Trends in the Management of Immigration and Diversity across Europe

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Driven by the pressure of ever larger numbers of refugees crossing the Mediterranean since 2014, the governments of Europe have been adopting a mix of sometimes contradictory policies in response. The unity of the European Union has been challenged, and it is far from clear that the resulting internal tensions can be overcome, despite the best efforts of the European Commission. As *The Economist* has pointed out (7 May 2016, "Visa wars"), EU policy making is suddenly preoccupied with the previously mainly technical issues of border security, asylum rules and passport technology.

A significant factor in this lack of European unity, just as it faces a common migration challenge, is that the different countries have come to the present along very different trajectories. For a start, just a century ago Europe was primarily a region of emigration. It is only gradually and at very different paces that the various countries have become countries of immigration. France and Britain had a head start with the arrival of people from outside Europe seeking work already before the First World War. But for most countries of north-western Europe this process substantially started in the 1960s, when expanding industrial activity could no longer find sufficient labour within their own country borders or from the poorer countries of southern Europe. As the economies of southern Europe also grew during the 1980s, countries like Spain and Italy started to import labour from outside Europe too. In western Europe generally it was the patterns of empire which tended to determine the origins and goals of labour migrants. So immigration into Britain was primarily from the Afro-Caribbean islands, the Indian subcontinent and, to a lesser extent from east and west Africa. In France immigration was predominantly from North Africa and, independently of empire, from Turkey. Turkey was the first main source of migrant labour in Germany – a pseudo-imperial economic and political relationship between Germany and the Ottoman Empire had developed in the last decades before World War I. These patterns set the tone for the other smaller countries across the region.

Before 1990 the countries of the Warsaw Pact had experienced quite limited immigration. The most common pattern was of students arriving on government scholarships and returning to their countries of origin upon completion of their studies. A small number of these students married locally and ended up staying. The one exception to this was of immigrants to the German Democratic Republic who were routinely channeled through to West Berlin, where many then stayed because the Federal German authorities did not allow them to move into the Federal Republic.

Typically, immigration into western Europe has taken place in three phases which, although starting one after the other, have increasingly overlapped and, in recent years, merged. The first phase was that of labour immigration. This was organized in different ways in different countries, whereby in some countries companies were free to run their own recruitment systems, and in others formal treaties between sending and receiving country were entered into. The UK policy was essentially *laissez-faire*, since not only did companies and private employment agencies arrange their own recruitment, but the government had a policy of open borders towards its former colonies. At the other end of the spectrum, the treaty between West Germany and

Turkey required that workers be recruited through government-run recruitment offices. The vast majority of people involved in this phase of the migration were young men. Usually the intention was to stay for a few years and then return with their savings to better the family's circumstances at home.

The second phase was mainly triggered by economic crises that sharply reduced industry's labour requirements. This led to the first Commonwealth Immigrants Act in the UK which came into effect in 1962. Elsewhere it was the economic downturn triggered by the sharp rise in oil process in 1972-4 which led to the introduction of restrictions on labour immigration. However, these restrictions only affected people seeking employment. Immigration for family reunion remained open. So instead of returning home after a few years the young men brought in their fiancées and wives and laid the foundations for family life. Temporary migration was becoming permanent immigration. Alone among the countries of western Europe, West Germany formally refused to acknowledge what clearly had become fact. Until policy finally changed in the late 1990s, documents on immigration produced by the Council of Europe or the European Union routinely included a footnote pointing out that the Federal Republic of Germany was not a country of immigration. It was with family reunion as a consequence of this second phase that the nature of the immigration – and now settlement – changed character. It was no longer a matter primarily of an economic phenomenon. The interaction between the immigrants and European society broadened into contact first with health and education services and subsequently into a wider cultural phenomenon. To put it simply, it was with the arrival of family that Islam arrived, a point we shall return to.

The third phase has been the influx of refugees.[1] Of course, this is not a new experience. Post-1945 Europe was founded in part on massive enforced population flows. The region received a substantial number of the mostly middle class Iranians that chose to leave Iran after the Islamic revolution in 1979. In the 1980s came large numbers of Lebanese and Palestinians fleeing the civil war in Lebanon. The various kinds of unrest which followed the collapse of the Cold War in 1989-91 also produced substantial numbers of refugees. Some became contentious, at least for a while, in the public debate, such as Bosnians fleeing the war in former Yugoslavia, while others attracted little attention outside an individual country, most notably the ethnic Germans who left Central Asia for Germany after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Refugees tended to include a higher proportion of families than the earlier phases of economic migrants thereby broadening the challenges to the civil and bureaucratic structures of the receiving societies. These and subsequent waves of refugees – from Iraq, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Somalia, Eritrea, etc. – tended to merge with continuing economic migration. Basically, as some entry routes were closed – those permitting immigration for work – the migration pressures shifted to the routes which remained available, primarily the possibilities of seeking asylum or family reunion.

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Public attitudes to these processes were initially positive, or at least neutral. There was an understanding that European industries needed foreign labour to continue to expand, and in countries with a strong sense of the welfare state there was often a broadly benevolent attitude that the good life could be shared. However, this was tempered by sometimes sharp expressions of racist exclusion. In the UK, this found notorious expression in landlords putting up notices like 'No pets, no coloureds.' As families settled, and the contact surface between immigrants and wider society expanded, the opportunities for resentment increased. This was particularly the case at times of general economic slowdown, as in the mid-1970s, when workers were being made redundant and competition for employment became harder. The situation was worsened during the 1980s when large proportions of traditional industries, especially those in iron and steel, were declining and disappearing,

[1] Note that I am not using the term 'refugee' here in its technical legal sense.

precisely those industries which had recruited heavily outside Europe in the 1950s and 60s. Foreign workers came to be seen as a threat in wide circles. Some trades unions defended their traditional members against the newcomers, while employers were suspected of favouring immigrant labour because it was allegedly cheaper.

As has already been indicated, the majority of non-European immigrants to western Europe during the 1980s came from countries which were either wholly Muslim or in the majority so. The combination of growing families and economic uncertainty provided a context in which a public focus on Muslims grew. Communities which were regularly identified by their ethnic or national origin, during the 1980s and into the 90s increasingly came to be identified as Muslims: in Germany 'problems' associated with 'Turks' became attributed to 'Muslims,' in France a similar process took place with regard to 'Algerians,' and so on across the region. Only in Britain was this process more complex and drawn out, where the immigration had been much more varied. In religious terms, the largest group in Britain of immigrant origin came from the islands of the Caribbean and were overwhelmingly Christian of a mix of denominations. The dominant religious group among South Asians were Muslims from Pakistan and Bangladesh, but there were also large Hindu and Sikh communities. So it was much more difficult to fuse 'Muslim' and 'immigrant.'

Another factor characterizing the British situation, and to a lesser extent the French, was that the shift to family reunion had taken place a decade earlier than in the rest of Europe, following the British immigration act taking effect in 1962 and the independence of Algeria agreed in Evian the same year. So the process of family formation and with that the appearance of a so-called second generation was a decade older than elsewhere. It is this process which increasingly drove European discussions about integration, assimilation, and multiculturalism. It is interesting to compare the French and British approaches, not only because these were the countries where the issues first took hold but also because they often set the tone for similar later debates elsewhere in Europe. The very different histories of the two countries have been significant factors in how debates and policy have developed. The United Kingdom has grown over the centuries in ways which have preserved the various component nations – English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish – or at least encouraged the development and preservation of their respective national myths. And since the Reformation the country has lived with a variety of religious traditions – granted, they were all Christian (with the exception of the Jews who were allowed to return in the 17th century), but their mutual relations have at various times been deeply inimical to each other. In other words, the UK was in its essence plural in character. Ultimately it was the monarchy that held the country together and became the common symbol of empire. Only in the early 1980s did the term 'UK citizen' become a legal concept replacing 'British subject.' It was this older usage which allowed the continuation of the imperial practice of giving the vote and the right to be elected to all UK residents who had Irish or Commonwealth citizenship. In this environment the scope for various religious groups to organize themselves according to their own needs and traditions has, until recently, been comparatively free.

French history has produced a much more unifying, and arguably more ideological, understanding of the nation, and hence the routes and goals of integration, even though the history could have allowed for a more plural self-understanding both in terms of religion and ethnicity. The relationship of the citizen to the State has become central, in other words a discourse which has privileged the individual over group identity. So integration came to mean something much closer to assimilation. This was part of the argument for withholding citizenship from the vast majority of Algerian Muslims at a time when Algeria was held to be part of metropolitan France. Since the separation of church and state in 1905, identification with a religious community in the civic space has been particularly problematized, and Muslim organizations have only very slowly been incorporated into the structures of religion-state relations which have continued to develop post-1905.

Commentators looking at these issues often talk about European secular states, as if this adequately explains the situation. As these brief descriptions of Britain and France show, such a generalization clearly is not adequate. Other descriptions can be added to enhance the confusion. Germany's official secularism in fact describes a state which is neutral in terms of religions and worldviews, but in that con-

text regards religious communities as potential partners in strengthening society. Scandinavian countries have national majority churches with various forms of privileged relationships with the State, leaving Muslim and other communities to negotiate for such status as are available. The Netherlands adopted a secular constitution in the 1980s, leaving the previously existing 'pillars' (including Catholic, Protestant and humanist) to continue to function informally, a change which took place just as Muslims were settling down and coming to regard the 'pillarization' system as desirable. Belgium and Austria have systems of officially recognized religions with particular privileges. And so on.

All of these various elements came together in a confusing and unplanned mix during the roughly two decades after 1990. Firstly, I would argue that there has been a growing coincidence of trends between eastern and western Europe, possibly even a merging. After 1945 there was a sense in the west that our various nations (mostly) had found an internal equilibrium after centuries of religious and national conflict: Danes knew what it 'meant' to be Danish and were comfortable with it. In the east the cover of the 'democratic socialist' ideology had thankfully replaced previous, seemingly insoluble ethno-national conflicts. The end of the Soviet system in the east removed that cover and the old tensions resurfaced, although in mutated forms. In the west, it was during the 1990s that the growing participation of communities of immigrant origin reopened questions of national (self-)identity. In both parts of Europe questions of the relationships between state, nation, religion, ethnicity and nationality again became contested ground.

Over the previous decades, European countries had had often sharply differing policies on immigration and integration. The Scandinavians had traditionally had a very liberal policy, hence the high proportion of immigrants from, for example, Lebanon, including Palestinians. But from the early 1990s they parted ways. Denmark's immigration policy became increasingly restrictive and after 2001, especially under the impression of 9/11, its integration policy increasingly directive with, for example, access to state benefits being made conditional on successful completion of language and other programmes. On the other hand, Sweden retained its open door policy until they finally imposed sharp restrictions in the face of the refugee flows of 2015. The UK has steadily and consistently tightened its policy and practices over the decades since the 1960s, but its experience also highlights some of the key dimensions of the experiences of the whole region. The immigration pressure on the UK can be directly related to the state of its job market, with one of the lowest unemployment rates in Europe, the ease of setting up small businesses, and English as the native language. But this also attracts large numbers of immigrants from other EU countries under the rules on free movement of labour. So public attention has moved away from the 'threat' of Commonwealth immigration to that of European immigration. This fear of growing immigration from other parts of the EU has been a major factor in the growth of EU-scepticism especially in the western parts of the EU: it is of course not immigration from all the EU which worries public opinion in the UK, France and Scandinavia, it is that from eastern members of the Union which is the popular concern. Perhaps it is not all that surprising, therefore, that the same eastern members of the EU are reluctant to agree to cooperate in a common policy to deal with the refugee crisis of 2015.

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The crisis of 2015 appears also to have marked the high point of what must be the most remarkable change of policy of any European country in this field, namely Germany. As already indicated, for decades the policy of Germany (and the Federal republic before the reunification) was that of the 'guest worker.' People, especially Turks, came for a job and might have brought their families with them, but ultimately they were expected to return to their countries of origin: they were not regarded as permanent. This was reflected across various sectors. It remained difficult if not impossible for Turks to become German citizens, even after Turkey allowed dual citizenship, and the grandchildren of immigrants remained foreigners. One of the common ar-

guments against extending the status of 'public law body' (*Körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechts*) to Muslims was that their presence was not permanent. And so on. The change of policy of the late 1990s firstly made the German system more welcoming, a policy which culminated in the headline-grabbing decision of the Chancellor to welcome especially the Syrian refugees in 2015, a policy which arguably led to the countries to the south-east closing the transit routes.

These developments have coincided with a change in the nature of the conversation between politicians, governments and the electorate. This change was driven first by the ever more sophisticated techniques of polling and focus groups which meant that political party leaderships could listen much more closely to public opinion – or thought they could. The more recent explosive growth in the use of social media has increased the flood of public opinions which political leaders and the media have to deal with. In the search for votes and, hopefully, improvement in their electoral fates, the political classes, at least the traditional ones, have surrendered their initiative. It is increasingly seldom that party leaderships present a vision or 'grand plan' to the public. They prefer to calibrate their messages to the demographic categories in ways which their polling and focus groups tell them will attract. The recent election for the position of Mayor of London was a classic example of this process. By all accounts, the professionals running the campaign for the losing Conservative candidate regularly overrode the candidate's and party's policy statements in favour of messages, sometimes contradictory, which were regarded as likely to attract specific groups of voters. In this environment the short-term horizons of most political leaderships were impacted by immediate circumstances to the neglect of longer-term challenges, such as falling birth rates and aging population, declining proportions of the economically active, developing the economies of the wider world, and climate change.

It is almost inevitable that, in such circumstances, we should see the emergence of movements of various kinds of nationalist or nativist colouring. These movements share little else across the region beyond their antipathy to the culturally plural developments of their countries and the immigration which is regarded as being the cause. In traditional left-right terms, some are oriented left with strong support of the social welfare state while others tend to be more oriented towards the right wing of traditional politics. In common, they have various degrees of populist approaches to the electorate.

The rise of such parties in all European countries, while often targeting the policies and policy processes of the European Union, also expresses a deep anxiety over what is received as a weakening of the familiar nation State, the emphasis being on the perceived weakening of the nation rather than the State. This weakening is often expressed in terms of the spread of multiculturalism, a quick reflection on which is a suitable way to finish this paper. Multiculturalism has been presented in a range of ways. In recent years it has come under attack from a variety of quarters, but it is not always clear what is being attacked. The contestation has usually been expressed in terms of theory, and there are theories as well as policies of multiculturalism. As both, multiculturalism has been declared dead in a number of countries. But while theories and policies can be debated endlessly, the fact of the multicultural on the ground is inescapable in all our big cities – and if we do not like the term let us call it diversity. The associated tensions arise because we are experiencing a transition to a new condition. We have been through transitions before in our history. The appearance of the nation State was itself a long and sometimes bloody transition, as was the process of industrialization and urbanization. The nation and its 'culture,' which the populist nativist movements want to preserve, are the result of transitions and transformations. They cannot be frozen under the pretense that they were ever thus.

Further reading

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