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**Unequal access to foreign spaces:
how states use visa restrictions to
regulate mobility in a globalised world**

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Global Commission on International Migration

In his report on the 'Strengthening of the United Nations - an agenda for further change', UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan identified migration as a priority issue for the international community.

Wishing to provide the framework for the formulation of a coherent, comprehensive and global response to migration issues, and acting on the encouragement of the UN Secretary-General, Sweden and Switzerland, together with the governments of Brazil, Morocco, and the Philippines, decided to establish a Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM). Many additional countries subsequently supported this initiative and an open-ended Core Group of Governments established itself to support and follow the work of the Commission.

The Global Commission on International Migration was launched by the United Nations Secretary-General and a number of governments on December 9, 2003 in Geneva. It is comprised of 19 Commissioners.

The mandate of the Commission is to place the issue of international migration on the global policy agenda, to analyze gaps in current approaches to migration, to examine the inter-linkages between migration and other global issues, and to present appropriate recommendations to the Secretary-General and other stakeholders.

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Introduction

In order to enter foreign spaces, travellers nowadays need passports or other documents, which only nation-states have the right to issue, together with a valid visa depending on which passport they hold and where they want to travel to. However, the modern system of passports and visa restrictions has only gradually evolved over time. While passports and visas in one form or another have existed since medieval times, the comprehensive system as we know it is inextricably linked to the evolution of the modern nation-state, “the almost inevitable outcome of the Westphalian state” (Anderson 2000, 18). Torpey (1998, 2000) argues that, with the victory of the principle of national sovereignty, nation-states have successfully managed over time to monopolize and usurp the authority to determine who may enter their external borders¹. Nation-state sovereignty understood as the principle of non-interference in internal matters might have weakened in recent decades, but few, if any, deny nation-states the right to control and restrict entry into their territory. Such controls and restrictions have “historically been viewed as inherent in the very nature of sovereignty” (Collinson 1996, 77).

As Sassen (1996, 1998) notes, nowhere in international law is there enshrined a right to enter foreign spaces. Even the non-binding Universal Declaration of Human Rights only postulates a right of exit and entry to one’s own country (article 13). In order to guarantee security and order, a state has to keep a close eye on who enters its territory and must be free in its decision to refuse entry, argued Bertelsmann (1914, 11) in his study on the passport system just before the First World War. More than ninety years later, states still subscribe to this view with few amendments. If anything, it has seen a revival in the wake of 9/11 as well as in the increasingly hostile reaction to asylum and other migration to Western high-income countries (UN 2002).

Yet, at the same time as nation-states cling to their prerogative to control entry, economic and political imperatives also call for permeable borders. The League of Nations in the inter-War period and, after World War II, the Council of Europe, reminded nation-states that visa restrictions inhibit international trade and tourism (Salter 2003). Over the last two to three decades, globalisation has led to a degree of cross-border mobility never known before. Globalisation has seemingly created a world “where borders and boundaries have become increasingly porous” and where “people readily (although certainly not freely and without difficulty) cut across national boundaries” (Inda and Rosaldo 2002, 2f.).

Certain groups of countries have set up passport unions and harmonized visa policies in order to facilitate travel and the exchange of goods, services and ideas. Many have argued that the unprecedented demand for mobility undermines the state’s ability and willingness to exercise stringent controls of who enters its national borders (Cornelius, Martin and Hollifield 1994; Bigo 1998). Such stringent controls are

¹ Nation-states also often exert control over who may exit their territory. In some countries it is very difficult for certain groups of people to gain the passport that is a necessity for foreign travel. Authoritarian regimes are not the only ones guilty of such practices. In the 1950s and early 1960s, hundreds of Americans suspected of being sympathetic to Communism were denied passports and thus barred from travel abroad (Rogers 1985). Some countries also severely restrict the movement of people within their territory (Torpey 1998, 2000). These issues are outside the scope of the present article, however, which focuses on the control of entry into foreign spaces via visa restrictions.

apparently against states' economic interests. For example, Flynn (2000, 58) argues that they would "place governments on a collision course with easy trade, which is key to the sustained expansion and integration of the global economy". Stringent controls also run counter to the expansion of human and civil rights to resident immigrants (Sassen 1996, 1998). They would, in the words of Bigo (1998, 160), "put at risk economic prosperity and political liberties associated with open societies". Do these developments constrain the sovereignty of nation-states against their will, are they simply 'losing control?' (Sassen 1996).

There can be no doubt that cross-national movement, both short-term and long-term, has increased dramatically over the last three decades in the wake of revolutions in communication and transportation technologies that gave rise to what Harvey (1989) has termed the process of "time-space compression". International arrivals increased from 166 million in 1970 to 702 million in 2002 (WTO 1995, 2003). The number of migrants, that is people residing in countries other than their country of birth, has doubled since 1970 to 175 million (UN 2002). This study demonstrates how nation-states employ bilateral visa restrictions in an attempt to manage the complex trade-off between facilitating and promoting economic and political interests on the one hand and maintaining immigration control and upholding security on the other.

As a consequence of this trade-off, a system has been put in place that is highly unequal in granting easy access to foreign spaces. The restrictions to freedom and difficulties in crossing national borders admitted to by Inda and Rosaldo (2002) turn out to be highly unevenly distributed across people with different nationalities. Facilitating the mobility of some is achieved at the expense of inhibiting and deterring the mobility of others. It is not passports as such, as Salter (2003, 2) seems to suggest, but the visa restrictions imposed on passport holders from certain countries that are one of the most important mechanisms by which nation-states exert their prerogative to control entry into their territories. I will describe and characterize the system of bilateral visa restrictions, put forward hypotheses with regards to its determinants and test these hypotheses empirically.

To my knowledge, despite its significance in restricting travel opportunities for billions of people, no such analysis has ever been undertaken, either by political scientists, scholars of international relations or geographers. Many others have noted the strange paucity of research on the topic of international passports, visa restrictions and the like (e. g. O'Byrne 2001, 399). Salter (2003, 152) sees a great gap in the extent of scholarship and explicitly calls for a research program that includes a "study of the international visa regime". It is this specific gap that this article attempts to fill. The study of visa restrictions should be of great interest to geographers, not only because access to foreign spaces is an inherently geographical topic, but also because it directly relates to many issues which have long since been subject to geographical debate. For example, visa restrictions directly relate to the issue of governments' attempt to control and ultimately deter immigration from certain groups of people; they are pertinent to debates on whether or not borders have become more permeable in a globalised world undermining the sovereignty of nation-states; and they represent an important manifestation of the inequalities imposed on people on the basis of nationality.

Why states impose visa restrictions

Every state faces the dilemma between facilitating the cross-border flow of people for its own economic and political benefit on the one hand and monitoring, controlling and limiting that same flow for its perceived security interest on the other. In order to understand the system of bilateral visa restrictions, one must therefore look at why countries want to encourage (or at least not discourage) the inflow of people from certain countries, but want to deter the inflow of people from other countries.

Let us start with the motivations for keeping people out. One obvious concern is that visitors might become immigrants by staying on (illegally) in the country instead of returning to their home country. This concern is particularly raised by policymakers of Organization of Economic Co-operation and Economic Development (OECD) countries who have become increasingly anti-immigrationist (Black 1996; UN 2002; Cunningham 2004), mainly for economic reasons, but partly also because immigrants are increasingly regarded as a threat to social and ethno-cultural stability (Samers 1997; Nevins 2002; Purcell and Nevins 2005). Greatly improved communication links, global television networks and more affordable and faster transportation links in the wake of globalisation have meant that the potential of immigration has hugely increased. Pictures of apparent material affluence being broadcasted into the cities and villages of poor countries buttressed by the mass tourism of Westerners, cheaper telephone calls and more affordable flights mean that would-be immigrants have more information, better contacts and easier travel access to OECD countries. At the same time, the factors pushing people toward migration such as poverty, political repression, human rights abuse, war and civil conflict have not diminished (Neumayer 2005).

Northern Africans trying to enter Southern Italy by night via unregistered and unofficial boats, Mexicans trying to cross the border to Texas illegally and Asians being rescued in the middle of the Pacific Ocean from a shipwreck on its way to Australia are the most televised and publicly known efforts to enter the promised land of OECD countries. However, despite their great salience, they are not the major pathways to illegal immigration. Bigo (1998, 152) reports from discussions with French Schengen Officials and the Central Directorate for the repression of illegal immigration and employment that only 20% of illegal immigrants crossed the border illegally, whereas the vast majority entered the country perfectly legally, but then simply overstayed the allowed period of time. Andreas (1998, 607) reports a higher share of individuals crossing the border illegally for the United States (50 to 60%) despite the increasing militarisation of the U. S. -Mexican border (Nevins 2002). But even so an estimated number of 150,000 people each year overstay their visa with the intention of settlement.

Visa restrictions represent an important deterrent to would-be immigrants. First, there is the additional cost and hassle of applying for the visa either via post, which can take weeks or months, or in person, which implies travelling to the embassy or one of the few consulates and waiting in the queue, possibly for hours. Second, the issuing consulate or embassy can of course deny the application without giving any reason. As Torpey (1998, 252) has put it,

At a time when substantial but unknown numbers of people become ‘immigrants’ simply by overstaying the legally prescribed duration of their stay, limiting ingress is the best way for states to avoid entering into a series of potentially costly obligations to non-nationals. Passport and visa controls are crucial mechanisms for this purpose, the ‘first line of defense’ against the entry of undesirables.

It is no coincidence that one of the major policy consequences of the rising flow of asylum applications in Western European countries in the 1990s was the establishment of a common policy of visa restrictions, together with a system of penalties on airlines carrying passengers without a valid visa². Council Regulation 2317, adopted in 1995, provided the first common list of countries and has been updated continuously since then. It was based on an earlier provision of the Schengen Implementation Agreement from 1990 (Jileva 2002). This regulation forms part of the Schengen acquis, which became part of the EU treaty system with the Amsterdam Treaty, and is regarded as essential for lowering the internal border controls within the Schengen area.

Today, all European Union countries, with the exception of Ireland and the United Kingdom, plus Iceland and Norway, refer to an identical list of countries whose passport holders must be in possession of a valid visa for crossing the external borders of the Member States³. With an original list of 73 countries, the number of countries facing common visa restrictions to all Schengen countries increased to 108 in the 1995 regulation and to 132 in the 2001 regulation. The increase in external border controls together with an increasingly comprehensive common country list of visa restrictions was inextricably linked to, and a precondition for, the abolition of internal border controls (Wiener 1998). Enhanced freedom of movement for insiders was achieved at the expense of decreased mobility for certain outsiders, namely those on the list of countries in need of a visa for entry, prompting critics to speak of efforts to create a “fortress Europe” and a “wall around the West” (Richmond 1994; Andreas and Synder 2000). Former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma warned that the Schengen visa rules would “replace the Iron Curtain with a different, more humane but no less dangerous Paper Curtain” (quoted in Lavenex and Uçarer 2004, 433f.).

Visa restrictions fulfil the double role of pre-selection and deterrence. Those who do not need a visa are regarded as desirable and low-risk visitors by default, those who need a visa and have been approved by the country’s consulate or embassy abroad are regarded as not undesirable and not representing a great risk upon closer inspection, whereas those who need a visa and do not have one are denied access. To be sure, even if no visa is needed or a visa has been attained, the final decision of whether one can enter a foreign space is made at the border itself and there is always the risk of being rejected despite being in possession of a valid visa. However, this risk is rather small in reality, which is why the pre-selection role of the system of visa restrictions is so important. This importance is further heightened by the fact that it might not be possible to send people whose entry is rejected back to their home country.

² This is reminiscent of the fact that European governments of the 19th and early 20th century required steamship companies to check whether individuals had the right to travel to their chosen destination (Torpey 1998, 243).

³ Ireland was unwilling to give up its bilateral free movement agreement with the UK, which it would have had to sacrifice in order to become part of the Schengen area. Denmark retains the right to accept decisions taken within the Schengen framework on an individual basis, but has accepted the EU’s common list of countries whose passport holders need a visa for entry (Anderson 2000).

True, in principle the passport “provides an assurance for the State of transit or destination that the bearer can return to the State which issued the passport” (ICAO 2004, 13). In other words, in principle the passport guarantees that those denied access can be sent back to the issuing country. However, there have been many cases where countries have refused to take their nationals back, prompting OECD country governments to bribe with financial aid sending country governments into concluding readmission agreements (UN 2002). Also, asylum seekers sometimes destroy their passports and other travel documents so that the country denying them access has nowhere to send them to. It is precisely for this reason that many countries require airlines not to let anyone enter the aircraft who is not in the possession of a valid visa (if required to have one). Otherwise the dual purpose of visa restrictions, pre-selection and deterrence would be defeated. Reportedly, in their efforts to comply, airlines have refused potential asylum-seekers to board flights, “flagrantly discriminating against non-European passengers, and even going so far as to kidnap passengers to prevent them from presenting themselves to airport immigration authorities” (Cruz 1995, 3) without a valid passport and visa. Increasingly, sanctions are applied to sea and ground transport companies as well (UN 2002).

The importance of visa restrictions in combating immigration to European Union countries can be illustrated by three facts. First, Article 100c of the Treaty Establishing the European Community calls for introducing visa restrictions on countries which enjoyed visa-free travel before, “in the event of an emergency situation in a third country posing a threat of a sudden inflow of nationals from that country into the Community”. Second, Romania (and before that Bulgaria) was only included in the list of countries exempt from visa requirements after it had convinced the European Commission that it had made “undeniable progress (...) as regards illegal immigration from its country, its visa policy and the controls at its borders” (European Communities 2001a). Third, the new EU member countries of Eastern Europe had to accept the existing list of countries and had to impose visa restrictions on third countries such as Moldova, Russia and the Ukraine despite the fact that they had not had such restrictions in place before accession to the EU and have economic, political or cultural ties with these countries (Jileva 2002, 2004).

After the restrictions came into force, cross-border tourism and trade travel fell sharply. Other countries eager to join the EU, such as Croatia, Macedonia and Turkey already implement changes to their visa policies, anticipating that they will have to cut old ties in order to gain new membership (Lavenex and Uçarer 2004). On the other side of the Atlantic, US authorities removed Argentina and Uruguay from the list of countries enjoying visa-free travel to the US when too many passport holders from these countries attempted to overstay their allowed 90-day period or were denied admission at the border (Siskin 2004). Indeed, to qualify for visa-free travel to the US, countries must maintain a very low ‘disqualification rate’ of below 2 per cent on average over time, defined as the percentage of national passport holders violating the conditions of their entry allowance or being rejected or withdrawing their application at the border (Siskin 2004).

Besides immigration, another big concern to many states is infiltration by potential terrorists, criminals such as drug traffickers and other persona non grata. In the past, entry has also been denied to people with infectious diseases (Slater 2003, ch. 3). However, some high-profile cases of visa restrictions on HIV-infected persons

notwithstanding (Ezzell 1989; Garmaise 2002), the focus of concern is now clearly on threats to regime stability by politically undesirable individuals as well as threats to national security by politically motivated violence and trans-national networks of crime. Long before 9/11, autocratic regimes have always been suspicious that foreign influence might undermine the regime's foundations and have therefore been eager to monitor who enters the country. The more autocratic and repressive a regime is, the more it is threatened by open borders (Anderson 2000). Visa restrictions represent an important mechanism with which to monitor and control entry. One would therefore expect that democracies, all other things being equal, would be more liberal with their system of visa restrictions than autocracies.

Too liberal, indeed, in the eyes of those concerned with national security, particularly in the United States after 9/11. Despite the fact that all terrorists participating in the attack on the World Trade Centre entered the United States on valid visas⁴, the US has severely restricted the issue of visas since then. This has created considerable concern among business groups, research centres and universities about undue delays in granting visas, thus keeping out students, scientists and businessmen whose entry would be beneficial to US interests (Froelich 2004; Bhattacharjee 2004).

That passport holders from certain countries do not need visas to enter many other countries has prompted security experts to worry about passports from these countries being stolen or forged to gain easier access and to circumvent the necessity to obtain a visa. Passports from EU countries have "become the world's most popular travel documents to forge, counterfeit or steal" (Fuller 2002). Criminals and terrorists appreciate EU passports since they offer visa-free travel in many parts of the world, whereas 'illegal' immigrants use them to enter and work within the EU without restrictions. The travel opportunities opened up by the possession of an EU or other OECD country passport, stolen or forged, are so great that they carry a high price on the black market.

To combat this problem, some countries, with the US at the forefront, now require passport holders who do not need a visa to enter the country to have machine-readable passports, so that stolen passports can be traced more easily (Slater 2004). To the dismay of the travel industry, other business groups and universities, individuals without such passports now need a visa to enter the US, but US officials claim that the new system has allowed them to detain more than 200 persons suspected of criminal convictions or immigration violations within a matter of months (Anonymous 2004).

In the future, these machine-readable passports will also need to contain biometric identifiers, by which the identity of the passport holder can be uniquely determined (Siskin 2004). Similarly, counterfeit-proof visa stamps are introduced to counter the rise in forged visa stamps (UN 2002). As with passports, the development of a black market in visas is the inevitable consequence of a restrictive system. Corrupt officials at German embassies and consulates in the Ukraine, Russia, Albania and the Kosovo illegally selling tens of thousands of visas to individuals, whose visa applications would have normally been denied, prompted an inquiry in the federal parliament that might still lead to the resignation of Germany's Foreign Minister (FAZ 2005).

⁴ Mohamad Atta and Marwan Alshahhi, the two pilots of the planes crashing into the World Trade Center towers, entered the US on a valid visitor visa, but applied for a change to status of students, which was granted since US authorities regarded students as low-risk travellers at the time (Salter 2004, 84f.).

Why states refrain from imposing visa restrictions

From the considerations so far it follows that, conversely, countries might refrain from imposing visa restrictions on passport holders from other countries from which they do not fear illegal immigration or the entrance of unwanted individuals. However, the absence of restrictions cannot only be motivated by the absence of concerns, but also by positive incentives to facilitate international travel. Most policymakers now subscribe to the view that international trade, foreign investment, tourism, scientific, business and other contacts are desirable for mainly economic reasons. Hence one would expect that countries that do a lot of trade with each other would want to facilitate the international exchange of goods and services by providing easy access to each other's spaces.

Poorer countries have an incentive to exempt passport holders from high-income countries from visa restrictions in the hope of bolstering foreign investment and knowledge spill-overs into their country. Major tourist destinations have an incentive not to impose visa restrictions on sending countries in order to remain attractive in the increasingly competitive market for mass tourism. O'Byrne (2001) argues that the relaxation of visa requirements in many countries can be explained as a direct response to the demands by the tourism industry, for which "freedom of travel *is* freedom to trade" (emphasis in original).

As a caveat, visa restrictions can represent a simple way of raising a good deal of foreign currency⁵ for a major tourist destination. Of course, the revenue from visa applications has to be balanced against the costs of processing the application and the opportunity costs of deterring potential visitors. This motive therefore only makes sense in the few cases where the visa can be obtained at the border itself; the procedure of getting it is often extremely simple and does not involve any major check on the applicant. Egypt is a good example of this: passport holders from OECD and other major tourist sending countries need a visa, but can obtain one at the border for a fee of US\$15 without complication. With an estimated number of arrivals in 2000 of around 5 million people, this might have generated a revenue of up to US\$75 million.

But besides economic reasons, there are also likely to be important political reasons why countries do not want to impose visa restrictions on passport holders from certain other countries. Such restrictions are likely to be regarded as an unfriendly act, as a sign of suspicion against the citizens of the affected country. Indeed, while such restrictions are affected by the relations between two states (Wang 2004), they also affect the relations between two states. Countries are therefore likely not to impose visa restrictions on other countries with which they share the same geographical region or civilization. Historical links such as former colonial experience can also play a role. Historical, geographical and civilisational patterns of shared belonging are likely to influence visa restrictions given that the latter are powerful manifestations of inclusion and exclusion. Granting visa-free access to one's territorial space is perhaps the most welcoming thing that can be done for passport holders from other nations, short of a full passport union. Full passport unions, where travel between the union members is not only visa-free, but also possible with identity

⁵ This point had already been noted by Bertelsmann (1914).

cards other than a passport, are a rather rare phenomenon. The Nordic Union (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden), the Schengen area, the UK-Ireland union and the Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates) are the only currently functioning unions (Salter 2003).

The combination of motivations driving the bilateral system of visa restrictions is clearly discernible from the European Union's Council Regulation (EC) No 539/2001, which lists "the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement". The preamble to the regulation states that

the determination of those third countries whose nationals are subject to the visa requirement, and those exempt from it, is governed by a considered, case-by-case assessment of a variety of criteria relating *inter alia* to illegal immigration, public policy and security, and to the European Union's external relations with third countries, consideration also being given to the implications of regional coherence and reciprocity (European Communities 2001b, emphasis in original).

Empirical analysis

So far, hypotheses have been put forward with regard to the reasons for which states impose visa restrictions on passport holders from certain countries, but allow visa-free travel for individuals from other countries. In this section, these hypotheses will be put through a rigorous formal statistical analysis to see whether they can explain the existing system of visa restrictions. In addition, summary statistics and descriptive information are used to illustrate the extent to which the system provides highly unequal access to foreign spaces, reinforcing existing inequalities and disparities between the rich and the poor nations of the world.

Information on bilateral visa restrictions for 189 sovereign nation-states as well as Hong Kong and Macao is taken from the November 2004 edition of the International Civil Aviation Association's Travel Information Manual (IATA 2004). Used by the vast majority of airlines and travel bureaux, this manual provides authoritative information on restrictions in place. Ideally, one would like to trace changes in restrictions over time, but with approximately 36,300 relevant country pairs (so-called dyads) doing so would be prohibitively costly in terms of effort (it took several months to input the existing data)⁶.

Let us start with some descriptive information and summary statistics. The very end of the justification for imposing visa restrictions given by the EU in its Council Regulation No 539/2001, quoted in the last section, points toward the fact that countries seem to pursue, to some extent at least, the principle of reciprocity: they are likely to respond with visa restrictions on passport holders from a certain country if that country imposes such restrictions on one's own nationals and vice versa. Generally speaking, there is a relatively high degree of reciprocity in visa restrictions.

⁶ Due to lack of data for the explanatory variables, the statistical analysis is based on a smaller sample size.

Around 68 per cent of country dyads have mutually consistent restrictions in place in the sense that they either impose or do not impose such restrictions on each other. However, for the OECD countries the degree of reciprocity is far lower at 48 per cent (71 per cent for non-OECD countries). As one will see below, this is because OECD passport holders enjoy much fewer restrictions for travelling abroad than their countries impose on passport holders from other countries.

OECD countries use their political power to maintain these inequalities. Thus, whilst the European Union's abovementioned Council Regulation on visa restrictions threatens any country which is exempt from visa regulations for the Schengen area with a review of its status should it decide "to make the national of one or more Member States [of the European Union] subject to the visa obligation" (European Communities 2001b), it has no problem with the fact that it imposes visa restrictions on many third countries which grant nationals from EU countries visa-free entry. Similarly, in order to be granted visa-free access to the United States, it is a prerequisite for countries to offer reciprocal privileges to United States passport holders, but offering such privileges does not provide countries with visa-free access to the US (Siskin 2004).

Perhaps the most striking feature of the system of bilateral visa restrictions is thus the great degree of inequality in access to foreign spaces. Holders of certain passports face much fewer visa restrictions for travelling abroad and therefore have much easier access to foreign spaces than holders of other passports. The passport holders from the 25 countries facing the smallest number of visa restrictions are all Western high-income OECD countries, with the exception of Malaysia and Singapore, which are also relatively high-income countries. At the other end of the scale are passport holders from countries that need to have a visa for travel to almost any foreign country. This group is more mixed, but generally consists of countries with a history of violent political conflict (e.g. Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia), countries with a strictly autocratic regime (e.g. Northern Korea and Myanmar), very poor countries (e.g. Ethiopia and Haiti) or countries with some combination of these aspects. In these countries, holding a valid visa is almost the defining condition for being able to travel abroad.

If gaining access to foreign spaces is highly unequally distributed, so is granting access to one's own space. Some countries whose passport holders face a high number of visa restrictions are also in the top group of countries imposing visa restrictions on passport holders from other countries (e. g. Afghanistan, Somalia, Myanmar, Northern Korea). In this sense, there is some symmetry between facing visa restrictions and imposing visa restrictions on others. However, countries whose passport holders face a low number of visa restrictions are typically not among the group of countries imposing relatively few restrictions on other countries. With the exceptions of Ireland, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, none of the Western high-income countries is in the group of 25 countries imposing the lowest number of visa restrictions. Instead, it consists mainly of small island countries (e. g. , Barbados, Maldives, Micronesia, Haiti, Jamaica).

On average, OECD countries do not have a number of visa restrictions in place that differs in a statistically significant way from the number of restrictions imposed by non-OECD countries (around 150 in both cases). However, whereas the average

OECD citizen faces visa restrictions in travel to approximately 93 foreign countries, the average non-OECD citizen needs a visa to travel to approximately 156 countries. Passport holders of OECD countries therefore enjoy relatively easy access to foreign spaces, but OECD countries do not generally provide easy access to their own spaces. Kumar (2000, 20f.) summarizes the inequality in access to foreign spaces succinctly as follows: “For those who live in affluent countries, the passport is of use for international travel in connection with business or vacations”, whereas for those living in the poorer nations of the world “the passport is without any value if it does not have the visa. In other words, it is meaningless as a passport”.

Turning to the formal empirical analysis, the choice of explanatory variables is driven by the hypotheses put forward in the sections above. One would expect that visa restrictions are more likely to be in place for passport holders from poor, politically repressive countries with a history of violent conflict. This is because all of these factors are well-established push factors for asylum and other migration (Neumayer 2005). In addition, visa restrictions against undemocratic countries or countries with political conflict might also serve national security concerns. All other things being equal, one would also expect that democracies impose fewer restrictions than more autocratic regimes. In order to facilitate mobility, one would expect dyads to be less likely to have restrictions in place. The same is true for countries that depend highly on tourism. Conversely, passport holders from major tourist-sending countries are less likely to face visa restrictions going abroad. Travel is likely to be visa-free for countries with a former colonial link and countries from the same geographical region as well as civilization, contested as the latter concept might be. The appendix provides the exact definition of these variables as well as the sources of data. Table I provides summary descriptive variable statistics.

The dependent variable is dichotomous (1 = visa restrictions in place; 0 = no restrictions in place), which calls for the use of a non-linear estimator such as probit or logit. I employ logit, but probit leads to qualitatively very similar results. Standard errors are obtained from a so-called robust variance estimator to account for the fact that the variance of the unobservable error term might not be constant (heteroskedasticity).

The estimated results reported in table II provide clear evidence for the use of visa restrictions to deter unwanted entry. The poorer, the less democratic and the more exposed to armed political conflict the target country is, the more likely it is that visa restrictions are in place against its passport holders. Yet, at the same time, there is also unambiguous evidence on how visa-free travel is granted in order to encourage desirable entry. Major tourist sending countries are less likely to face restrictions, whereas major tourist destinations are less likely to impose restrictions. Dyads with more bilateral trade are less likely to impose visa restrictions on each other. Regional and civilisational ties render visa restrictions less likely. Former colonial links as such have no impact on the visa regime, but Commonwealth countries are more likely to grant visa-free travel for each other. More democratic countries impose fewer visa restrictions on passport holders from foreign countries.

The explanatory power of the estimated model is quite good. At the mean of explanatory variables, the model predicts that 75.6 per cent of all dyads have visa restrictions in place – not far off the actual observed frequency of about 78 per cent.

With a very large sample size, variables tend to be statistically significantly different from zero, but their substantial importance can be very small. To explore this, one can assess the actual impact of varying the explanatory variables on the likelihood of visa restrictions being in place. Unfortunately, contrary to the linear ordinary least squares (OLS) estimator, probit or logit coefficients have no direct easy-to-understand interpretation.

We will therefore now look at changes in predicted values, which are easier to understand. Unfortunately, the estimated probabilities are contingent on specific values of the explanatory variables because the logit and probit models are non-linear, and therefore non-additive, in the probabilities. We will look at the impact of changing a variable from its minimum to its maximum. That is, we look at the change in predicted probability comparing a very poor to a very rich targeted country, a very repressive to a very rights-protecting country, a country within the same geographical region to one outside and so on. The disadvantage is that one needs to set the remaining variables at a certain level, for which for simplicity we choose the average value. Table III reports the results.

A very poor country has visa restrictions imposed on its national passport holders with a predicted probability of 88%, whereas a very rich country has a probability of only 34% (holding all other variables at their mean). Since there are a multitude of countries deciding on whether or not to impose a visa restriction, another way of interpreting the estimated results is that passport holders from a very poor nation are predicted to face visa restrictions in travelling to 88% of all other countries, whereas a passport holder from a very rich nation is predicted to face such restrictions in only about a third of other countries. This demonstrates again the great inequality in access to foreign spaces reinforcing existing inequalities between rich and poor nations. Very repressive countries are predicted to encounter visa restrictions in 93% of other countries, whereas very rights-protecting countries do so only in 73% of cases. The respective predicted probabilities for peaceful countries are 82% and for war-torn countries 89%.

A liberal rights-protecting democracy is predicted to impose visa restrictions on 62% of all other countries, whereas a very repressive regime does so in 96% of cases, i.e. is predicted to impose visa restrictions on almost all other countries. For the regional and civilisational dummy variables, the best interpretation is that a passport holder on average faces a visa restriction travelling to a country outside its region or civilization with a predicted probability of 85%, but with a predicted probability of 66% and 70% if travelling to a country within its region or civilization. Passport holders from Commonwealth countries on average need a visa in 83% of cases travelling abroad to a country outside the Commonwealth, but this falls by a predicted 17 percentage points if they are travelling to another Commonwealth country. A country very heavily reliant on income from tourism is 13 percentage points less likely to impose a visa restriction than a country with no tourism (71% as opposed to 84% predicted probability). Passport holders from major tourist-sending countries are 10 percentage points less likely to face visa restrictions going abroad than individuals from countries with virtually no tourists going abroad (73% as opposed to 83%). Countries with no bilateral trade are predicted to have visa restrictions in place in 82.6% of all cases, whereas country pairs with very considerable bilateral trade are very unlikely to have a visa restriction in place (predicted probability close to zero).

Conclusion

As far as the apparently faltering willingness and ability of states to control entry into their territories is concerned, our analysis of visa restrictions clearly demonstrates that states remain willing and eager to systematically keep out passport holders from certain nations. For passport holders from OECD countries the world appears in easy reach with relatively few restrictions imposed. But for passport holders from poor, authoritarian countries with a history of violent political conflict, travel remains severely restricted. This paper's analysis cannot really tell us anything on states' actual ability to control entry and deter inward migration. Without doubt, the large-scale inflow of 'illegal' immigrants represents an important example of "the erosion of state sovereignty" (Collinson 1996, 77). However, there is evidence that visa restrictions in combination with carrier sanctions have been effective. Neumayer (2004), for example, shows that European countries which became full members of the Schengen Convention received a lower share of asylum seekers. I therefore agree with Brubaker (1994, 230) that "seen from the outside – from the perspective of those turned down for tourist visa (...) – immigration control appears all too effective".

Visa restrictions allow states to facilitate the transnational movement of some at the expense of deterring the movement of others. If mobility is one of its defining features, then as with many other aspects of globalisation, its realization is highly stratified and subject to states' monitoring, regulation, interference and control. States might struggle to exercise their prerogative for thorough and comprehensive monitoring and control of movement in times of globalisation. But the era of supposedly unprecedented mobility is only part of the picture, and is at the same time also an era of great, continued and enforced inequality in access to foreign spaces based on the principle of nationality. Yeung (1998) argues that the notion of a borderless world has more to do with folklore than with reality, that states maintain their role of organizing and regulating the international flow of capital and goods and services, thereby asserting the continued importance of national boundaries. He argued this mainly with respect to the globalisation of economic activities, but this verdict is also true for the cross-national movement and mobility of people. As Hirst and Thompson (2001) argue, "people are less mobile than money, goods or ideas, and in a sense they remain 'nationalized', dependent on passports, visas, residence and labour qualifications" (257), which is why those without privileges cannot easily move around and why despite all the rhetoric of globalisation "the bulk of the world's population lives in closed worlds, trapped by the lottery of birth" (267).

This study has made a first attempt at analysing and understanding the role of visa restrictions in granting unequal access to foreign spaces. Much more can and should be done in future research. In particular, more in-depth and qualitative studies should complement this necessarily broad-brush quantitative analysis. Dicken (2004) has argued that geographers are marginal at best to the wider debates on (economic) globalisation. Border and passport controls, visa restrictions and other features of state responses to the unprecedented potential for cross-national mobility in the wake of 'time-space compression' deserve the attention of geographers. They form an as yet under-researched aspect of globalisation in the social sciences, which geographers must not leave almost exclusively to other disciplines for study.

Appendix. Variable definitions and sources of data.

- Visa restriction: 1 = home country imposes visa on target country; 0 = home country does not impose visa restriction on target country. Source: IATA (2004).
- GDP p. c. : Gross Domestic Product per capita in thousand dollars of purchasing power parity. Source: Heston, Summers and Aten (2002).
- Restrictions to political freedom: A subjective index based on experts' judgment of the extent of civil and political rights protection. Source: Freedom House (2004).
- Armed political conflict: A measure of conflict intensity, covering both civil and interstate conflict, based on fatality levels (0 = no conflict; 1 = conflict with more than 25 and less than 1000 casualties in a single year; 2 = as 1, but with an accumulated total above 1000 casualties; 3 = conflict with more than 1000 casualties in a single year). Source: Strand et al. (2004).
- Same region: Dummy variable based on geographical location of country within one of seven regions used by World Bank (2004) for regional classification: Northern America, Latin America and the Caribbean, Western Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Middle East and Northern Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, East Asia and the Pacific.
- Same civilisation: Dummy variable based on Huntington's (1996) admittedly controversial classification of countries into eight civilizations (plus one residual category): Western, Latin American, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Islamic, African, Sinic, Buddhist. Source: Russett, Oneal and Cox (2000). Henderson and Tucker (2001) provide a slightly different classification, also based on Huntington (1996). Using their alternative measure has very little influence on the results.
- Colonial link: Two dummy variables are used. One is based on whether countries have been colonised by the same country in the past, but are not a member of the Commonwealth of Nations. The other is based on whether countries are members of the Commonwealth (plus Zimbabwe whose membership was suspended in 2004). Source: Alesina and Dollar (2000) and Commonwealth Secretariat (2005).
- Bilateral trade: The value in billion US\$ of bilateral trade in goods and services. Data refer to 1996 due to lack of more current comprehensive data. Source: Rose (2005).
- International tourism receipts: Expenditures by international inbound visitors, including payments to national carriers for international transport, divided by the value sum of exports of goods and services. Source: World Bank (2004).
- International outbound tourists: The number of departures per million inhabitants from a country to any other country for any purpose other than a remunerated activity in the country visited. Source: World Bank (2004).

Table I. Summary descriptive variable information.

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Visa restriction (from home country on target country)	23221	0.76	0.43	0	1
GDP p. c. (thousand \$) (target country)	23221	8.2	8.6	0.48	43.8
Restrictions to political freedom (target country)	23221	6.23	3.47	2	14
Armed political conflict (target country)	23221	0.29	0.75	0	3
International tourism receipts % of exports (home country)	23221	12.06	14.85	0	70.83
International outbound tourists per mill. (target country)	23221	2.93	9.36	0	73.4
Bilateral trade (billion \$)	23221	0.38	4.48	0	292.3
Same region	23221	0.17	0.37	0	1
Same civilization	23221	0.18	0.38	0	1
Colonial link (non-Commonwealth)	23221	0.01	0.08	0	1
Colonial link (Commonwealth)	23221	0.06	0.24	0	1
Restrictions to political freedom (home country)	23221	6.74	3.92	2	14

Table II. Estimation results on visa restrictions

GDP p. c. (target country)	-0.062 (22.86)*
Restrictions to political freedom (target country)	0.129 (16.61)*
Armed political conflict (target country)	0.204 (6.76)*
International outbound tourists (target country)	-0.008 (5.21)*
International tourism receipts (home country)	-0.011 (8.65)*
Bilateral trade	-0.027 (3.18)*
Same region	-1.037 (18.55)*
Same civilization	-0.896 (17.71)*
Colonial link (non-Commonwealth)	-0.017 (0.09)
Colonial link (Commonwealth)	-0.950 (13.29)*
Restrictions to political freedom (home country)	0.224 (38.23)*
Constant	0.255 (3.44)*
Observations (dyads or country-pairs)	23221
Log pseudo-likelihood	-9543.6
Predicted probability	75.6%
Actual probability	78.1%

Note: Logit estimation with robust standard errors. Absolute z-statistics in parentheses. * statistically significant at .01 level.

Table III. Predicted probabilities of visa restrictions.

	At minimum (zero for dummy)	At maximum (one for dummy)
GDP p. c. (target country)	88.3%	34.1%
Restrictions to political freedom (target country)	92.7%	73.1%
Armed political conflict (target country)	81.5%	89.1%
International outbound tourists (target country)	82.9%	73.3%
International tourism receipts (home country)	84.3%	70.7%
Bilateral trade	82.6%	0.01%
Same region	84.8%	66.3%
Same civilization	84.6%	69.2%
Colonial link (Commonwealth)	83.2%	65.7%
Restrictions to political freedom (home country)	96.0%	61.8%

Note: In each row, all other variables are held at mean values.

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