpened my ideas. This book is the result.

Here I have taken the original text of that essay as my starting point. I’ve expanded the original chapters and added six more. In various places I’ve freely made use of earlier publications and lectures. More specifically, I’ve used the Pacification Lecture that I gave in Ghent in 2012 and a lecture at the University of Tilburg from 2014. I’ve also drawn upon my contribution to a book about the shooting down of flight MH17.

The issue of borders is to the fore, so the essay form is no accidental choice. The genre lends itself beautifully to the crossing of borders. Overcoming the division of labour between disciplines, which José Ortega y Gasset once called ‘the barbarism of specialization’, is essential if you want to say anything useful about dealing with borders. Without specialists, generalists are powerless, so here too we have to take dividing lines seriously. Furthermore, such an undertaking is of course risky, since nobody can encompass such diverse disciplines, but a broad view remains necessary if we are to find a direction in a chaotic world.

I am grateful to John Thompson and Elise Heslinga of Polity for their willingness to publish another book of mine, after *Immigrant Nations*. And I would like to thank Liz Waters, who translated this book with great care and patience. She also translated my previous book with Polity and the cooperation proved to be, once more, a real pleasure.

Notes

1 Paul Scheffer, *De grenzen van Europa*, Brussels, Academia Press, 2012.

2 Paul Scheffer, 'De gewelddadige randen van het continent: Europa tussen macht en moraal', in Gabriël van den Brink (ed.), *Een ramp die Nederland veranderde? Nadenken over vlucht MH17*, Amsterdam, Boom, 2015, pp. 29–57.

3 See José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, transl. Anon., New York, W. W. Norton, 1932, ch. XII, pp. 107ff. (originally published as *La rebelión de las masas*, 1930).

Introduction: Exploring boundaries

I was eighteen when I first stood at the Wall that cut Berlin in two. In the summer of 1973, as one of my country's representatives at the World Festival of Youth and Students, I saw at first hand the ghostly tableau of the East German side. We were housed at the edge of the city and from my window I could see the watchtowers and searchlights at the Wall a short distance away. Its official name was the Antifaschistischer Schutzwall, the Antifascist Protection Rampart, but in reality it had been built to prevent East German citizens from leaving.

One Sunday morning sixteen years later I watched as an excavator removed its first segment of the Wall at the Potsdamer Platz, three days after that historic 9 November 1989 when the Wall fell.[1] A huge crowd thronged the square. I leaned on the shoulder of a smiling border guard to get a better view. For twenty-eight years this former traffic intersection at the heart of the city had been an impassable barrier. Now no-man's-land was filling up with a cheerful multitude, and together we experienced the beginnings of a new vision of the old continent.

I well remember the sense of relief in the years that followed the end of the Cold War. At last we were rid of the Iron Curtain that had divided Europe so brutally. The oppression of the Eastern part of the continent was over and the 'peace dividend' was quickly cashed in. Major cuts to defence expenditure became possible, with worries about territorial integrity and border security resolved. After 1989 everything was going to be different.

Now, more than thirty years later, we again find ourselves talking endlessly about borders. The influx of refugees

provokes emotional responses. There is apparent agreement about the need to improve the security of Europe’s external borders, but still no sign of a real determination to act. In fact European division on this point is greater than ever, partly as a result of moral diffidence: on what grounds can we deny others the right to settle in our part of the world?

This book is about the open society and its borders. I’ve always been suspicious of the notion that we live in a borderless world. It’s a self-image that betokens a rather inward-looking attitude. Because what is left to be discovered if there’s no outside world? The value of crossing borders can be understood only by those willing to acknowledge their significance.

My approach to the issue has been shaped in part by the history of my own family. One of my grandfathers, Herman Wolf, was born in Cologne; the other, Lou Scheffer, in Batavia in the Dutch East Indies. It was made clear to me at a very early age that the world is bigger than the country into which I was born. I grew up in a liberal environment in which the novels of Jean-Paul Sartre and Heinrich Böll were venerated (a minor rapprochement between the French and the Germans), while at the same time the jazz of Nina Simone and Stan Getz was embraced (a minor rapprochement between black and white).

Along with curiosity, I inherited anxiety, which manifested itself from an early age. While clearing my mother’s flat after she died, I came upon my father’s wartime arrest warrant and a couple of letters he had written to his parents from the prison camp in Amersfoort. The war was never a subject of conversation between us at home, since my parents didn’t want to see their children burdened by it. All the same, that period in history was a looming presence,

all the more so because it was unthinkable that any of us would ever mention it.

For me the border is first of all a childhood memory. There was one border we were never allowed to cross, between the Netherlands and Germany. My mother refused to step beyond it until well into the 1970s, which was strange, because we lived quite close by, in Arnhem. Her refusal was a gesture of respect for her Jewish father, Herman Wolf, who moved to Amsterdam with his parents around the turn of the twentieth century.[2] We were not allowed past the border that, many years before, he had crossed in the opposite direction along with his parents.

His life and work in Amsterdam in the 1930s were those of a literary generation, enthusiastic about humanism but at the same time filled with a deep pessimism. Influenced philosophically by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, yet also marked by the First World War, they were at the start of a century now sometimes described as an age of extremes. Wolf witnessed the rise of totalitarian movements and his opposition to them led him to ask questions about the resilience of humanism.

Shortly after Adolf Hitler's seizure of power, Herman Wolf wrote, 'That is the problematic, indeed tragic situation of the humanist in our time. He is profoundly convinced that faith in the value solely of race, people and party will lead to the most atrocious violation of all that is purely and truly human.' What puts the humanist thinker in such a tragic position? 'He cannot articulate his conviction by means of concrete forms and symbols; again and again he can only watch as others, by appealing to blood, race, folk, church and party, gain millions of followers.'

This is a significant problem in our own day too. We are experiencing once again a clash between openness towards the world and the urge to preserve a specific heritage. The

question that has preoccupied me for years is this: are we forced to conclude that identification with a specific people and identification with humanity as a whole are irreconcilable, or is it possible to bridge the gulf between the two?

Today, despite living in a very different time, we realize how hard it is to give shape to a humanism that is robust and that rises above an appeal to our own distinctiveness. I understand humanism to mean making the case for humanity in general, resisting the idea that cultural otherness cannot be overcome. It is a dilemma of Herman Wolf's time and of our own, and it is the subject of this book.

Behind his observation about the tragedy of humanism lies a major question about our belief in progress. Does history present evidence of improvement, step by step, or does the same evil arise repeatedly, taking a different form each time? Do we underestimate progress when we say that the veneer of civilization is thin? Or is the progress we experience largely material, while societies show no improvement in a moral sense?

Wolf's work is imbued with his insight that humanism is always a form of pessimism. He was inspired in this belief by Arthur Schopenhauer, about whom he published a lengthy essay. He was not alone in being strongly influenced by this particular philosopher. Author Thomas Mann, for example, admired in Schopenhauer's work the connection between 'Melancholie und Menschenstolz' (melancholy and human pride). In a time in which human values were being trodden underfoot – this was 1938 – a combination of pessimism and humanism was of incalculable importance. Humility features prominently in a philosophy that contrasts the impermanence of things with an arrogant faith in progress.

My family history, incidentally, never prompted me to condemn everything that tasted or sounded German. I was impressed by the conscientious way in which our neighbours were dealing with their past, and in the 1980s I became convinced that German unification is part of the integration of Europe. In those years many people saw the division of Germany as nothing short of a moral precept, a form of compensation paid to the rest of Europe.

I got to know the work of Martin Walser, and later the writer himself. He convinced me that the oppression of seventeen million people in East Germany could not be tacitly accepted.[3] It was impossible to justify the division of his country by regarding it as a war debt. He abhorred the position of his fellow author Günter Grass, who believed that because of Auschwitz the Germans had lost their right to self-determination.[4] No amount of wrongdoing can be avenged by making an entire nation a prisoner of its past, Walser said. The often blunt way in which Auschwitz was invoked in every conversation about Germany led him to suspect that its memory was being used for political purposes.[5]

I came upon a comparable idea in the work of German historian Arnulf Baring, who in a reference to the peace movement wrote about his country's 'new delusions of grandeur'.[6] Precisely because a moral low had been reached in the war, he believed, many West Germans thought their country had become Europe's moral benchmark. His criticism confirmed my impression that there was too much well-intended browbeating among the Germans. I've come upon it on several occasions myself, especially in the censorship of unwelcome opinions. If today's Germany causes me any discomfort, then it's precisely because of its moral overestimation of itself.

Longer stays in Paris and Warsaw – two cities in which I worked as a correspondent – taught me a great deal about the historical significance of borders. My time in Poland especially, in the early 1980s, changed my view of the world. From the history of a country that had been wiped off the map by its neighbours on several occasions, and after the war was shifted Westwards, I deduced that borders are bound up with existential fears. To this day people in Poland are extremely sensitive to any perceived infringement of the borders, as evidenced by their greater than average dislike of migrants and refugees.

After the fall of communism, a Polish minister said to me, 'Because of German unification, we Poles, like the Czechs, share a border with the West.' That sentence summed up many experiences, but above all a sense of vulnerability that has been a feature of the country for hundreds of years. It's a fear that people in the more secure parts of Europe cannot truly appreciate, but we do need to make the effort to understand that Europe looks very different from Warsaw to the way it looks from Brussels. I learnt from Polish writer Ryszard Kapuściński that for the people of Eastern Poland the Second World War began not with their country's invasion by Hitler but with its invasion by Stalin. He also made clear to me that such experiences sharpen awareness. 'Fear has big eyes', he wrote later.[7]

My time abroad changed my impression of the Netherlands. The widely shared notion that the Dutch live in a country without borders brings with it a somewhat distorted view of the surrounding environment. It goes back a long way. In a book that he published at the end of the First World War, in which the Netherlands remained neutral, legal expert Joost van Hamel was critical of this cast of mind. 'Destined to be a place of peace and rest, our statecraft seemed more and more to regard the whole world as having reached a resting point', he wrote. 'All too

often we forget that this is far from always the fate of countries and peoples. We must not turn our eyes away from the perpetual element of unrest and upheaval that is fomented repeatedly in a region like Europe.'[8]

A century later, those words have lost none of their force. The Dutch have a tendency to expect other countries to adopt their point of view, which suggests they are less good at looking beyond their own borders than they tend to think. By spending time abroad and especially by working in other countries, I became better able to see the self-absorption of my own. My provisional conclusion was that true cosmopolitanism lies not in denying that borders exist but in exploring them and attempting to cross them.

That was the source of my irritation at the words chosen by Dutch author Harry Mulisch at the opening of the Frankfurt Book Fair in 1993. 'When in this country a group of people bellows "Deutschland! Deutschland!" it's terrifying', he said. 'So the Federal Republic is all right, but Germany is not to the same degree. The notion that people in my country, except in a football stadium, would yell "Holland! Holland" is completely ridiculous. So Holland isn't doing too badly.'[9]

Mulisch was cheerfully treating nationalism as a fallacy, and this seemed to obviate the need to think any further about the phenomenon. There are quite a few countries where such fallacies have solidified into traditions. It was never possible to develop a sense of living a borderless life in those countries, because the achievement of independence was accompanied by violence. Mulisch was not saying much more than that the Dutch tend to believe the Netherlands is not truly threatened, and as a consequence they have lost the ability to recognize a threat at the rare moments when danger arises.

Mulisch's speech was an illustration of Dutch conceit: we are self-satisfied, in fact we regard our country as a guide to others and judge them accordingly.[10] In the years since then, we have failed to realize how much hidden pride, of a kind we might safely call nationalism, is bound up with our apparently relaxed self-image. I can understand why Mulisch's speech in Germany was perceived by so many people rather more as an expression of distrust than as evidence of openness. I should add that quite a few of our neighbours to the East shared his distrust of their recently united country; like Mulisch, they feared the return of nationalism.

In a foreign country it's not easy to read between the lines. I understood this better than ever when I started to investigate divided Belgium. If we take no interest in the linguistic conflict in that country, what can we hope to say about Europe as a whole? In Flanders you never need to remind anyone that borders matter. From time to time I've asked liberal politicians like Guy Verhofstadt and Karel De Gucht what lessons for Europe they derive from the long process that is the disintegration of Belgium. They usually fail to give satisfying answers. But how can they speak with such confidence about ever closer union between almost thirty countries when no one has yet succeeded in curbing the nationalism of tiny Flanders?

Writer Geert van Istendael summed this up beautifully: 'L'Europe sera belge ou ne sera pas.'[11] Freely translated, this means that Europe needs to model itself upon Belgium as a multilingual democracy or it will fail. He was writing in the late 1990s, when Belgium was still functioning reasonably well, but now, twenty years on, the Walloons and the Flemings are drifting further and further apart. To what extent can the unification of Europe be achieved if it's so hard for these neighbouring citizens of one country to find an accommodation?

So I pursued my quest to discover the value of borders. In 1996 I made a television series called ‘Waiting for the Barbarians: Borders of Europe’. The title was of course derived from a famous poem by Cavafy:

Why this sudden bewilderment, this confusion?

(How serious people’s faces have become.)

Why are the streets and squares emptying so rapidly,

everyone going home lost in thought?

Because night has fallen and the barbarians haven’t come.

And some of our men just in from the border say

there are no barbarians any longer.

Now what’s going to happen to us without barbarians?

Those people were a kind of solution.[12]

Cavafy’s poem invites self-examination. We should be able to overcome our weaknesses without any need for an external threat.

A number of politicians and philosophers appeared on the programme, including Helmut Schmidt, Francis Fukuyama, Jacques Attali and Peter Sloterdijk. The last of these said in a conversation with Attali, ‘What the skin is to a person, the border is to a state.’ He added, ‘Only angels have no skin, but we are not heavenly, we belong to the earth.’[13] Sloterdijk was at the time working on his *Spheres* trilogy, a cultural history that begins from the space in which humans find themselves. He believes that the issue of how to create security in a borderless world is the cause of the moral panic that characterizes our era.

On reading his work I began for the first time to see the questions surrounding borders as philosophical in nature. I had earlier been struck by a sentence from Hegel: ‘Etwas

ist nur in seiner Grenze und durch seine Grenze das, was es ist.' Or, 'Something only is what it is in its limit and through its limit.'[14] I asked myself: does the same not apply to an open society? Can a democracy endure without borders? If freedom flourishes only within certain limits, might this borderless era presage a new absence of freedom?

These questions kept pressing themselves upon me after a new century arrived. The issue of how to deal with borders was given a fresh urgency by migration. I was increasingly aware of a moral embarrassment surrounding them. It occurred to me that when liberals no longer have words to refer to borders, people with authoritarian tendencies will begin to erect them. The call for borders to be closed cannot be far away if all that liberals can come up with is an appeal for them to be open.

Migration is the most visible sign that our world is smaller than ever. Distances have shrunk and we can no longer ignore the needs of the rest of humanity. Diversity is an everyday reality in cities where more than a hundred nationalities live, but resistance to it is growing – and not only among the traditional residents, since within the circles of newcomers there are people who because of their religious beliefs want to limit contact with their adoptive country as far as possible.

The refugee crisis is revealing our unease more starkly than ever. How can we justify having borders at all? Who are we to deny others access to our territory? Are citizens' rights not the same as human rights? Surely citizenship can't be dependent on where you happen to have been born? But communities cannot exist without any boundaries at all. The right to decide who is and who is not allowed into the community is essential.

The meaning of borders became clear once again, dramatically so, in the coronavirus pandemic that caught the world off guard in the spring of 2020. It ought to surprise no one that national borders were embraced as the first line of defence. It was an understandable reflex. In Flanders roadblocks even appeared at the border with the Netherlands, as shipping containers were used to block access from a neighbouring country that the Belgians believed had too complacent an attitude.

All over Europe, daily television news programmes began with the number of deaths in the home country. Only later was there any mention of victims of the disease in other European states and later still attention might turn to New York. Somewhere towards the end of each broadcast we would be given an impression of the situation in the slums of India or Brazil, which says something about the geography of our emotions. Whatever is closest weighs heaviest.

This suggests one lesson to be drawn from the crisis. How often have we heard it said over recent decades that the nation state is a thing of the past? It quickly transpired that an announcement of a state of emergency or emergency measures is possible only on a national or regional basis. The legitimacy needed to take such drastic steps cannot be contracted out to international institutions. No German waits eagerly for a speech by Ursula von der Leyen, whereas a speech by Angela Merkel is a different matter altogether. It’s first of all within national borders that people accept authority and feel a sense of solidarity.

What has surprised me is how willing we are to give up freedom in exchange for safety. Sealing off a city of millions like Wuhan is possible only under a dictatorship; a democracy could not summon the discipline for it. Yet despite all their differences, many European countries were

prepared to accept a rapid adjustment that radically disrupted daily life.

Most citizens proved willing to adhere to new rules about social distancing or working from home. Indeed, most people will do the right thing if there is a trustworthy government close by. The trust that citizens have in each other is closely bound up with the trust those same citizens have in their government. Why were more people fined for breaking lockdown rules in France than in Denmark? More trust means less coercion. The cultural differences between countries become obvious.

Social abstinence has sharpened our awareness of the community that makes all our individualism possible. We now see how dependent we are on all those who keep the wheels turning. They are the people in key occupations, who run the greatest risk because they cannot work from home. And theirs are precisely the jobs that tend to be poorly paid.

Governments need to ensure this crisis does not heighten inequality, as the last crisis did. We see companies that have made huge profits in the recent past now applying for state support. They neglected to build up reserves in times of plenty. An internet company like Booking.com, which has benefitted hugely from tax breaks over the past few years, surely has quite some gall asking for help for its 5,500 employees in Amsterdam.

There is another way in which the spread of the new coronavirus has shown up the deficiencies of national governments. I had taken it on trust that my country had detailed disaster plans, that there were organizations preparing themselves for such eventualities, that important equipment, including ventilators and surgical masks, had been stockpiled. Now it seems little or none of that was the case.

I understand that it isn’t easy to be prepared for all eventualities, but we don’t build dykes with only the most probable floods in mind. We most certainly maintain a defence system with an eye to wars that may never be fought. So why is there not the same investment in essential medical supplies? How could a situation arise in which healthcare workers treating people who were fighting for their lives were unable to protect themselves adequately? Doesn’t that teach us something about how our governments work?

However understandable our embrace of national borders, an observation by Italian writer Paolo Giordano invites us to reach beyond them. ‘The epidemic pushes us to behave in a way that is unthinkable under normal circumstances, to recognise that we are inextricably connected to other people, to consider their existence and wellbeing in our individual choices. … In the contagion we become, again, a community.’[15]

We have many years behind us in which our main concern was to extend the reach of freedom, a reaction to the society of the 1950s, which was increasingly experienced as restrictive and subservient. Crossing boundaries was an imperative for many of my generation: life had an ever-expanding horizon and a world without borders was the highest ideal. But how habitable is that ideal now? I have become convinced that an open society can exist only within borders. This book is not about the borders of freedom, therefore, but about the freedom of borders.

To what extent does a civilization need boundaries if it is to promote human rights? Our first task is to measure our civilization against norms that we value ourselves. The history of European civilization is also a history of barbarism, including slavery in the colonies and genocide at home, but even a community filled with a sense of

historical responsibility cannot simply open itself up to all the needs of the world.

Experience teaches us how difficult it is to overcome our own constraints. The history of the old continent shows that traditions, identities and traumas permeate the past of all nations. Before we can cross borders we must learn to understand their significance. Humility lies at the very root of cosmopolitanism.

Dealing with borders is perhaps the greatest challenge of our time. Now that borders seem to be falling away, it has become a matter of urgency to determine the form that freedom needs to take. My search has not led me to a nostalgic conclusion. On the contrary, I am looking for a contemporary ideal of progress. Starting from the idea that borders make freedom possible, can we expand in a lasting way the circle of people with whom we identify? Is it possible to give shape to a transnational community?

The future of the European project lies at the centre of all this. It ought to be a source of hope but is more often than not a source of despair. Europeans are becoming aware of how vulnerable the Union now is. They realize that the fate of Greek or Romanian or French citizens directly affects them all, yet the psychological distances between North and South, East and West, have only grown, as a result of crises around the common currency and the shared external border.

Europe has dismantled its internal borders without giving sufficient thought to its external border. Think of the wars in neighbouring regions and the movement of refugees that results. How can a European community take shape without turning its back on the world? The needs of the countries bordering the Union are pressing, but can we really contribute to peace and prosperity in countries like Ukraine, Turkey, Syria and Egypt?

Sustainable involvement in the wider world depends on a notion of progress. Despite the widely held view that Western societies are gripped by a fear of the future, there are plenty of signs that majorities are open to change if offered a direction. Conversely, if given nothing to hold onto, people retreat into their shells. Populism is first of all a form of protectionism.

We saw this with Brexit. The powerful resonance of ‘take back control’ says a great deal. The slogan touches upon a sense of powerlessness and insecurity in a time in which borders seem to be losing their significance. The election of Trump – who made the building of a wall along the Southern border the central image of his campaign – illustrates this change in the collective mood. For many it came as a shock.

It was in the English-speaking world that the breakthrough of populism took place, in countries that see themselves as in the vanguard of globalization. This should give us pause. Perhaps it is precisely in those societies that inequality and alienation have increased as a result of a failure to keep a proper watch on the balance between openness and protection. Their relatively large-scale immigration was a symbol of their open attitude, in which economic and humanitarian motives overlap.

It is striking that in our time employers and human rights activists tend to use the same language. This combination of market and morality soon leads people to underestimate the value of the social contract within a society. Human rights and citizens’ rights are not one and the same. Whereas human rights have no limits, citizens’ rights are given shape only within borders. It’s no accident that social security is under strain in a time of globalization. Economic and humanitarian disavowal of borders can easily reinforce each other.

A future-oriented outlook therefore starts with an understanding of the rational elements within criticism of globalization, rather than a dismissal of all unease as irrational. Talk of an angry multitude is incompatible with this approach.[16] Such psychologizing is objectionable on many grounds. It suggests emotional closeness – 'we feel your pain' – but creates distance, since it's always a matter of other people's unease, other people who are in the grip of delusions. The clash of interests and ideas in a time of globalization is not taken seriously, so the conversation ends before it can begin.

In any case, a bit of self-examination would not go amiss. It soon becomes clear that visions of decline exist all along the political spectrum. Supporters of the European Union who say war will break out again if the euro collapses are just as guilty of summoning visions of catastrophe as opponents of the euro. The millions of people who demonstrated in the 1980s against the forward deployment of American nuclear weapons in Europe were motivated by fear of a nuclear war.

In this book I discuss the consequences for an open society of the erosion of borders. Polish-British sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has placed the issue in a broader context: 'There is good reason to conceive of the course of history as pendulum-like, even if in other respects it may be portrayed as linear: freedom and security, both equally pressing and indispensable, happen to be hard to reconcile without friction – and considerable friction most of the time.'[17] In other words, a borderless world can end up depriving us of our freedoms.

This investigation begins with a philosophical contemplation of the meaning of cosmopolitanism, followed by a more empirical consideration of globalization (Part I). I then look at the causes and consequences of migration and

the refugee crisis (Part II). Finally I examine the present state of Europe, chart the new world disorder and discuss various ideas about the future of the European Union (Part III).

It is a triptych concerned first with the significance of attachment to place in a time of globalization, then with the crossing of borders, which creates new fault lines in society, and lastly with possible ways of reconciling freedom and security in Europe. It explores the questions lurking behind the reality of the euro crisis, the refugee crisis and populism. Can the gap be closed between citizens who are looking for protection and citizens who embrace openness?

Notes

1 Paul Scheffer, 'De doos van Pandora', *De Haagse Post*, 31 March 1990, pp. 34–9.

2 Paul Scheffer, *Alles doet mee aan de werkelijkheid: Herman Wolf 1893–1942*, Amsterdam, De Bezige Bij, 2013.

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7 Ryszard Kapuściński, *Lapidarium*, transl. Martin Pollack, Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 1996 (originally published in

five volumes as *Lapidarium*, Warsaw, 1990, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2002). English by the translator.

8 J. A. van Hamel, *Nederland tusschen de mogendheden*, Amsterdam, Van Holkema & Warendorf, 1918, p. 387.

9 Harry Mulisch, *Bij gelegenheid*, Amsterdam, De Bezige Bij, 1995, p. 34.

10 See Paul Scheffer, 'De ontvoering van Europa', *NRC Handelsblad*, 18 October 1993.

11 Geert van Istendael, *Le labyrinth belge*, transl. Vincent Marnix and Monique Nagielkopf, Bordeaux, Le Castor Astral, 2004, p. 271.

12 C. P. Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, transl. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1975, p. 18.

13 Peter Sloterdijk, in 'Wachten op de barbaren' (VPRO television), 31 March 1996.

14 G. W. F. Hegel, *Die Wissenschaft der Logik*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1970, p. 197.

15 Paulo Giordano, *How Contagion Works: Science, Awareness and Community in Times of Global Crises*, transl. Alex Valente, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2020, p. 24.

16 See for example Mark Schaevers, 'Het multiculturele debat: Paul Scheffer en Arnon Grunberg kruisen de degens', *Humo*, 9 February 2018.

17 Zygmunt Bauman, *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, Cambridge, Polity, 2001, p. 19.

Part I
The value of proximity

Discovery of the world citizen

In *The Complaint of Peace*, Erasmus remarks that the most trifling matters are used to sow division.

> Thus, for instance, an Englishman, say they, is the natural enemy of a Frenchman, because he is a Frenchman. A man born on this side the river Tweed must hate a Scotchman, because he is a Scotchman. A German naturally disagrees with a Frank; a Spaniard with both. … A name is nothing; but there are many circumstances, very important realities, which ought to endear and unite men of different nations. As an Englishman, you bear ill-will to a Frenchman. Why not rather, as a man to a man, do you not bear him good will?[1]

Here we see a cosmopolitanism that wishes to embrace humanity and regards national, religious or ethnic differences as of lesser importance. It is cosmopolitanism as a form of pacifism, a principled appeal for the bridging of differences in order to create lasting peace. This tradition in European thought is both important and controversial, and we will discuss it here mainly in the light of work by philosophers Desiderius Erasmus and Immanuel Kant.

By starting with a brief history of ideas, I aim to make clear how long it took to develop an ideal of equality that attempted to reach beyond borders. It turns out to be far from natural to prioritize humanity as a whole. In fact the French, Germans and Spaniards – to say nothing of the Scots – attach great significance to their own unique character. This detour through philosophy is crucial partly because it demonstrates the degree to which thinkers like