

SOCIAL COOPERATION REQUIRES AN EQUAL TELLING FIELD

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for a fair narrative on migration



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Liberals of all persuasions believe in equal human dignity; all individuals deserve equal concern and respect.¹ Accordingly, they must be treated as equals not because they belong to the same class, caste, race, gender or nationality, but because they have the same moral personality irrespective of their class, caste, race, gender or nationality. They also have the rights to develop their personality, to grow and to realise their potential. Through their self-actualisation, society as a whole benefits. For society is nothing else than a nexus of relationships and complex interactions for purpose of maximising collective welfare.

Notwithstanding the above liberal premises, liberal democratic societies are often trapped in circumstance and forget their principles. They are distracted by fears of 'societal survival' and seek evidence of human beings' 'adaptation', 'adjustment' and 'maladjustment', 'assimilation' and 'integration' to society. Individual lives are to be controlled for such control or the illusion of control provides relief from the discomfort of confronting social limitations and structural problems. But paradoxically, concepts such as adaptation, integration, adjustment and assimilation and the policies that are based on them hinder, rather than aid, associated life.

This is because they are underpinned by societal divisions and distorted hierarchies. They depict certain individuals and/or groups as problems, place them in opposition to society in general and then require their 'adjustment' or 'assimilation' or 'integration' into it. In other words, instead of opening up societies to 'let people fully in' and to recognise them as valued collaborators, they depict them as threats to societal unity, societal cohesion or integration. Individual and groups are seen to bear a priori societal 'demerit badges' – only their 're-education' and subsequent conformity to the culture, beliefs, values and ways of life of the dominant societal group or the majority would unlock the gate of social acceptance.

Accordingly, they are framed not only as Other, but also as deficient on one or more grounds in comparison with the selected or dominant group(s). This legitimises the subordinate status² society ascribes to them. Migrants have been particularly vulnerable to processes of othering. Throughout the 20th century their different languages, cultures, accents, beliefs, traditions have been depicted as reasons for their alleged deficiencies and, in turn, rationales for their 're-education' into the language, customs, history, constitution and the values of Western host states.

Instead of projecting a forward-looking perspective, removing obstacles to the creation of mutually beneficial relations and enlisting people to participate in society, narratives on societal adjustment or

¹ Ronald Dworkin, *A Matter of Principle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

² See, inter alia, Ricky Van Oers, Eva Erboll and Dora Kostakopoulou (eds.), *A Redefinition of Belonging? Language and Integration Tests in Europe* (The Hague: Brill/Martinus Nijhoff, 2010) ; Floya Anthias and Mojca Panic (eds.), *Contesting Integration, Engendering Migration* (Houndmills : Palgrave, 2014).

integration look backward, that is, seek to legitimate people's already constructed outgroup, and always inferior, status. Instead of making contribution to society the relevant criterion, they focus on the differences-cum-deficiencies of individuals and groups and on how much 'difference' a society can contain without losing its unity or cohesion or identity. This focus is chosen arbitrarily; elites look away from what matters and look towards what serves their interests and beliefs. The latter determine what is relevant and important for a society's functioning within a spatio-temporal location. Accordingly, full societal and political memberships are not facts associated with one's co-existence and interaction with others; they are viewed to be privileges that are reserved for deserving members.

But such a perspective is one-sided and thus falsifiable. It presents a practically worthless interpretation of the fluidity and ease of human interactions and of how socio-economic life unfolds. Domiciling somewhere necessitates the sharing of the burden of the commonwealth. One must pay national and local taxes and national insurance contributions and to respect the law. Newcomers are equal burden sharers; they are not placed on a graduated taxation scheme based on the duration of their residence.³ Nor are they given a settlement allowance, such as the one given to new members of corporations and other organisations. Instead, they are expected to contribute to the commonwealth in the same way as anybody else. And yet, when it comes to the enjoyment of the benefits of membership, including the right to be treated as a full and equal member of the society, resident migrants are caught in graduated schemes of membership and unequal statuses because of their 'alien' nationality. Their equal burden-sharing status, their law abidingness and their prolonged residence are not sufficient for citizenship acquisition. Equal burden sharers are thus deemed to be unworthy or undeserving of a full and equal beneficiary status.

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This is not only a paradox, but an injustice. States treat newcomers as equals and fully integrated into society when it comes to the extraction of their resources, but they are unequals when it comes to the enjoyment of societal benefits. They need to 'earn' their entitlement to continuous residence and citizenship and to demonstrate that they are 'safe' and 'good' citizens by meeting mandatory integration requirements.

Integration is deemed to be necessary in order to prevent societal disintegration, adjustment is necessary in order to prevent maladjustment and the ensuing instability or anomie or the breakdown of the social framework (OPPORTUNITIES). To put it differently, civic or cultural integration ensures that the social structure does not become fragmented or destroyed – hence the talk about countries' 'integration capacities' and individuals' 'integration capabilities'. On reflection, however, it is easy to discern that such conceptions are nothing else than narratives of legitimization of political control and of restrictive migration policies. They are the product of an 'unequal telling field' (OPPORTUNITIES) based on presumptions which lack coherence and credibility.

It is presumed that what the social fabric is held together by virtue of certain values, beliefs and cultural symbols that have an enduring, unalterable quality. It is also presumed that these values, beliefs, ways of doing things and cultural commonalities form a unified normative and cultural structure to which all members conform. Furthermore, it is presumed that newcomers and their beliefs, value-orientations, cultural sensibilities and so on are radically different from, and simultaneously antagonistic to, the assumed unified domestic structure. In this way, 'instability' is introduced into a 'harmonious society' from

³ I draw here on my reflections in 'What liberalism is committed to and why current citizenship policies fail this test', in R. Baubock and C. Joppke (eds.) *'How Liberal are Citizenship Tests?'*, EUI Working Paper, RSCAS 2010/41, EUI.



the outside. But all these are just presumptions; they may be effective in legitimating certain political relations but they are also inaccurate in reflecting the contemporary diverse and digitally interconnected societies.

Not only do such presumptions conceal the multifarious webs of human interactions and reciprocal societal exchanges, but they also exclude the perspective of migrants, refugees and other newcomers. Accordingly, the conceptual frame that shapes policy output in this area tends to view newcomers as a problem and/or a threat to a nation's core values or national cultures⁴ whilst newcomers view themselves neither as representatives of their 'home' national culture nor as subscribers to extremist ideologies nor as potential destroyers of the country in which they seek to be at home and to create a home.

OPPORTUNITIES disapproves of the silencing and exclusion of the perspectives of newcomers and settled migrants. The exclusion of such *narratives of migration* facilitates the predominance of the 'societal survival' *narrative on migration* in public discourse thereby legitimising state elites' decisions about which groups would be admitted to the country, which groups would be excluded and which groups would be subjected to cultural and political discipline.⁵ The narrative of 'societal survival', however, has affinities with political discourses creating enemies and using fear in games of political manipulation. In 'Zum Begriff der Politischen Freiheit', Franz Neumann pronounced the latter as active constituents of illiberal politics.⁶ The depiction of certain groups as a threat to the continuity or the unity of society appeals to governing elites because almost anything can be constructed to be a threat to the survival of society. But 'survival' is always a vague concept; on closer inspection, it is difficult to understand why something should threaten the survival of a society as opposed to stimulating its growth and further development. In brief, the societal survival narrative denies the reality of phase transition and transformation.

It is interesting that in 2011, Mr David Cameron, former UK Prime Minister, delivered a speech on multiculturalism in Munich, Germany, which postulated a direct linkage between state multiculturalism and the (alleged) 'insularity of Muslim communities that can foster terrorism'. He stated that Britain 'had encouraged different cultures to live separate lives' with the effect of 'weakening the British collective identity'. In his opinion, this created disorientations among the young Muslims thereby making vulnerable to extremist discourses.⁷ A more robust patriotism, according to Mr Cameron, would guard against those risks.

But Mr Cameron's perspective was not shared by Muslim communities and groups which identified Islamophobia, racism and social exclusion as the problems which were weakening the fabric of the British society. Encouraged by Mr Cameron's speech, members of the English Defence League, a far-right and anti-Muslim organisation, marched in the town of Luton claiming that Mr Cameron's speech reflected

⁴ Samuel Scheffler, "Immigration and the Significance of Culture," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 35(2) (2007) : 93-125. Scheffler's defence of cultural fluidity and change, which he calls Heraclitean pluralism, accommodates 'a reasonable cultural preservationism' which resists unwanted changes and preserves traditional practices; see pp. 107 et seq.

⁵ See Theodora Kostakopoulou, "Towards a Theory of Constructive Citizenship in Europe," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 4 (1996); Theodora Kostakopoulou, *Citizenship, Identity and Immigration in the European Union: Between Past and Future* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 102 et seq.

⁶ This was published in English in 1957 as 'The Democratic and the Authoritarian State: Essays in Political and Legal Theory'; Franz Leopold Neumann, *The Democratic and the Authoritarian State: Essays in Political and Legal Theory* (London: Free Press, 1957).

⁷ It was reported in *The Observer* on 6 February 2011, p. 8 et seq.

their views.⁸ On the other hand, the Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain at that time, Mr Farooq Murad, voiced his concerns about the fact that Mr Cameron's speech had omitted any reference to extremist groups which were spreading hatred and bigotry against British Muslims in towns and cities. He focused on the realities of ordinary life for all citizens and residents and thus the need for employment and business opportunities, caring and providing for the young and elderly members of the household, health care, education, access to affordable housing and protection from violence and discrimination. In this respect, British Muslims shared the dreams and aspirations of the majority community and were keen on contributing to societal renewal.

The narratives on migration as a threat to societal survival, on the one hand, and as an enabler of societal renewal, on the other, show the importance of the existence of a democratic public sphere which can expose irrationality and prejudice in various arguments by persistent appeals to justice and reason. Narratives on migration are necessarily conditioned, circumscribed and shaped by both ideologies and historical contexts and, by ensuring that there exists a level telling field, well-informed policies and sustainable solutions can be appropriately devised. Instead of societal survival, it is more accurate to refer to societal renewal and processes of change in social relations particularly since the latter ensure the continuity of societies in the long run. Instead of the mandatory integration of newcomers, it might be better to talk about the inclusion and equal participation of all residents. It is true, one cannot legislate away prejudice. But, instead of divisions between ingroups and outgroups, it is advisable for political communities to promote an ethic of listening, respect for human dignity and fundamental rights, to acknowledge the inevitability of the fluidity of society and to seek to transform differences, tensions and conflicts into creative communal conversations.

⁸ Ibid, at p. 8.





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