

Opinion

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EUROPE'S MIGRATION EMERGENCY

To respond fully, the E.U. must shift its focus to human rights.

Record numbers of migrants are risking perilous crossings by sea to reach Europe's borders. At least 23,000 have died attempting to make it to Europe since the year 2000, and more are dying every week. A new report from Amnesty International puts the blame squarely on "Fortress Europe" migration policies.

A clampdown on border crossings by land has led to a sharp rise in attempts by desperate migrants to reach Europe by sea. Italy has rescued more than 50,000 people since it launched its Mare Nostrum marine rescue operation in October 2013 after 400 migrants drowned in two disasters. Meanwhile, less than one-fifth of the 4 billion euros allocated to border management by the European Commission over the last seven years was devoted to the resettlement and integration of refugees in the European Union, while €2 billion was spent on external border protection.

Many in the E.U. argue that human traffickers are encouraging more people to cross by sea; that the best humanitarian response is preventing them from boarding boats in the first place; and that, in any case, they are economic migrants. The facts, according to Amnesty International, tell a different story. Most migrants are refugees from conflict-torn nations like Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea and Somalia; going home is not an option. Rounded up en route or turned back at Europe's borders, thousands languish in detention centers, while others are reduced to destitution and subjected to torture and other abuses in countries that do not guarantee their human rights.

There are signs that the new E.U. leadership intends to create a more united approach to migration. Italy is leveraging its new position as rotating president of the European Council to demand that the European border control agency Frontex take over the Mare Nostrum rescue operation, which currently costs €9 million a month. And Jean-Claude Juncker, the new president of the European Commission, is considering adding a new commissioner dedicated to migration.

For this new approach to work, the E.U. must shift its focus to human rights. Coordinated marine search-and-rescue efforts will save more lives, but the E.U. should also create legal avenues for refugees to reach Europe, increase financial assistance to transit countries and refocus Frontex's mission on the humane treatment of migrants who survive the journey to Europe's borders.

THE POPE AND THE VATICAN BANK

The reforms were desperately needed after decades of corruption.

Pope Francis is showing that he means business — sound fiduciary business — in his campaign to clean up the Vatican Bank. Since the pope made his promise of credible reform last year, investigators and bank officials have vetted and closed out 3,000 suspect and unwanted accounts.

Francis continued the shake-up last week with the hiring of a veteran European fund manager, Jean-Baptiste de Franssu, to be the bank's new president, the naming of an advisory board dominated by banking specialists, and the sweeping redesign of Vatican finances and assets under the direction of a trusted troubleshooter, Cardinal George Pell.

"Our ambition is to become something of a model for financial management rather than a cause for occasional scandal," Cardinal Pell candidly explained. He announced that the Vatican would hand over management of its billions of euros to external banking specialists and be subject to regular reports by an auditor general.

The pope reportedly considered shutting down the bank given the decades of scandal. The latest was the arrest in January of Msgr. Nunzio Scarano, the former accountant for the Vatican's vast real estate holdings, on charges of trying to launder millions of euros through the Vatican bank. But Francis opted for full-scale reform, which has prompted the bank to restrict its customer base to Catholic institutions, clerics, employees and resident diplomats to the Vatican.

Decades of corruption at the bank were grimly punctuated in a bankruptcy scandal in 1982 when Roberto Calvi — a private banker dubbed "God's banker" for his close involvement with the Vatican bank — was found hanged under London's Blackfriars Bridge. Over the years, Italian prosecutors have brought criminal cases against bank officials and frozen the bank's credit.

The pope's ambition to change the bank's culture was underlined by the announcement that Cardinal Pell's new responsibilities would also involve reform of the Vatican's media practices. Chris Patten, the former BBC Trust chairman, was appointed to run an advisory committee to overhaul the Vatican's newspaper and broadcast operations, with an emphasis on the digital future and social media — including the pope's popular Twitter feed.

The skeleton garden of Paris

Justin E. H. Smith

PARIS I am at the Jardin des Plantes, in the Fifth Arrondissement on the Left Bank of the Seine. Here we find one of the world's oldest zoos, still officially called a "menagerie," various greenhouses and rows of brilliant dahlias book-ended by statues of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon.

We also find the various galleries composing the National Museum of Natural History. These include, not least, the Gallery of Paleontology and Comparative Anatomy, a two-floor exhibition hall built in preparation for the 1900 World Fair, where the skeletons and preserved tissues of thousands of animal species are on display: the massive jaws of sperm whales, cross-sections of elephant molars like great petrified mille-feuilles, countless miniature bat skulls under tiny glass domes.

It is here, among the many bones, that I have been drawn since my arrival in this city, as if it were the true center of Paris. I sometimes have trouble explaining or even understanding why I

moved here, I who care nothing about fashion or fine cuisine or shortened work weeks, who loves wine but is happy as long as it is red. I love art, but I can barely survive 30 minutes in an art museum without my cafeteria-hom-ing instinct kicking in.

Why do I keep coming back to this bone menagerie? What pull do the skeletons have that the artworks lack? How do they call out when the living beasts across the garden, in spite of their barks and howls, remain silent to me?

I return at every opportunity. The gallery, which grew up around the collections of the great French naturalists Buffon, Georges Cuvier, Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and others, is the result of a vision of living nature that does not set it sharply apart from art. Twentieth-century artists like Damien Hirst would, with his segmented cows and his immortalized shark, ironize the artifice of the natural-history display. But the treatment of such specimens as objects for aesthetic contemplation is by no means revolutionary. It is borrowed, with a smirk, from an earlier era's sincere effort to understand nature by re-composing it in a display that captures its beautiful order.

The overwhelming impression in the

main exhibition hall is of a great stampede of animal skeletons. They are all facing in the same direction, hundreds of them, posed as if running. At the vanguard of this formation are various megafauna, each of which would be impressive enough on its own: hippopotamuses, elk, a Steller's sea cow. As one surveys the abundance of vertebrate forms, one perceives viscerally the unity of this great taxon. The skeletons reveal

God, or nature, didn't tear up the blueprint and start over for each species.

that all these different animals are in the end variations on a single theme, built up around a backbone. Many of the skeletons belonged to animal celebrities. There is the rhinoceros of Versailles, for example, who was assassinated in 1793 by an angry mob of Sans Culottes. There is the Stadhouder giraffe, brought in from the Netherlands in part to disprove the Marquise de Pompadour's claim that the enormous femur in her possession, from an animal of the same species, had belonged to a human giant. There is Rock Sand, the thoroughbred winner of the 1903 British Triple Crown.

And there are the various skeletons of mummified animals brought back by Geoffroy in 1802 from the Napoleonic expedition to Egypt. Unfortunately for the French naturalist, and to the apparent advantage of his anti-evolutionist adversary Cuvier, the Egyptian skeletons — a Dorcas gazelle, a peregrine falcon, an ox — did not seem any different from their modern counterparts, though they were millenniums old. It was of course somewhat naïve to look to the human historical record, rather than to the fossil record, to settle the matter of species change over time. Yet this is the sort of naïveté that in its way gives off unmistakable signs of genius.

Throughout the 18th century, evolution became increasingly fashionable, but the problem of humanity's place in any evolutionary scheme loomed large. The study of animal nature thus made it possible to think our way into a web of kinship for all living species, before we were quite ready to see ourselves as part of that web. Even the whales had tiny pelvises, unconnected to the rest of the skeleton, with what looked like the traces of hind legs. What were these doing there? One thing was certain: God, or nature, did not tear up its blueprint and begin anew for each species. The quagga, the okapi, the tapir, the various marsupials: All testify to an elegant order, aesthetic and systematic at once.

Our reasons for wishing to be where we wish to be are often idiosyncratic, incommunicable. When I try to come up with an explanation for why I wish to be in Paris, the only faint glimmer of an idea that I can find is that I wish to be close to this place: to the Jardin des Plantes, to its menagerie of dik-diks and ostriches, to its greenhouses of prehistoric ferns, and, most of all, to the Gallery of Comparative Anatomy. It is not that I will spend my life in this complex, and it is not that dusty old displays of natural history are entirely unique to this city. It is, rather, that this place embodies a certain intangible spirit that was once much more naturally associated with Paris.

Buffon, Cuvier and the others were not displaying mere curiosities, as the Marquise de Pompadour did with her giant's femur; nor were they seeking to one-up nature, like Hirst with his shark, by the conceit that their art is more worthy of attention than the creatures that are their art's subject. The spirit that brought the gallery into existence is one that presupposes the unity of art and nature, that does not shy away from seeing nature itself as an aesthetic object.

In this spirit, it is among the foremost roles, and greatest distinctions, of a capital city that it be a center of natural knowledge, that it be a point of access to nature as a whole: a portal, through the very densest concentration of human culture, to the order of nature that lies beyond it. The skeletons are like the most vivid embodiments of this order. It would be a great mistake to think of them as dead.

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A comparison of higher primate skulls on display at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris.

OWEN FRANKEN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Who will stand up for Hong Kong?

Michael C. Davis

Seventeen years after the handover of Hong Kong from Britain to China, the political future of the territory hangs in the balance. The city can continue down a path that will lead to a fully democratic political system, or Beijing can thwart its democratic development and eventually run Hong Kong like just another Chinese city.

All signs indicate that Beijing plans to tighten its grip. As increasingly restive Hong Kongers protest this summer against Beijing's interference, the international community, particularly Britain, the former colonial power, has a moral and legal obligation to support their will for democracy and autonomy. London should demand that Beijing live up to its agreements and back off.

On July 1st, an estimated half a million people took to the Hong Kong streets to protest Beijing's meddling. In the days before, nearly 800,000 Hong Kongers participated in an informal vote run by a pro-democracy group in support of electing the city's next leader by democratic means, a prospect Beijing has all but ruled out.

In recent months, the Chinese government has made clear that it intends to renege on a promise to allow Hong Kongers "universal suffrage" to freely elect their next leader by insisting Beijing must vet the candidates for "patriotism." But it was the release in June of a strongly worded policy paper in which Beijing claimed ultimate author-

ity over Hong Kong that galvanized locals against the mainland's interference.

The so-called white paper says the "high degree of autonomy" Hong Kong was promised in the 1984 Joint Declaration — signed by Britain and China when Beijing was trying to assure the world it would leave Hong Kong alone after the end of British colonial rule — is not "full autonomy." In blatant disregard of Margaret Thatcher's signature on the Joint Declaration, the white paper claims that Beijing can interpret Hong Kong law as it sees fit. The territory's autonomy, the paper says, derives "solely from the authorization of the central leadership."

Perhaps most troubling, the document likens Beijing's authority over Hong Kong to how it rules other autonomous regions in China — a worrying prospect for anyone familiar with how the leadership treats the people of Tibet and Xinjiang.

The situation should not be this bleak. As early as 1979, in meetings with British officials, Deng Xiaoping said Hong Kongers should "put their hearts at ease" about Chinese rule. The Basic Law, Hong Kong's mini-constitution, largely fulfilled the legal commitments made in the Joint Declaration. Hong Kong courts were authorized to interpret the Basic Law within the scope of Hong Kong's autonomy, while foreign affairs and defense were to be handled by Beijing. Most importantly, "univer-

sal suffrage" was to be implemented.

Now, the white paper refers to Hong Kong's judges as "administrators" and emphasizes their role in guarding national security.

Cracks appeared soon after the handover. First, the National People's Congress Standing Committee effectively overturned a 1999 decision by Hong Kong's highest court in a case about local residency rights, raising great concern about Hong Kong's judicial independence. Later, Beijing made central government approval a requirement for any reforms to the Legislative Council election process. And over the past decade the subservient Hong Kong government has tried to push through unpopular national security laws and policies on patriotic education (all abandoned in the face of mass public protests). Meanwhile, a form of crony capitalism is widely thought to be creeping across the border.

Still, Beijing finally agreed in 2007 to allow universal suffrage to elect the chief executive in 2017. Yet in the last year Beijing has insisted that nominees must "love China and love Hong Kong" — language that is code to exclude the democrats. Locals feel they have no other choice but to take the cause of democracy to the streets.

The group Occupy Central with Love and Peace has threatened a mass act of civil disobedience in the Central financial district if the government does not put forth fair democracy proposals that meet international standards. To show support for its position, Occupy Central organized last month's vote in which citizens were asked to choose from

three democratic proposals for nominating chief executive candidates. The next protest, its organizers say, could happen as early as August if government proposals, due out this week, aim to block real democratic reform.

Who will stand up for Hong Kong? Major international banks and accounting firms are toeing Beijing's line, saying publicly that mass protests will disrupt the city's economy and threaten the peace. Except for the usual expression of support for "credible" elections, Washington and other foreign governments have largely remained silent on Beijing's latest moves.

A special onus falls on Britain, whose flag some Hong Kongers waved during the July 1 demonstrations. One can only wonder if Prime Minister David Cameron, who recently signed a group of major trade deals with China during Prime Minister Li Keqiang's visit to London, will ever weigh in to uphold his country's commitment to Hong Kong's people. He should consider the words of his predecessor, John Major, who sought to assure a wary world before Hong Kong was handed over to the Chinese.

"If in the future there were any suggestion of a breach of the Joint Declaration, we would mobilize the international community and pursue every legal or other avenue open to us," Prime Minister Major said back in 1996, a year before the handover. It's clear that time has come.

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