



## Exploring the cultural challenges to social democracy

**Anti-migration populism, identity and community in an age of insecurity**

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- ▶ Popular concerns over culture, migration and identity are of considerable importance to the future of European social democracy; their neglect marks a significant weakness and vulnerability.
- ▶ By losing sight of the need to provide people with a modern sense of belonging, community and collective mission, the centre-left is losing its guiding voice and with it the right to be heard by voters.
- ▶ The struggle to empathise with societal unease and respond to anti-immigrant, anti-elite and anti-Islamic populism is creating cleavages and fissures which cut through both the movement's electoral constituencies and its parties' political and policymaking fraternities.

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## The Amsterdam Process

Revitalising and reenergising European social democracy

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European social democracy is in urgent need of a period of ideological reconstruction. It has to confront the fundamental causes of its vulnerability, loss of trust and élan in past years, reconnecting with both the contemporary challenges of government and today's dynamic electorate.

*The Amsterdam Process* is an ambitious process of reflection and strategic thinking initiated by Policy Network, the international center-left thinktank based in London, and the Wiardi Beckman Stichting, the thinktank for Dutch social democracy. It is named after a famous monastery in Amsterdam's red light district, where a thorough post-Third Way brainstorm took place: repentance and brave forward thinking in one move.

It aims to:

- ▶ Bring together an "avant-garde group" of individuals and organisations from across Europe to analyse the roots of the long-term structural decline of European social democracy. Above all it is an *international* collective effort.
- ▶ Facilitate a fresh round of ideological renewal and revisionism capable of overcoming traditionalist inertia as well as the mistakes made during the latest revisionist projects.
- ▶ Open up to wider developments in the world of ideas and confront new societal trends with bold answers, appealing to traditional constituencies and new progressive generations.

### Berlin Conference

The papers in this volume were presented at an international conference in Berlin on 20-21 January 2011. This *Amsterdam Process* conference, organised by Policy Network and the Wiardi Beckman Stichting in partnership with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Das Progressive Zentrum, brought together senior political leaders, experts and policymakers from across Europe to discuss the cultural challenges to social democracy. Keynote speakers included: Frank Walter Steinmeier, leader of the SPD parliamentary group in the German Bundestag; Job Cohen, Leader of the Dutch Labour Party (PvdA); and Trevor Phillips, chair of the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission.

**Policy Network** [www.policy-network.net](http://www.policy-network.net)

**Wiardi Beckman Stichting** [www.wbs.nl](http://www.wbs.nl)

**Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung** [www.fes.de](http://www.fes.de)

**Das Progressive Zentrum** [www.progressives-zentrum.org](http://www.progressives-zentrum.org)

## Executive summary

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Public concerns over migration, identity and culture loom large in European politics. Social democrats appear to be paying a heavy price in this regard, losing ground to parties on the centre-right, far right and far left as they struggle to craft a clear narrative and policy response.

The premise of this volume of essays is that popular concerns over culture are of considerable significance to the future of European social democracy; their neglect marks a significant weakness and vulnerability. The contention is that, by losing sight of the need to provide people with a modern sense of belonging, community and collective mission, social democracy is fast losing its guiding voice and with it the right to be heard by the electorate. Cultural and moral values, as well as aspiration and socio-economic security, matter to people.

Furthermore, the struggle to empathise with societal unease and respond to anti-immigrant, anti-elite and anti-Islamic populism is a particularly pronounced and inflammatory problem for parties on the European centre-left. It is creating cleavages and fissures which cut through both the movement's electoral constituencies and its parties' political and policymaking fraternities.

In directly addressing these divisions, the wide-ranging diagnoses and prescriptions in this volume demonstrate that the answers to these cultural challenges will not come easy. They are not to be found on one side of the spectrum as opposed to the other. Rather, the response must involve a carefully considered fusion of different approaches, firmly wedded to social democratic principles, but also addressing the insecurities and anxieties which exist in modern societies.

### **The cultural challenges to social democracy**

The contributions to this volume, written by some of the most eminent thinkers in the field, can roughly be grouped into three approaches – interlinked to various degrees – to the cultural challenges to social democracy:

Firstly, it is contended that social democrats need to engage in a process of reflection relating to their cultural *raison d'être* and basic value positions in a world of globalisation, migration and individualisation. The centre-left's current positioning on socio-cultural issues is out of kilter with the views of the electorate-at-large, necessitating strategic and ideological revisionism.

Secondly, social democrats must not throw the baby out with the bath water. Diversity, if properly linked to key-orientations of social democracy, can be a powerful force for our societies, both socially and economically. A pragmatic and conciliatory approach to integration and the politics of identity must be applied to a new agenda for living together.

Thirdly, social democrats have to look at creative new ways to strengthen common bonds and common life in the 21st century. Rather than getting tangled up in diversity, the emphasis should be on bonding and bridging solutions to the socio-economic anxieties and insecurities which prevail in modern communities.

## Moving in line with public concerns

In analysing the centre-left's approach to migration and multiculturalism, Tim Bale argues that social democrats have failed to recognise the inelasticity of the fairness code which drives most European voters. In running out of kilter with mainstream public opinion they have lost trust and support across the social spectrum to a resurgent right. Confronting reality and winning back public trust requires taking on some uneasy questions about the extents of the centre-left's transformational powers and the limits of an approach to migration and multiculturalism that "whilst wholly well-intentioned and far from the complete disaster conjured up by their opponents, went a lot further than people wanted, or were told would happen."

David Goodhart also calls for compromise in line with the prevalent political and cultural centre of gravity. Drawing on new polling he highlights a growing value clash – "the left's civil war" – between the left's middle class graduate vote and its lower middle class and working class vote. Straddling these new divisions will require a "liberal communitarian" approach to politics, which can find a fairer balance between the values sets of cosmopolitan liberals and more traditionally orientated communitarians. Mass migration, certain aspects of globalisation and the broken promise of social mobility all need to be revisited.

Likewise, René Cuperus points to a disconnect between elites and non-elites on issues such as welfare state pride and nation state identity, warning that populism must be understood as an important alarm signal. The ever-growing pan-European presence of right-wing and left-wing populist movements, which often appear following "contested reforms of the post-war welfare state settlements, remain an alarming and grimy reminder of widespread societal unease and the crisis of confidence which besets the established political scene." Cuperus warns of the dangers of a post-national elite carelessly arguing away the nation state and national identity, just at the moment when the nation state "is for many the last straw of identification to cling to; a beacon of trust in a world in flux."

In also analysing the underlying causes of populism, Laurent Bouvet points out that the European right as a whole have clearly gained a better understanding of how values now cut across the political divide. They have successfully triangulated onto traditional social democratic territory leaving the left fatally unsure about how to respond. To reclaim abandoned territory, social democrats have to target the political debate at cultural values, with a wholly renewed consideration of 'equality' serving as a prominent pillar. In this vein, a new theme or nation building narrative to regain the people could take inspiration from George Orwell's concept of common decency.

This disconnect is also picked-up on by Marc Elchardus in his observation that populism has not been motivated by discontent with people's personal lives but by perceptions of problems in society at large. Social democrats have failed to appreciate that the weakening of class consciousness has liberated the electorate from adhering to discrete interest groups, with people instead making sense of their place in society by interpreting more cultural and symbolic social structures. The rejuvenation of social democracy therefore requires a concomitant shift away from a paradigm of economic self-interest towards a cultural approach to politics which prescribes educational and labour-market reform to reintegrate the vulnerable and disenfranchised back into the social democratic fold and, in turn, tackle the roots of populism.

## Pragmatism and principles

Responding to cultural unease also raises questions about how diversity is, and has been, managed and communicated.

In Philippe Legrain's contribution it is argued that compromise on issues such as migration represent capitulation in the face of far-right fear mongering: "pandering to, or changing position on anti-immigrant views will only lead back to closed societies that are stagnant and reactionary." Principle, pragmatism and economic logic all point in the direction of robust support for immigration and diversity. In line with this the progressive left must build a positive narrative around diversity congruent with social democratic values and in tune with the reality of modern communities and identities.

The economic logic for effective counter frames to populist discourse is brought home by statistics on Europe's increasingly ageing, deskilled and dwindling population. Trevor Phillips underlines this truth maintaining that the question is not whether we need migration, but *how* we manage its consequences. In this vein, the social democratic left's inability to develop a persuasive account of the role of identity in modern politics or engage its power as a means of understanding a changing world represents a significant intellectual failure. Using the Highway Code as an analogy for a new civic identity he sketches a vision for "gentle integration" based on fairness, not ethnicity.

Returning to diversity, Elena Jurado warns of an ill-considered lurch away from the underpinning principles of multiculturalism. In dissecting New Labour's approach to cultural diversity, she advocates a nation-wide conversation about both the strengths and weaknesses of multiculturalism. The UK Labour government's embrace of multiculturalism was problematic in the attention it gave to minority groups *vis a vis* the majority population; yet does this necessitate the abandonment of its underlying commitment to an open, pluralist society? The lesson to be learned is that recognition of diversity can be reconciled with the development of strong nation building narratives which emphasise common culture.

Shamit Saggur also focuses on the fine line between principles and pragmatism in drawing lessons from New Labour's time in office. Saggur argues that bearing down on discrimination and prejudice in order to create a more ethnically equal society matters as much as looking at why certain immigrant groups shun the value or need to join into the mainstream of society: "The appetite for trust and common cause between white and non-white Britain is not just dependent on who integrates and who does not. It also hangs on who is more equal than whom, and in the old saying, who gets what, and why." Yet, he tempers this with the assertion that politicians have to be seen as competent managers of immigration in the eyes of the electorate. Political instincts or leanings – based on worthy principles such as social justice – have to be balanced with the more sceptical views of the wider electorate. Tribalism and competence often pull in opposite directions.

## Nurturing common bonds

Past focus on multiculturalism, diversity and narrow conceptions of identity have for others led to social democrats neglecting the need to build common bonds and bridges.

In his essay on the “open society and its believers”, Paul Scheffer argues that social democrats must pursue a conception of diversity that plays down the differences between people and understands all as citizens operating in the public sphere as equals. He argues that well meaning overreactions to daily cultural clashes need to be put in historical context. Immigration is the most visible aspect of globalisation and it is as difficult for receiving communities as it is for dislocated immigrants to adapt. In this sense, “conflict is a necessary, not unhealthy, stage in the road to integration”. The key to moving on from conflict to integration is a strong sense of “shared citizenship” based around common social and cultural realities, and underpinned by clear rights and duties.

Taking issue with the left’s facilitation of identity politics in Sweden, Dilsa Demirbag-Sten maintains that social democrats, in a benign effort to compensate for racism and discrimination, have inadvertently fanned the flames of populism and xenophobia. In assuming fixed identities and compromising on the defense of individual rights, political, cultural and media elites have been implicit in the politicisation of identity and ethnicity. In confusing, for example, the difference between Islam and Muslim and consequentially giving special treatment to outspoken Islamic groups, this form of multicultural collectivism has been counterproductive and damaging. For Sten, promoting the rights of the individual citizen above those of the group is the best way to tackle such negative identity politics and ensure a more genuinely egalitarian society.

In Maurice Glasman’s contribution, it is argued that, rather than getting tangled-up in debate about diversity, the starting point for social democracy must be questions of class, political economy and capitalism. Glasman’s contention is that social democracy must advocate a “politics of common life” which does not demarcate based on identity, but rather speaks to the real concerns of people in a language that reflects the social democratic tradition. The answer is not to be found in common ground between liberals and communitarians but between “immigrants and locals, Christians and Muslims, public and private sector workers, middle and working class; developing local leaders, engaging in common action, pursuing the common good of the country by valuing the institutions of a common life and strengthening them.”

Rupa Huq, using perceptions of suburbia as a prism for looking at contemporary community living, also warns against “shoehorning people into constructed categories” on the basis of what they might unite around. For Huq, suburbs, where most people in the UK live, have changed irrevocably: “they are inhabited by diverse people, with multifaceted identities negotiating increasingly atomized and time-poor lives.” Genuine community cohesion will come about through looking at local solutions to the real grievances of modern day suburbia’s ageing and anxious populations and finding common solutions. Suburban concerns are fertile ground for centre-left renewal - as alluded to in Policy Network’s *Southern Discomfort Again* and the growing body of research into the concept of a “squeezed middle”.

Finally, Tinneke Beeckman argues that social-democrats for too long defined questions of identity in socio-economic terms overlooking the multiplicity of ways in which people now define themselves. As a consequence of globalisation, the reinforcement of overlapping and varied identities has become a permanent process. In remembering that every successful solidarity movement is rooted in a constructive sense of community, the left must do more to develop a persuasive account of the role of identity in modern societies.



## The right side of the argument? The centre-left's response to migration and multiculturalism

Tim Bale, University of Sussex

Social democrats have failed to recognise the inelasticity of the fairness code which drives most European voters. In running out of kilter with mainstream public opinion they have lost trust and support across the social spectrum to a resurgent right. Confronting reality and winning back public trust requires taking on some uneasy questions about the extent of the centre-left's transformational powers and the limits to well intentioned approaches to migration and multiculturalism

On December 10 2010, British judges blocked a bid by the government to deport a failed asylum seeker from Iraq with criminal convictions in the UK for offences involving drugs, theft, burglary, criminal damage and harassment who, seven years earlier, had been involved in a hit and run incident that cost a 12 year-old girl her life. In so doing, they supported an earlier finding that, since the man in question had formed a stable relationship, and had fathered children with his British partner in the meantime, his deportation would breach his right to a family life under the UK's Human Rights Act, which embeds in British law the European Convention. The father of the girl who the man had run over before fleeing the scene was understandably angry. "I work hard, play by the rules, pay my taxes and this is how I get treated", he protested. "What does that say about politicians, our leaders and the legal system? It's a joke." His words were all the more pointed in view of the fact that the UK's Conservative prime minister had, when in opposition, written to him implying that once in government, his party would make legislative changes that would supposedly ensure something like this would never happen again.

Although the press was predictably outraged, the leader of the British Labour Party appears neither to have criticised the judges' decision nor, on the other hand, to have followed suggestions that he stand up for the Act which had been passed into law by the Blair government in three years after its landslide victory in 1997.

Hard cases, as the saying goes, make bad law. But the point made here is a political rather than legal one. Episodes like this are litmus tests. Reactions – or the lack of them – are very revealing. Judging from what people were prepared (or not prepared) to say in public at least, many actively involved in centre-left politics may have sympathised with the dead girl's father but in the end tacitly accepted that the man who killed her nonetheless retained his right to stay in the country. That they would do so is arguably a measure of how far removed social democrats have become from the people they could once, with some justification, have claimed to represent. No wonder then that critics suggest that centre-left parties only have themselves to blame for the dire electoral straits in which they find themselves nowadays.

Much has been written recently about the left's failure to strike a chord with the public when it comes to responding to the economic downturn. But, despite some early and repeated warnings, the continuing disconnect between centre-left parties and the bulk of the electorate on what are sometimes referred to (euphemistically or otherwise) as cultural issues is every bit as serious. Unless it is addressed, the pendulum may never swing back sufficiently to see them back in power for any length of time.

Just as the devil is sometimes said to have all the best tunes, the right – whether we’re talking Conservative, Christian Democratic or Market Liberal parties in the mainstream or populist radical right parties towards the extreme – seems to possess most of today’s politically most potent messages. In as much as today’s more globalised and individualised consumer societies can be characterised by a consensus or a common sense, it is far from ‘progressive’ – at least in the sense in which that term is commonly understood by Europe’s social democrats. As a result, the centre-left is struggling, shipping support both to the right, where conventional conservatives are often prepared to do deals with their more outspoken counterparts in order to get into government, and to the left, where former communist and/or left libertarians compete with Green parties to mop up the votes of Labour/Social Democratic supporters disillusioned by their former champions’ failure to stand their ground.

On the big questions, economic and cultural, the right – helped it must be said by its friends in the media – seems to be able to supply answers that resonate with, and solutions which cut through to, ordinary people, be they working or middle class. Economy in trouble, for instance? The state takes and spends too much of our money. Big government has stifled enterprise, robbed people of their initiative, and left us up to our eyeballs in debt. Time to let business do what it does best and create some real rather than pretend public sector jobs, to end the welfare dependency that’s created a permanent, feckless underclass, and to cut back in order to balance the books just like we all have to do at home.

Or perhaps you’re feeling like you don’t belong in your own country, like you’re losing out to foreigners when it comes to getting a job, a home, a doctor’s appointment, a place for your kids at a good school – or at least one in which most of the kids can speak the language? The answer is equally obvious: the liberal elite has let us all down, made us part of a multi-racial, multicultural experiment that none of us ever voted for but that suited them perfectly, providing the nannies, the nurses, the builders and the barristas that make their lives easier but keep our wages down and render some parts of our towns and cities unrecognisable or even turn them into virtual no-go zones, fit only for scroungers, criminals and even terrorists. The tide has to be turned, borders have to be closed, rules have to be obeyed, political correctness and this human rights nonsense has to end. Those who don’t like it know where they can go.

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### How should social democrats respond?

The centre-left has three options when it comes to responding to these populist, but undoubtedly popular, takes on what is easily portrayed as some sort of hydra-headed crisis. The first, heroic, option is to seek to counter or at least disrupt the dominant narrative with stories of its own, reminding people, for instance, of our moral responsibilities toward the dispossessed of the developing world, of our honourable tradition of providing a safe haven for the persecuted, of the obvious benefits – economic, demographic, and international – of bringing in a big bunch of newcomers, most of whom, despite the stereotypes, are not only relatively young and healthy but prepared to work hard and happy to try to fit in.

The second option is to dodge or at least play down the question, to move on to topics that look electorally more promising – the need, for example, to do something to reign in the financial sector, to defend popular public services like healthcare, education and pension provision.

The third option is to go with the grain, to acknowledge that 21st century political economy and the media systems which both support and reflect it, mean there is little or no point trying to argue the toss. Better to recognise the reality of the financial markets and to limit the damage and make cuts (or at least pretend to make them) before the other lot get the chance. And, on the cultural as opposed to the economic front, better to acknowledge (and so do something to assuage) the anger felt by those whose fear and loathing of the unfamiliar, the unfair and the offensive, risks driving them either into abstention or into the arms of less scrupulous politicians who claim to tell it like it is but surely know they stand no chance of delivering even half of what they promise.

Each of these three options, taken in turn, has its own logic and rationale. Option one recognises that politics is as much about story-telling as delivering tangible goods, symbols as well as substance. It makes sense, then, to ensure that it's your version rather than your opponent's which is on everyone's lips – and all the better if it's a tale that you truly believe and that your members and core supporters find comfortingly familiar. Option two recognises that elections aren't so much about the clash of ideas as about getting the voters and the media to focus on the issues you 'own' and to ignore those owned by other parties. Focusing on the old favourites, then, especially (once again) if it hits the spot with people whose sympathy you can probably count on but need to really motivate to actually get out and vote. Option three acknowledges that democracy is ultimately about giving as many people as possible what they want. Only governments get the chance to do that: if you're out of office and out of sync with the mass media, victory sometimes requires that you admit defeat, that (to coin a phrase) you concede and move on.

In the real world, of course, these options are not mutually exclusive. Centre-left parties often oscillate between them, split on the principles; worried about selling out and unable to make up their minds whether one strategy really is superior to another. The choice between them can depend on what other parties are up to. Perhaps, for example, the centre-right can be persuaded to join a cross-party consensus which excludes discussion of potentially explosive issues. On the other hand, it may be too late for that – the media may refuse to join in what will undoubtedly be dubbed a conspiracy of silence and parties on the far right and the far (or ecological) left may be more than happy to step into the breach.

Which strategy is chosen can also depend on just how united and/or hierarchical the centre-left party in question is. Will the grassroots be prepared to let the leadership concede and move on? Or perhaps it's the leadership, insulated from the anger and alienation of constituents on cultural questions, who refuse to respond to the pleas of their activists and local councillors that something has to be done? The choice of strategy also depends on what seems to be working – something that can only be judged retrospectively by elections or prospectively (and perhaps less reliably) by the opinion polls to which many politicians are understandably reluctant to enslave themselves. Parties, after all, are as prone as any other complex organisation to inertia; sometimes only the severest of shocks will shake them out of their complacency.

### Conceding and moving on

The most likely response on the centre left, then, is to meander and muddle through. But that is an empirical observation rather than a political or normative recommendation. Leaving aside what actually happens, or is likely to happen, and concentrating for a moment on which course of action constitutes the best – or, more accurately, the least worst – option, then it may be that biting the bullet is the way to go. Just as the centre-right has had to accept, say, the effective permanency of

welfare provision and the outlawing of overt discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, sexuality, and disability, then today's social democrats may have to admit that there are limits to the tolerance and understanding of ordinary people and recognise that it is fundamentally undemocratic, as well as unrealistic, to stretch things beyond that limit.

Few people come into politics without a set of principles. And no one gets anywhere in politics unless they are convinced that they can persuade others to share or at least act in accordance with those principles. As a result, politicians are by their very nature, inclined towards the heroic assumption that the electorate's views are endogenous rather than exogenous, influenced by the cut and thrust of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary political debate rather than by experiences (social, cultural and occupational) gleaned outside of that sphere and by preferences hard-wired by genetics and evolution.

Research suggests that we are not blank slates and that most of us are prepared to show, let alone feel, only so much understanding of those we see, rightly or wrongly, as strangers. It also means that such understanding will be in particularly short supply when times are tough or when we feel that people are acting

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unfairly, abusing our hospitality, or taking us for a ride. As altruistic beings, we are prepared to help – but only up to a point. Charity doesn't end at home but it does begin there; those to whom we give assistance and shelter must be genuinely (and, ideally, only temporarily) in need. As self-interested beings, we can appreciate that we might need to bring in foreigners to fill skill shortages and maybe even to make up for our ageing society – but again only up to a point. If governments and employers can rely on an inflow of people prepared to work long hours on low wages, then what incentive do they have to improve the employability of those born and raised here, whether by carrots (higher wages, better education and training) or sticks (making it less and less easy for those out of work to refuse to do the jobs they see as beneath them)? Is it really so simplistic (or so right-wing) to ask whether it makes sense to import labour (legally or illegally, openly or via the back door) when we have millions – and it is now literally millions – of people out of work and claiming benefits, some of whom are desperate to find a job, some of whom regard the work that migrants will gladly do as somehow beneath them.

If it is the case that politicians have less influence on people than they like to think, then it makes little or no sense to believe that avoiding a sticky subject will prove any more successful than trying to change their minds. The suggestion that talking about it instead will provide some sort of silver bullet is clearly misguided – banging endlessly on about migration and multiculturalism inevitably risks making both issues even more salient than they are already. But not talking about it at all seems, as Swedish politicians have recently discovered, to do little more than postpone rather than cure the problem. In any case, the chances that everyone – be they politician or journalist – can be persuaded to remain quiet forever are virtually non-existent: the rewards for defection, be they measured in votes or in fame and fortune, are simply too high for some to resist. And, in any case, those who defect often do so with the best of intentions.

As the 20th century came to a close, the centre-left had to admit that there were limits to decommodification and state ownership. Those policies made sense (and continue to make sense) when it came to redressing market failure, but taken to their logical conclusion they clearly

conflicted with individual liberty, with economic success, and even (irony of ironies) with effective welfare provision. As the 21st century gets properly underway, the centre-left should, by the same token, acknowledge that migration and multiculturalism, whilst wholly well-intentioned and far from the complete disaster conjured up by their opponents, nevertheless went further than most people wanted or were told would happen. It should recognise that, while we have a continuing and non-negotiable responsibility to ensure, by legal and educational means, that minorities are treated fairly, the time has come to listen to the majority rather than simply serve up more of what we think is good for them. This after all, is the essence of democracy.

### Contracting out

Social democracy is not, has never been, nor should ever allow itself to become, the vanguard of a post-materialism that shows few signs of filtering down – at least wholesale – from the educationally privileged middle classes. There are other parties even more willing and much better able to play that role. Just as the centre-right finds it convenient to contract out some of the really mean stuff to the far right – and sometimes ride back into government with its help – the centre left should consider contracting some of its more generous impulses out to the radical left and the Greens.

Obviously, this contracting out is much easier in countries where such alternatives exist, are capable of translating votes into parliamentary seats, and are happy to compromise in order to form coalitions or at least to support a social democratic minority government. In other countries, it will be much harder. The British Labour Party, for example, will inevitably find things far harder going than its European counterparts that operate in proportional systems. Before May 2010, it was axiomatic that those disillusioned with its supposed shift to the right would vote either for a party like the Greens, who apparently stood no chance of making it into parliament, or, more obviously, for a Liberal Democratic Party that was surely bound, if it came to the crunch, to do a deal with Labour rather than the Conservatives.

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After May 2010 things look very different. Some of those disillusioned with what they see as Labour's disrespect for civil liberties will stick with the Greens, convinced (almost certainly wrongly) that the latter will be able to build on the single seat they managed to win at the last election. Others, feeling betrayed by the Lib Dems, will no doubt flock back to Labour, thereby piling pressure on its new leader to pursue a softer line on law and order and immigration. They will be supported by many who stuck with Labour but who were never convinced that tough talk on such issues ever did much good – forgetting perhaps that the real problem was not so much the tough talk as the patent failure to back up words with deeds. All mouth and no trousers is never an election winning strategy.

### Confronting reality

If this small-l liberal pressure on the British Labour Party proves effective, the consequences for it could be disastrous. Tony Blair's genius – if it can be called that – was to understand the bleeding obvious, namely that in Britain, as in most European countries, the electorate was often located just to the left of centre on the state-market dimension but pretty far to the right on the dimension whose two poles political scientists like to label libertarian and authoritarian. That authoritarianism, however, is qualified by that same sense of fairness which, together with a dash of self interest, drives

most European voters, most of the time, towards the centre on the economy and welfare. However, that sense of fairness is not infinitely elastic.

Liberals on the centre left have been able to rely on this strong, shared and arguably hard-wired sense of fairness in order to gradually construct a legislative framework and a social consensus (most marked among the young) rooted in the idea that it is simply wrong to discriminate against someone because they are black, or female, or gay, or disabled – and quite rightly so. But they have also made the mistake of bundling up a duty to accept the principle and the practice of non-discrimination with consent (tacit or otherwise), firstly, to levels of migration that (even discounting the often misleading figures thrown around by populist politicians, press and pressure groups) were never really wanted and, secondly, to laws that make a nonsense of both innate and learned notions of justice, rehabilitation and, yes, retribution. In so doing they have lost the trust and support of people across the social spectrum but in particular ordinary working people who look at what populists call ‘the political class’ and see no-one – not even in social democratic parties – who looks and sounds like they have any personal experience of life lived at the sharp end.

No political creed or party that hopes to attract the votes of at least a third of the adult population... can allow itself to so get too far out of kilter with, or run too far ahead of, public opinion

No political creed or party that hopes to attract the votes of at least a third of the adult population, and the governing consent of the majority of the remainder, can allow itself to so get too far out of kilter with, or run too far ahead of, public opinion. Human beings have a terrible tendency to believe that their own values are self-evidently right and shared by everyone of goodwill, and it can often come as something of a surprise to realise that it’s not (or no longer) the case. But that excuse won’t wash any more. Decades of research show that the liberal instincts of many centre-left parties aren’t always (and in some cases are seldom) shared by most of those to whom they seek to appeal. Efforts to change that, whether concerted or halting, have had some but not enough impact. Maybe, a few years back, a redoubling of those efforts may have made a difference. But not now. The right, whether extreme or mainstream, will have no hesitation in pressing home the huge advantage this gives them, even if business concerns about labour mobility will occasionally encourage them to do less in reality than they promise in their rhetoric.

Rational argument may make some difference, but it won’t on its own prove sufficient. Changing the subject can make sense, but it offers no long-term solution. In the end, listening, even if you don’t like what you hear, and then actually acting on it, is probably the only way forward. That doesn’t, however, mean it will be easy: what we are talking about here is not just a change of tune but also a change of heart.

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## Liberals v communitarians: the left's civil war

David Goodhart, Prospect Magazine

New polling highlights a growing value divide between the left's middle class graduate vote and its lower middle class and working class vote. Straddling these divisions requires a "liberal communitarian" approach to politics that can bring social democracy back in line with the prevalent cultural centre of gravity

It is an old story, but with a new twist: the divergence between the liberalism of the centre-left's educated elite and the conservatism—or to put it more neutrally, communitarianism—of the left's working-class voters. This liberalism v communitarian value divide is a feature of all rich societies and affects all political parties—it might be described as the political dimension of the tension between diversity and solidarity. But it has emerged as an especially big political headache for parties of the centre-left across Europe, especially since the arrival of the "security and identity" issues—immigration, national identity, extremism—on the centre of the political stage in the past decade. The rise of populist parties in the Netherlands, Belgium and France, among others, has sucked away working class communitarian voters from the main centre-left parties, which has left them increasingly dependent on their liberal graduate voters who have promoted policies which further alienate the working class communitarians, and so on. Labour has been somewhat protected from this trend by the first past the post electoral system and the lack of a serious populist threat, but for reasons I will explain it is not immune to the problem.

Before going any further I should define my terms. My definitions are a bit vague but roughly speaking liberals place most stress on individual rights and cultural openness, they are loosely pro-diversity and pro-immigration, they are relatively lenient on criminals and green on the environment. They are generally comfortable with globalisation and are among those who benefit from it both economically and culturally. At the more extreme end they are post-national universalists, who feel no greater obligation to someone in Birmingham as to someone in Burundi.

Communitarians by contrast have a more collectivist view of rights and place great stress on community membership and boundary maintenance, they like reciprocity and worry about welfare free-riding, they value the familiar and the local and are sceptical about mass immigration and mobility (both social and geographical), they are draconian on criminal justice and not particularly green, they are generally uncomfortable with globalisation and tend not to benefit from it either economically or culturally. At the more extreme end they shade into racists and nativists, but racism has generally been in decline in recent decades in Britain (although there is some evidence that it stopped falling in the early 2000s) and is not a significant factor among Labour voters.

Judging from public opinion polls and value surveys one can generalise with some confidence about how these values map on to the left's (liberal) middle class graduate vote and its (communitarian) lower middle class and working class vote. Of course, not everyone in these two groups fits the stereotype and many people will espouse both liberal and communitarian views, but a recent YouGov poll (see p 15-16) makes it clear that the broad social contours of the divide are pretty clear.

So why has the problem become more intense in Britain in recent years? For two reasons: first, the changing composition of the centre-left vote and, second, the new policy terrain. Labour's voting base is becoming increasingly evenly divided between liberals and communitarians. At the 2010 election Labour's middle class vote – not the same as its liberal vote – of 4.4 million just outstripped its working class vote (of 4.2 million) for the first time, with Labour twice as likely to lose a working class voter as a middle class one. As recently as 1997 the working class vote of 8 million comfortably outstripped the middle class vote of 5.5 million; back in 1970 it was 10 million to 2 million. Clearly, this loose ABC1 definition of middle class is much larger than the group of people who would fit my definition of liberal, but that proportion is growing rapidly too: Labour's graduate vote, which is more likely to conform to liberal values, is about 25% of the whole (and rising), while the communitarian vote is declining, partly because it is older.

The second reason that this liberal v communitarian divide matters more is that the policies that divide these two parts of the Labour camp are now much more mainstream. In the old days, when there weren't many Labour voting middle class liberals (they used to be called Hampstead liberals, after all!), the group still had a disproportionate influence among activists and MPs and policymakers but the things that they were interested in, such as international affairs, ending apartheid, foreign aid, liberalising policy on homosexuality and so on, did not really impinge on communitarian Labour voters. Now it is becoming harder to do the ideological splits. Stark differences between liberals and communitarians over globalisation, the effects of mass immigration, green issues and issues relating to mobility cannot be so easily fudged.

Mobility is a key issue here, as John McTernan the former New Labour adviser has pointed out. McTernan argues that: "Mobility comes naturally to graduates who often move away from home to university and then move again to their first job, it is part of the life-style of many middle class people. But many working class communitarians cannot see the point of it; they value their family and other networks too much—why move away from your extended family when it offers free childcare? New Labour rhetoric was on the side of change and mobility but it was off-putting to many people. The party has been in effect saying to many people especially in the north: stay with your community and fail, or move."

Asked whether Britain now feels like a foreign country – working class progressives agree by 64-26 per cent, but middle class graduate progressives disagree by 67-28 per cent

The value clash is certainly borne out in some recent polling data collected by Peter Kellner at YouGov. Peter and me drew up some questions to try to tease out this liberal v communitarian distinction among "progressive" voters (we have actually combined Labour and Lib Dem voters in that definition).

Asked whether employers should be given special incentives to hire British workers – working class progressives agree by 65-25 per cent, but middle class graduate progressives disagree by 52-35 per cent.

Asked whether Britain now feels like a foreign country – working class progressives agree by 64-26 per cent, but middle class graduate progressives disagree by 67-28 per cent.

Asked to choose between two statements about immigrants, one saying they should integrate the other saying it's fine if they keep their own culture and traditions, 72 per cent of working class progressives back integration compared with just 53 per cent of middle class graduate

progressives.

And on foreign aid one-third of working class progressives say it should be axed completely in favour of spending more on public services at home, compared with just 12 per cent of middle class graduate progressives.

### How should centre left leaders respond?

The traditional answer has been to fudge the distinction—say one thing to one group and another thing to the other; that after all is part of the art of politics. But for the reasons I have given that is getting harder. There are still policies that can bridge the divide—well funded and functioning public services (many middle class liberals are public service professionals), effective attacks on the financial sector and good social democratic economic policies might help too, but as cultural issues loom larger in politics the old bread and butter issues are probably not enough.

The alternative is to mainly back one side or the other, either the liberals or the communitarians, and hope that enough of the other group will still turn out for you. In parts of continental Europe the decision has been taken already as social democratic parties become increasingly dominated by liberal graduate voters. But for Labour there is still some room for manoeuvre.

My own view is perhaps a mixture of the two, fudge a little and choose a little! The centre-left needs to develop a kind of liberal communitarianism that is more centred on communitarian preferences but just liberal enough to keep the liberals.

The liberals may be growing in number, and younger, but their ideas are often less strongly held and they can be persuaded to change some of them. The centre of gravity remains for a few more decades with the communitarians. Moreover, there is an argument to be won with what one might call “lazy liberal universalists” who have not thought through the logic of their beliefs. For example, a liberal disdain for the protections of national citizenship—the belief that as a British citizen I have no greater obligation to a fellow citizen as to someone from the developing world (Burundi before Birmingham)—could within a generation or two mean the withering away of the welfare state.

A liberal disdain for the protections of national citizenship could within a generation or two mean the withering away of the welfare state

What would a liberal communitarian politics look like? On the crucial issue of mass immigration, it would be anti mass immigration but pro-immigrant. It would, for example, be against Turkish membership of the EU, or at least against free movement for Turkish workers, and would have some sympathy for the current government’s attempts to bring numbers down to tens of thousands a year. It would want immigration to be highly selective and it would place great stress on integration measures for new citizens, practical things like language lessons as well as the symbolism and ceremony.

On welfare and housing and free-riding fears, Britain starts from the difficult position of having a strongly “common pool” welfare system with little insurance. Stressing “earned citizenship” is an attractive idea, but apart from pointing out that there is a two year residency qualification for non-contributory benefits it has little practical effect. The ideas of the free-thinking Tory MP Nick Boles

about deposits and a five year qualifying period for public housing should be looked at closely. (There is some opinion poll evidence that although most people have a club membership view of welfare, rather than a universal view, it may only take a couple of years residency to qualify as a club member.) And, as Jon Cruddas has stressed, the squeeze on housing—both public and private—as a result of a rapidly growing population, must be reversed.

A liberal communitarian politics would be pro-free trade but sceptical about aspects of globalisation, and would lean on business and finance to be less offshore while protecting ‘fellow-citizen favouritism’ as far as possible in the labour market and elsewhere. Ed Balls suggested reviewing free movement of labour within the EU in an article in the Observer just after the election. More practical perhaps would be reviewing how far it is possible to favour local, disadvantaged workers in public procurement.

There would be less rhetoric about change and more about stability, and economic policy would focus on repairing Robert Reich’s broken promise that so long as people get trained and educated they will benefit from globalisation—that might mean fewer riots about tuition fees and more riots about apprenticeships.

**David Goodhart is editor-at-large of Prospect Magazine**



## The populist revolt against cosmopolitanism

René Cuperus, Wiardi Beckman Stifting

A disconnect between elite “winners” of globalisation and its non-elite “losers” is threatening the foundations of the European party democracies and their welfare states. The ever-growing pan-European presence of right-wing and left-wing populist movements remains an alarming and grimy reminder of both the crisis of confidence which besets the established political scene and widespread societal unease. Bridge building based on a sensibility for identity and cultural politics is urgently required

*‘We have entered an age of fear. Insecurity is once again an active ingredient of political life in Western democracies. Insecurity born of terrorism, but also, and more insidiously, fear of the uncontrollable speed of change, fear of the loss of employment, fear of losing ground to others in an increasingly unequal distribution of resources, fear of losing control of the circumstances and routines of our daily life. And, perhaps above all, fear that it is not just we who can no longer shape our lives but that those in authority have also lost control, to forces beyond their reach’*

Tony Judt

A tormented wave of anti-establishment populism is haunting Europe. Populist parties have made it to the political centre stage. This is partly the result of the breakthrough of former extreme-right or far right parties into the ‘regular right’ part of the political spectrum and of the drift to the right in European political discourse concerning issues of immigration, Islam and the concept of the multicultural society after 9/11. In Europe, populism not only comes from the right, but from the anti-liberal protectionist left wing as well. In this essay, it will be argued that this populist wave points to a more deeply rooted crisis of trust and representation in the political and societal system at large. The position I take in this essay on populism is a ‘Blairite’ one: *tough on populism and tough on the causes of populism.*

### Populism against globalisation

Western Europe is in the grip of a political identity crisis. The disruptive effects of globalisation and lifestyle individualisation, the permanent retrenchment of the welfare states and the development of a “media audience democracy” are accompanied by fundamental changes in the political party system: the triumph of the floating voter, i.e. the unprecedented rise of electoral volatility, and the spectacular jump in the political arena of neo-populist entrepreneurial movements.

The traditional mass parties that have ruled the region at least since the end of the Second World War have lost members, voters, élan, and a monopoly on ideas. Because they are the pillars of both the party-oriented parliamentary system and the welfare state,

their slow but steady decline affects European societies as a whole. Due to changes in labour, family and cultural life styles, the Christian Democratic (conservative) and Social Democratic pillars of civil society are eroding away, leaving behind “people’s parties” with shrinking numbers of people. This

This erosion of political representation eats away at the foundations of the European welfare states and European party democracies

erosion of political representation eats away at the foundations of the European welfare states and European party democracies.

The second ingredient of the European crisis is what might be called the paradox of Europe's Holocaust trauma. Europeans still seem unable to cope with the question of ethnic diversity. Intellectual discourse has for too long been characterised by a species of political correctness that praises multiculturalism and 'The Foreigner' as enriching for society while turning a blind eye to the de facto segregation and marginalisation of many new immigrants and the stress they place on the welfare system in many nations. Also, the potential cultural conflict between Europe's liberal-permissive societies and orthodox Islam was denied. The established democratic parties reacted to the rise of extreme right, racist parties with a *cordon sanitaire*, but made the mistake of also applying it to the issues these parties campaign on, i.e. the shadow sides of mass migration: problems of integration and segregation; high unemployment and crime rates; "multicultural discontent", especially within the constituencies of the people's parties: "feeling a stranger in one's own country". These problems did a lot to provoke a populist-xenophobic backlash. Here, Europe is facing two dilemmas. Firstly, how to maintain its 'communitarian' welfare states under conditions of permanent immigration. And secondly, to what extent will the integration patterns in Europe be determined by multiculturalism or integrationalism?

A third ingredient of the crisis is widespread unease over the process of European integration. What could be a proud achievement of cosmopolitan cooperation between rival nation states has become, instead, a cause of increasing insecurity and national alienation. This discontent with the European Union has been propelled considerably by the impact of the Big Bang-enlargement - the arrival of a many new east-central European member states to the EU and the contested negotiations for a Turkish membership - and by the effects of the neoliberal and technocratic make-up of EU-negative integration: the rise of a Brussels 'market state'.

The fourth component of the European malaise is the fact that much of the discontent was channelled through the rise of right-wing or even extremist-radical right populist movements. Moreover, in Europe, unlike in the American historical tradition, populism is more or less associated with fascism and Nazism, the pathologies of the "voice of the masses". This in itself adds up to a sense of crisis: the opening up of the scars of the 20th century.

The representation problem of the traditional political party system; the discontent with ill-managed mass migration; the growing unease with the European integration process (not a shield against globalisation, but instead the transmitter and 'visible face' of globalisation): these all fuel the political and electoral potential of (right wing) populist movements, who exploit feelings of anxiety, fear and discontent while constructing a narrative of social and moral decline.

This revolt is rooted in the perception that people feel 'betrayed' by the ruling elites

Populism can be defined as a particular style of politics, referring to 'the people' as a false homogeneous entity against a 'corrupt elite', and in this sense the neo-populist citizen's revolt in Europe must be understood. This revolt is rooted in the perception that people feel 'betrayed' by the ruling elites. They feel, as transnational public opinion research is revealing, not represented in, but victimised by, the great transformation of our contemporary societies, in particular by the processes of globalisation/Europeanisation, post-industrialisation and multiculturalisation. Populism can be read as a fever warning which signals that problems of transformation are not being dealt with effectively, or points to the malfunctioning of the linkages between citizens and governing elites.

The new right-wing populism that emerged in the last decade of the last century can be called populist because they claim to represent ‘the people’ and to be mobilising them against a domineering establishment. And they can be classified as right-wing populist because they claim to be defending and shielding national, cultural or ethnic identity against ‘outsiders’ or external influences.

In this sense there are connections to xenophobic, racist or far-right parties and political ideas. Some of the parties indeed have their origin in extreme-right quarters or did house neo-nazi or fascist party activists (the Haider Party in Austria, the “Vlaams Belang” party in Flanders, the Sweden Democrats). Most of these parties however tried to transform themselves (sometimes just to cover up) into democratic ‘normality’. Other parties, however, cannot be associated with ‘dark European history’. Examples are the Pim Fortuyn party in the Netherlands - which has been called ‘postmodern populist’, because of his *bricolage* of right-wing and left-wing ideas-, the Danish People’s party of Pia Kjaersgeld or the Dutch ‘Partij voor de Vrijheid’ van Geert Wilders, which is ruthlessly islamophobic, but “clean” with respect to nazi-connections. One could call this kind of new populism, a “third way of the right”, a middle road between the democratic and the undemocratic right, between traditional conservatism on the one hand and the antidemocratic extreme right of the past on the other.

In Europe, for a long time it was common to identify populism with the radical right parties of the 1980s and 1990s. But one of the actual problems is that the new anti-

Populism is not a marginal or protest phenomenon, it is striking at the heart of the post-war political order

globalisation populism is no longer restricted to the relatively small ‘home constituencies’ of the far right parties. The populist discontent with established politics and with the perceived disrupting impact of internationalisation (global neo-liberalism, mass migration, the undermining of national democracy) is expanding to great parts of the electorate, threatening to turn over the post-war political systems in various countries. In countries such as Flanders or the Netherlands, anti-establishment populist parties, which are successful just because they cannot be labelled radical right in the traditional sense – respectively, the Flemish-nationalist NVA of Bart de Wever and the PVV of Geert Wilders – have become serious political players. Populism is not a marginal or protest phenomenon, it is striking at the heart of the post-war political order.

This essay therefore focuses on the widening gap between the political and policy elites and large parts of the population in continental European welfare states. There is a massive level of unease in many western countries, trust in institutions and politics is at a record low and there are crises in voter confidence and political representation. The ever-growing pan-European presence of right-wing and left-wing populist movements, which often appear following contested reforms of the post-war welfare state settlements, remains an alarming and grimy reminder of the general unease in the population and the crisis of confidence which besets the established political scene.

### A shortcut between elites and non-elites

In the process of adaptation to the New Global World Order, there has been a fundamental breakdown of trust and communication between elites and the general population. The pressures of adaptation to the new globalised world are particularly directed at those who do not fit in to the new international knowledge based economy, the unskilled and the low-skilled. The over-all discourse of adaptation and competitive adjustment has a strong bias against the lower middle class and non-academic professionals. This bias is one of the root causes for populist resentment and revolt. Policy and political elites are selling and producing insecurity and uncertainty, instead of

showing security and stable leadership in a world of flux. With the exception of some Scandinavian countries, European policy elites do not show welfare state pride or offer stability in times of change and reform. This ambivalence about the very foundations of the European social model is in itself producing populist unrest.

However, unease and distrust in contemporary European society must be located at more levels than welfare state reform. We are experiencing a shift right across the board: the magic of the post-war period seems to be all used up: the post-war ideal of European unification, the post-war welfare state model and the post-Holocaust tolerance for the foreigner; they all seem to be eroding and under pressure. The overall process of internationalisation (globalisation, immigration, European integration) is producing a gap of trust and representation between elites and the population-at-large around questions of cultural and national identity.

### A world in flux

The “populist pan-European revolt” has been empirically demonstrated by Hans Peter Kriesi et. al. In a Six European Countries Comparison, they offer that “the current process of globalisation or denationalisation leads to the formation of a new structural conflict in Western European countries, opposing those who benefit from this process against those who tend to lose in the course of events.” They observe a structural opposition between so-called globalisation “winners” and “losers”, which results in a new cleavage that has transformed the basic national political space. “We consider those parties that most successfully appeal to the interests and fears of the ‘losers’ of globalisation to be the driving force of the current transformation of the Western European party systems”.

Populism or protectionist “politics of demarcation” may be analysed as reactions of fear and discontent to globalisation, denationalisation or detraditionalisation; a revolt against economic and cultural liberalism, the ideology of the modern internationalised professional elites; a revolt against the universalistic, cosmopolitan global village without boundaries and distinctions. In nucleus, this is what the new populism is all about, both in its moderate version (conservative or left-wing anti-capitalist protectionism) and in its nasty version of xenophobia, racism or aggressive nationalism.

In the process of reform and adaptation to the new global world order, there has been a fundamental breakdown of trust between the elites and the general population, aggravating the harsh cleavage between winners and losers of “late modernism”; a cleavage between future-optimists and future pessimists.

The process of economic and cultural modernisation has resulted in a new social polarisation. Major economic changes associated with globalisation and new technologies result in a new redistribution of opportunities for participation and success. The level of education in particular, pre-determines individuals’ life-chances, their confidence in politics and public institutions and their expectations of the future.

As a result, a new dividing line is emerging between two groups: those who embrace the future and those who fear the future, people who believe that the new world holds nothing good in store for them and who feel betrayed by the ‘political elite’. This concerns both a cultural-political cleavage as well as a social-economic class divide. On the right, this new dividing line creates a breeding ground for anti-immigrant right-wing populist parties; on the left it provides a basis for left-wing populist parties, such as the German *Die Linke* or the Dutch Socialist Party. More and more, the traditional

people's parties, which functioned as a connecting umbrella between higher and lower middle class, higher and lower educated, are faced with an existential issue as the dividing lines between these groups now threaten to split and fragment their electorates. Is this foreshadowing of a fragmented and split society?

There are some who dismiss the discontented electorates, one-dimensionally and straightforwardly, as xenophobic nationalists, as frightened enemies of the open society, as people who turn their back on the future, as deniers of globalisation and immigration. But these critics are wide of the mark. There is a great danger involved when a cosmopolitan post-national elite carelessly argues away the nation state and national identity, just at the moment that the nation state is for many the last straw of identification to cling to, a beacon of trust in a world in flux.

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A casual cosmopolitan reaction painfully denies the strong polarising forces to which society is currently subjected and which have very different results for different groups. It denies the extremely weak socio-cultural and political climate in Europe. The issue is thus the crisis of trust and political representation, to a great extent caused by the new sociological fault line in today's European society.

### The dialectics of globalisation

One could argue, and thinkers like Manuel Castells made this point long before, that globalisation implies two contradicting things at the same time:

1. the world grows more together, becomes more 'familiar', interdependent, connected, better-known, better reported and visited and travelled, because of revolutionary changes in transportation, media (the world wide web) and the economy. *The world is becoming flat.*
2. but, 'at home', within nation states, globalisation implies that through global migration or by mergers and acquisitions, national societies become more global, more diverse, more 'strange', more fragmented and heterogeneous.

So we see a dialectics of more 'familiarity' and more 'strangeness' at the same time, caused by the same factors. And if we relate this simply defined dialectics of globalisation to the populist revolt analysed above, we can observe that globalisation in the first meaning, that of more familiarity, is predominantly an experience for those people who are internationally connected, who act on a transnational or global level, i.e. the international business, academic, political (including NGOs) and cultural elites.

The impact of globalisation at the nation state level, however, is predominantly directed towards low-skilled and semi-skilled workers, who are the first to experience job and wage competition as a result of labour migration – towards people living in worn out inner city or *banlieu*-neighbourhoods where non-expat migrants settle first, and so on. To put it in one badly formulated English phrase: "The world is becoming flat, but national democracies and welfare states are becoming less flat".

The impact of a globalised world in flux has, in other words, a strong pro-elite-bias. Again, what is the

sense and sensibility of cosmopolitanism against this background?

The problem with the (in itself beautiful) concept of cosmopolitanism, apart from its dreamy, John Lennon-like “Imagine all the people” connotations, lies in our inhabitation of a world in flux. We have experienced an acceleration of the process of modernisation, including globalisation, mass migration, the financial crisis and the international knowledge economy. As a result, and research in many countries backs this up, we see a split between those who are able to connect internationally, and those who cannot connect internationally, between national, local citizens and non-bound internationally oriented citizens.

In the literature, there has already been made a distinction between ‘multilingual mobiles’ and ‘single language, localised immobiles’. The ideology of global, cosmopolitan citizenship threatens to downgrade those who cannot connect internationally. So, cosmopolitanism, as a matter of fact, produces second-class citizens. This puts democracy at stake in the long run. Society is threatening to split into globalisation winners versus losers of globalisation among countries and within countries, a fault line running right through the European and American middle class society.

In the context of the contemporary globalisation process, cosmopolitanism threatens to become the neoliberal and cultural ideology of international business and expatriate interests, instead of the philosophy of cultural universalism, the global open mind, of, say, Erasmus or Stefan Zweig. Instead of paying homage to cultural openness and curiosity, it tends to become the accompanying song of cultural standardisation and commercialisation. Philosophical cosmopolitanism threatens to become replaced by the pseudo-cosmopolitanism of the world market and the world consumer.

Back in the days of Stefan Zweig, cosmopolitanism was an important antidote to aggressive nationalism, and ‘jingoism’. Being cosmopolitan meant distancing oneself from superiority-blind nationalism. It just meant opening up, say as a German, to the French, English, Chinese or American culture, lifestyle and experience, instead of sticking to a singular cultural identity.

But what is cosmopolitanism in the contemporary context of neoliberal globalisation, mass migration and taboos on national identity and cultural difference? Is cosmopolitanism critical enough of the neoliberal globalisation that has become entrenched under the auspices of the Washington Consensus, or does cosmopolitanism contribute, due to its vaguely a-cultural identity, to the fact that the world consumer not the world citizen is the common denominator of the new global world? How culturally curious and open is a world in which people and countries are merely treated as consumers and commodities, as economic competitors in a global free market society?

But what is cosmopolitanism in the contemporary context of neoliberal globalisation, mass migration and taboos on national identity and cultural difference?

Cosmopolitanism is basically an a-historical, a-political and a-cultural concept, and an unprecedented, laconic replacement of traditional historical and cultural identities with a thinly layered veil of cosmopolitan attitudes. It is risky business at a time when we are witnessing a hard separation between globalisation winners and losers. In this picture, a misunderstood cosmopolitanism sides with the elite-winners, turning cosmopolitanism into an ideology of the international top class only, turning the internationally disconnected into second-class citizens. On top of the already negative impact of socio-economic trends on non-academic professionals, now they are culturally dismissed

as well, categorised as atavistic dinosaurs and xenophobic nationalist provincials.

We also encounter a contradiction here, which I will label the 'culture trap' of cosmopolitan multiculturalists. On one hand, postmodern, post-nationalist, post-identity thinkers, 'define away' the culture, identity, national tradition and core values of the "host countries" of immigration in the west. But at the same time, they do not apply this post-traditionalist, post-cultural, postmodern approach to migrant communities and cultures. Instead they take a strong multiculturalist position against assimilation or integration, assuming that migrants possess (threatened) cultures, traditions and identities, which are denied for the autochthonous population. This one-sided, asymmetrical approach did much to 'produce' the populist backlash against immigration and globalisation. It will, understandably, bring on resentment and revolt. Worse still, this is already happening: the revolt of populism against the elitist notions of globalism and cosmopolitanism.

Cosmopolitanism threatens the postwar stability of the Western middle class democracies, where the tormented history of twentieth-century Europe has shown us precisely that a pinched, anxious middle class represents a big alarm for the stability of society and mutual social relations within it.

Cosmopolitan ideologues far too often totally neglect the conflict dimension and the great disparities which their cosmopolitan utopia entails. Instead of giving globalisation and cosmopolitanism a critically-balanced review on the basis of the piled-up historical and sociological knowledge of our sciences, they embrace, as Tony Judt pointed out so brilliantly, cosmopolitan globalisation as a sort of Belle Époque-ideology, implying that globalisation by nature will be a linear progress, without alternatives, kickbacks or counterproductive effects.

And kickbacks and risky backlashes there will be. Large parts of the populations will revolt against the elitist, neoliberal and cultural liberal worldview of permanent flexibilisation, mobility and free flow of people and capital. People feel threatened by the totally disruptive discourse of the international policy elites; about "a total change of everything." They present a hysterical story of modernisation and adaptation: everything and everyone will have to adapt constantly, or they will miss the boat in the new world.

According to this reasoning, globalisation, demographic shifts and technological revolutions will continue to shake the foundations of the world. Nothing will remain the same. Jobs, professions and industries are one hit wonders. Nation-states are powerless dwarfs in the global arena. Europe will hardly survive in the 21st century, unless the countries finally unite in becoming a global player. The west will lose out to China, unless our best and brightest are totally committed to an excellent innovative knowledge economy.

If we want Europe to succeed in the new century, and nation states to succeed in Europe, we must give priority to our international elites, the smartest, the strongest, the best. They are the only ones who can safeguard our future. (German SPD-banker Thilo Sarrazin in his book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* even designed a kind of 'meritocratic racism' along these lines).

And all this under the mantra of inevitability: TINA, There Is No Alternative. According to the conformist opinion of international policy experts, there is no substitute for intensive adaptation to the brave new world of globalisation, permanent immigration, lifelong learning and liberalization. That is the price we have to pay for our ideal of an open global society, economically and culturally. There is no left or right adaptation, there is only one way to go. The World is Flat, so the people will

become. I have once labelled this discourse of total adaptation, without any reference to cultural traditions and existing institutions, the 'pornography of change'.

The alarming warning should be: those who arrange the world for cosmopolitans only, and assume that everyone wants to be and can be a world citizen, run the risk of huge resistance, such as the contemporary revolt of populism. Or worse. Anyone who thinks that globalisation naturally brings forth global people, global politics, global democracy, global ethics and solidarity, will in the end play with historical and sociological fire.

### Concluding observations

Europe faces a dangerous populist revolt against the good society of both the neoliberal business community and progressive academic professionals. The revolt of populism is, as I have argued in my paper, 'produced' by the economic and cultural elites. They advocate, without much historical or sociological reflection, their 'brave new world' of the bright, well-educated, entrepreneurial and highly mobile. Their TINA project is creating fear and resentment under non-elites. The deterministic image of a future world of globalisation, open borders, free flows of people, lifelong-learning in the knowledge-based society is a nightmare world for non-elites, the 'losers of globalisation'.

In the elite narrative, sizable parts of the middle and working class are being confronted with economic and psychological degradation. Their life is no longer the future. They feel alienated, dispossessed and downgraded, because the society in which they felt comfortable, in which they had their respected place and which has been part of their social identity is being pushed aside by new realities. To what extent can the ideology of 'globalism', multiculturalism and world citizenship be reconciled with the heritage of national democracy and welfare state communitarism? To what extent can a uniform global culture of neoliberal and hedonistic capitalism be reconciled with the rich cultural diversity of the world?

A restoration of trust between politicians and citizens will have to take place at the national level – the only tested legitimate arena for democracy

This essay examined unease and popular distrust, an instable undercurrent in European society. The unease is to be found in the perception of threat through processes of internationalisation: on the one hand the globalisation of production of goods and services as well as capital markets and the apparently boundless European unification; on the other hand a seemingly uncontrollable immigration and the development of multi-ethnic societies with problems of integration, segregation and multicultural 'disorientation'. Research is showing that immigration, since the 1970s, has become the most salient and polarising political issue. In some countries (Switzerland, Britain and more recently in the Netherlands), the question of European Unification has also become part of the new political-cultural conflict. According to Kriesi c.s., this cultural dimension has become the primary basis on which new parties or transformed established parties seek to mobilize their electorate.

Contrary to the gospel of the postmodern, cosmopolitan pundits who advocate the self-abolition of the nation state in favour of new regional power centres, instable and dislocating undercurrents in European society require not only prudence in (the discourse on) modernisation and innovation but also the rehabilitation of the nation state as a forum for restoration of trust, as an anchor in uncertain times, as a source of social cohesion between the less and the better educated, between immigrants and the autochthonous population. A restoration of trust between politicians and citizens will have

to take place at the national level – the only tested legitimate arena for democracy - as will the creation of a harmonious multi-ethnic society.

The precondition for regaining political trust is also the renewal or even reinvention of the Volkspartei, as a bridge between the winners and losers of the new world trends. This new 'Volkspartei' will possibly emerge from coalition-building encompassing other political parties, as well as civil society-actors, and should design a new deal between the privileged and the less privileged: a pact of social-economic security and cultural openness, forging a new idea of progress. It should also be based on a sensibility for cultural and identity politics, because the primary discontents and sources of unhappiness in affluent welfare democracies are to a serious extent about community, social cohesion and, security: postmaterialist problems of social psychology.

It is important to restore the divide between left and right in politics – with alternative scenarios to adapt to the new world trends - in order to fight the dangerous populist cleavage between the establishment and (a false entity of) the people. *We must be tough on populism and tough on the causes of populism.*

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Note: This paper is partly based on:  
René Cuperus, *De Wereldburger bestaat niet. Waarom de opstand der elites de samenleving ondermijnt*, Bert Bakker, 2009



## Responding to populist value triangulation

Laurent Bouvet, University of Nice & Fondation Jean-Jaurès

The European right as a whole, including the far right, have gained a much better understanding of the forces shaping modern European societies. They have successfully triangulated onto traditional social democratic territory leaving the left fatally unsure about how to respond. To reclaim abandoned territory, social democrats have to target the political debate at cultural values, with a wholly renewed consideration of 'equality' serving as a prominent pillar

Everywhere in Europe, a new kind of populism is rising. The election of Marine Le Pen as the new president of the French National Front (the daughter of the far right party's founder) is the latest event in this political wave.

The popularity of radical right-wing parties defending a populist or neopopulist agenda has increased in recent years. Their platforms are all the same: anti-immigrant (and, moreover, anti-Islam), anti-European, anti-elite. There is a rising neo-populism on the left, too. In France, for example, a former member of the Socialist party is now openly presenting himself as a left-populist. All these forces and parties claim a desire for the return of the real or genuine 'people' (the 'P' word) to power.

The main explanation, among commentators as well as among social-democratic analysts, is that this phenomenon could be attributed to the current economic turndown and its social consequences. But the malaise is far deeper than that – this neopopulist phenomenon has not only economic and social causes but deep cultural roots. The new pan-European populism challenges the entire political system, but particularly the place of social democratic parties. European social democracy should be worried.

### A lost confidence

Social democracy is said to have lost the confidence of the public because it was not able, while in power, to draw a distinction between itself and the then dominant discourse of economic neo-liberalism (and it was in power in most European countries at some point over the last two decades). Social democrats are accused of having failed to govern their countries better than the right and of having accepted the worst excesses of the market economy (including deregulation, privatisation, financialisation, and casualisation of labour). And once relegated to the opposition, where they again began to talk the language of the left, they are accused of continuing to think on the right. In short, social democracy is said to have betrayed its ethos and its base by tacking to the right.

This explanation – that the social democrats lost their economic and social bearings – is the most widespread, and there is some truth to it. But it doesn't tell the whole story; first, because the list of European social democracy's economic and social successes and failures over the last 20 years is obviously more disparate than they would at first appear – not to mention differences from one country to another, which are deliberately ignored; and, second, because measuring performance against this yardstick misses, if not the essentials, at least the more fundamental level at which political change takes place in societies.

The issue facing social democracy now transcends the question of the extent to which it has or has not been converted to economic and social neo-liberalism. It will be noted that confining the discussion to this question is of no help to the social-democratic leadership. The issue must be addressed at the more fundamental level of ‘values’ or prerequisites (of the economic and social model in particular). The European right as a whole, as well as the political forces that are here and there referred to as ‘populist’, have clearly gained a better understanding of what is at stake. The governing right was forced to do so, since the left embraced most of its economic policy – for example, in the triangulation practiced by the New Democrats in the United States and New Labour in the United Kingdom in the 1990s. The right had to wage the political struggle on the basis of values by ‘triangulating’ the values of the left in turn, as Nicolas Sarkozy did in the case of labour values during the French presidential election in 2007.

### The populist challenge

In doing this, the right all over Europe picked up on and benefited from popular aspirations often neglected by the left (which thought it could take them for granted based on its historic monopoly, which was largely a figment of its own imagination): labour values, of course, but also national identity, family values, a sense of belonging and collective security. These are aspirations, and therefore values, that the left, seeing itself increasingly deserted by the working class that had traditionally supported it, gradually began to denounce as ‘populist’. Social democracy ceded these values – and the support of those who, for one reason or another, set great store by them – to non-respectable political movements and leaders, particularly on the extreme right. It was not so much a matter of the traditional right benefiting electorally (if not programmatically) by ‘co-opting’ the extreme-right working class as it was one of social democracy (i.e., the governing left) forfeiting that part of the electorate because it was unable to offer a platform that accommodated both its interests (economic and social) and its identity (its ‘values’) – demonstrating, in the process, that the two are closely linked.

The right all over Europe picked up on and benefited from popular aspirations often neglected by the left

For this reason, populism is the central issue. It is a double-edged sword. In its European version (but not in its US incarnation) it harks back to the continent’s darkest hours and smacks of a dangerous manipulation of working-class despair. But it can also be read as a signal that must be picked up on and listened to, especially by the left (if one considers that the left without the people is no longer the left). It is therefore important for European social democracy to take a dialectical approach to populism, if only to avoid falling into the trap set by the right. This is the major challenge facing social democracy if it is to survive as a historic tradition, a source of bedrock values and a political alternative within the democratic process.

To take one example, consider how this new wave of European populism is challenging the ‘multicultural compromise’ social democratic parties (and, beyond them, our societies) rely on. The neopopulist movements present themselves, as Ed West from the Telegraph has put it, as “neoliberal islamophobes”, defending postmaterialistic individual rights (those of women and gays) against the Muslim (not just immigrant) habits and rules threatening them. They oppose “traditional inter-faith gay-bashers”, including religious fundamentalists from everywhere, who attack women and gay rights in the name of family and religious values. It means that social democrats

must now take this new landscape very seriously into account, especially if one considers their multiculturalistic ethos: social democrats are now challenged on their comprehensive understanding of what constitutes a ‘minority’ – an inclusive concept of the different kinds of identities in western societies including those of ethno-race, religion, immigrant status, gender and sexuality.

### **Straight to the people**

To tackle populism, social democracy must re-connect with the people. This objective is within its reach. If it is openly and clearly formulated as such and expressed with conviction – not as just one more last-ditch communication strategy on the part of social democratic parties – and if it is regularly improved with as broad a range of discussion and experience as can be managed, it can represent the platform of democratic socialism for years to come. To target the debate at values and avoid being drawn into a polarising approach, the European social democratic left needs to identify a few highly relevant and energising issues.

The next European social democratic economic and social programme must include a totally renewed consideration of ‘equality’ as a prominent value (and not just ‘justice’, for example) and a strong determination to fight against all kinds of ‘unearned or illegitimate income’ in order to create a decent, fair society. The social democrats have to target the political debate at cultural values, which means that they have to tackle the consequences of our social and economic choices both at national and European levels. For example, if we favour immigration for economic reasons, we have to reshuffle our integration policies: no more rights for the newcomers without a strong set of commitments and the recognition of our values. By not doing this, social democrats will let the neopopulist forces claim that they better protect our western values of liberty, toleration and gender equality. In France, Marine Le Pen now says, at every opportunity, that she is the first to defend *la laïcité* and *la République* against the communitarian (i.e. Islamic) threat.

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Beyond the specific programmatic proposals, social democratic parties need to find a new general theme that they can focus on to regain the people. This ‘narrative’ could, for example, take inspiration from the concept of ‘common decency’ (which encompasses the moral standards, social conduct and self-respect of the individual) as formulated by George Orwell in a letter to Humphrey House in 1940: “My chief hope for the future is that the common people have never parted company with their moral code.”

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## An electorate set free: culture, symbolism and social democracy

Mark Elchardus, Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Populism is not motivated by discontent with people's personal lives but by perceptions of problems in society-at-large. Social democrats have failed to appreciate that the weakening of class consciousness has liberated the electorate from adhering to discrete interest groups. The rejuvenation of centre-left politics requires a concomitant shift away from a paradigm of economic self-interest and towards a cultural approach to politics which prescribes educational and labour-market reform to reintegrate the vulnerable and disenchanted back into the social democratic fold

Under the influence of utilitarianism, social democracy (as well as large sections of sociology and political science) has assumed, first, that conditions or the materiality of life translate into political preferences via interests, and secondly, that satisfied, happy voters will support the parties they hold responsible for their satisfaction. Hence the assumption that social democratic parties cannot fail to win support when they provide employment, effective and efficient public services, welfare provisions and economic growth. Hence the surprise when this expectation is not met. The thesis I defend in this discussion note is that both assumptions are wrong, have always been wrong, and that the recent societal changes now clearly reveal their inadequacy.

### Public concern

Democratic politics have been anchored in the lives of the citizens by considering politics as the expression of interests. Individuals experience the conditions under which they live and, based on that experience, form interests which in turn guide their political behaviour or, more specifically, the way in which they vote. The idea that an individual's life experiences generate interests and that these influence voting, fits within a broad family of theories – a paradigm – that links in a direct and straightforward way conditions and the distribution of means – the materiality of life – to ways of thinking, feeling and acting.

One had to wait until the 1980s – when politicians like Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher explicitly and unabashedly appealed to self interest as a political motivation – to see a critical mass of empirical research into the question of whether self interest or economic interest does indeed influence the way people vote. Several researchers came to the conclusion that those factors play no, or only a very small, role. People appear to vote on the basis of their evaluation of a party's impact on society. The conclusions emerging from this research re-emphasise the classical distinction between the private and the public realms. One researcher summarised this by speaking of the "compartmentalisation of personal and national judgment". Such findings are consistent with the observation that satisfaction with personal life and satisfaction with the way society is doing – the evaluation of one's personal situation and the evaluation of the way society is evolving – are quite different things. Support for populist parties is not based on dissatisfaction with personal life or unhappiness, but on dissatisfaction with the state of society and the direction in which it is evolving. Populism does not thrive on dissatisfaction with personal life but on social malaise.

## Enter the cultural approach

These various observations suggest that a shift from an interest paradigm to a more cultural approach to politics and particularly to social democratic politics is needed. A cultural approach – it might be more appropriate to speak of a symbolic approach – is attuned to the role of representations, codes, narratives and ideologies. In short, the structures of symbols that influence a person's perception of his situation and establish a legitimate link between that perception and a way to politically act upon it. What is represented by the outcome of elections is, according to this conception, not only or not even primarily (aggregated) individual interests grounded in the materiality of life, but various social texts and symbolic structures that define the situations and orient the way people react to them.

An important symbolic structure for social democracy has been class consciousness and the more accessible forms of Marxist ideology. The extent to which in the past the class situation was homogeneous and class consciousness widespread, is disputed among historians. Yet, a prominent issue in the literature, especially in Britain, is the alleged decline of class based voting. In most of the Marxist interpretations, the class situation made people aware of their pre-existing and compelling class interests. A process that is ultimately determined by the situation and the interests which are considered to be fundamental and both “real” (anchored in the materiality of the situation), and “imposing” (a legitimate expression of that situation). Against the backdrop of such an interpretation, the decline of class based voting was interpreted as a shift from class interests towards personal interests, induced by changes in the situation caused by, among other things, post-industrialisation, rising affluence and the emergence of mass consumption. Such an interpretation is inconsistent with the observed weak electoral role of personal interests.

From the vantage point of a cultural or symbolic paradigm one would interpret the changes between the class situation and class voting in an entirely different way: not as a shift from class interest to personal interest, but as a change in the symbolic orders that influence the perception of the situation and suggests appropriate ways to react to it. Class consciousness means that individuals view themselves as members of a class – they view their real interests as those common to their class and consider it appropriate to act politically on those interests. Class consciousness transforms personal concerns with wages, access to health care, education for the children and so on, into societal concerns and into elements of an attempt to build a better, more just society. In that way the ideology supporting class consciousness bridges the gap between the private and the public realms. In performing that function, class consciousness has, paradoxically, for a long time hidden the shortcomings of the interest paradigm: it has made it possible and plausible to interpret its own effects, that is the consequences of an ideology and of a specific structure of symbols, as the expressions of interests and material conditions.

Class consciousness, or what remains of it, no longer fulfils that function, and so social democracy's attempts to create employment and provide welfare, public services and economic growth, even under adverse conditions, is no longer perceived as the incremental realisation of a better and just society, but as a (probably untrustworthy) attempt by self-serving politicians at electoral seduction on the basis of private, petty concerns. This confronts social democracy with a new situation: a world that consists, not so much of different interests, but of symbolic structures people can adopt to make sense of their situation, link their interests to the future of society, and conceive of the desired paths to a better society. People do not adopt such structures in a random fashion, but on the basis of what makes sense to them, gives them dignity and is in accord with their interests as they perceive them. Of course, in contemporary society two institutions play an important role in influencing what kind of symbolic structures people come across, register as plausible and meaningful to them and seem to

offer a useful key to the interpretation of one's personal life and the future of society: education and the mass media. Hence the strong relationships that are now observed between levels of education and media preferences on the one hand and electoral behaviour on the other.

### An electorate set free

The decline of class consciousness and with it of a vision of the just society has set the social democratic electorate free. It has created a situation in which their electorate could connect with other symbolic structures and follow the parties that seemed to carry and implement them. The outcome of this is well known. Social democratic parties have tended to conserve that part of their electorate that was not connected to them on the basis of their class position, but rather ethically, connected to their view of a just society. This tends to be the better educated members of the electorate. What used to be called the working class voter and what now should be called the voter with less sought after educational credentials, has tended to leave the social democratic parties in favour of right wing parties, populist parties, anti-immigrant parties and anti-Muslim parties.

As the anti-elite stand, the popular forms of nationalism, and the celebration of "common sense" make clear a number of the so called populist parties are quite correctly labelled populist. Yet, while that label is in many

The decline of class consciousness and with it of a vision of the just society has set the social democratic electorate free

respects quite adequate, it also risks being misleading when it suggests that the various issues the populist parties take up and exploit are a haphazard collection determined solely by the desire to exploit whatever form of malaise comes along: mobilisation of fear, anti-migrant, anti-Europe sentiments and so on. Yet, this might be too optimistic an interpretation. Looking at the different issues that the apparently diverse bunch of parties has exploited, a consistent cluster of positions emerges that closely resembles the positions that from the 18th century onward have been defended by the Counter-Enlightenment. In empirical sociological and political science research the re-emergence of this discourse has been rendered by defining it as a new cleavage or a new political dimension.

From the 1990s onward many researchers have diagnosed the emergence of a so called "new" cleavage, a second left/right dimension distinct from the "old" left/right or socio-economic one, centred on issues of equality, allocation, rejection of the self-regulating market and according a role to the state. The new cleavage addresses other issues. The core attitudes that it appeals to are authoritarianism, intolerance of non-conformity, a preference for punitive criminal justice, for law and order, ethnocentrism and the critique of putatively corrupt parliamentary politics. Qualitative research has shown that people combine these different attitudes into a coherent narrative that shows affinities with social Darwinism and the sociological versions of the idea of the struggle for existence. Central to these ways of thinking is the idea that life is a struggle, oriented by the pursuit of self interest. In applications of this idea, the struggle is often seen as pitting us against them, our own people against foreigners. This struggle should, according to this discourse, not be tempered by (pampering) social security provisions, precisely because it is good (military, economically and/or genetically) that the strongest should win. "We" and "them", locked in conflict, are often defined in terms of a racial, cultural or national identity. The name "new cleavage" does not do justice to the long pedigree of these ideas. We are rather confronted with the re-emergence of a way of thinking and speaking that seems to be a stable part of modern European culture. Precisely this cultural continuity increases the likelihood that such an alignment can stabilise, determine people's view of man and society, and give rise to a stable political cleavage. It is appropriate to call the identified alignment the discourse of conflict. It seems appropriate to view the

so called populist parties not as exploiters of various forms of malaise, but as the political expression of a coherent narrative connected to a long standing European tradition.

A common view among researchers and a comforting view for social democrats is that our better educated supporters take a consistent position on the two above-mentioned dimensions, combining a position in favour of redistribution, the welfare state and social markets with the rejection of the conflict discourse, while our less educated supporters take an inconsistent position combining the pursuit of more equality with the acceptance of social Darwinism and the conflict discourse. However, that position is not logically inconsistent. The stronger the longing for equality among the vulnerable members of society, the more likely they are to opt for right wing positions on the new left/right-cleavage. The position of the people with less educational credentials is not logically inconstant, due to frustrated egalitarianism. The combination of a desire for more equality combined with a weak and threatened socio-economic position, leads to welfare chauvinism, to the view that too many people, particularly the immigrants and the foreigners, profit undeservedly from the welfare state, that the deserving people are abandoned and that the world in fact turns out to be as social Darwinists depict it. The welfare state and social democratic policies are not considered to serve equality; social democratic politicians do not do what they promise to do. Because there is no longer a clear vision of the future and because there is a group of “foreigners” or “strangers” to blame, frustrated and impatient egalitarianism translates into attitudes and values quite incompatible with social democratic positions.

### The Left that left us

That means that social democratic parties are not only confronted with a fissure between a cosmopolitan and a communitarian electorate, between an electorate faithful to Enlightenment values and an electorate tempted by the traditions of the Counter-Enlightenment, but that those parties are also well on their way to losing an important part of their electorate, not only because these people embrace the conflict discourse but also because they become very sceptical with regard to the welfare state and the egalitarian project of the left. Their egalitarianism becomes alienated from the policies – welfare policies – that social democrats implement to pursue more equality.

Both sociological and electoral research shows that a large segment of the former socialist and social democratic electorate now embraces positions and parties that can be described as authoritarian, xenophobic, populist and nationalist. The validity of that observation can no longer be doubted. More difficult and inevitably more speculative and controversial are the answers to the question “why?”. Why does part of the social democratic electorate opt for values and positions at odds with those of the left?

Part of the answer might lie in a cultural affinity. Strong elements of utilitarianism and the conflict discourse were present in Marxist ideology and it is conceivable that this made other forms of conflict

People embrace the conflict discourse but also... become very sceptical with regard to the welfare state and the egalitarian project of the left

discourse attractive to the working class electorate. This could help to explain why, for in instance in France and Flanders, such large segments of the socialist and communist electorate shifted to extreme right wing parties that aggressively emphasized their willingness to use force and disregard humanitarian values in solving the problems of migrants and crime. There is, however, quite some evidence showing systematic relationships between the social position of people and the extent to which they are attracted to the cluster of positions and attitudes that underpin the success of populist, anti-immigrant and right wing parties. A key element appears to be vulnerability.

It is often forgotten that contemporary society is characterised by two structural sources of increased vulnerability. The ageing of the population increases the proportion of vulnerable people; people with increased demands for security, stability and familiarity in their respective environments. The shift towards a more knowledge based economy increases the vulnerability of the people with elementary skills, a group that slinks as a consequence of educational expansion but that more and more takes on the characteristics of a very vulnerable minority.

The need to deal with that vulnerability creates a fertile ground for the construction of threats. Vulnerable people are likely to believe that they are threatened, eager to listen to stories describing the threat. They in fact create a market for threats: for stories about crime, about the heavy involvement of immigrants in crime; about immigrants “taking our jobs”, profiteering from and undermining the welfare state; about globalisation threatening jobs and increasing economic competition, forcing people to work harder for a longer time and for less; neighbourhoods transformed beyond recognition, waking up as a stranger in one’s own country; politics becoming powerless, politicians gesturing to no avail, promising things they can not deliver. None of these threats is wholly imaginary; almost all of them are overblown. But, once formed and in circulation, both through face to face contacts and through the mass media, the narratives about those threats convince much more people than just the vulnerable.

Qualitative research also shows that these different worries and threats are also expressed in a vision of social decline, based on a nostalgic view of the past. The idealised past that is being lost is often situated in the 1950s and characterised by full employment, a peaceful homogeneous society (“one did not have to lock one’s door”), a strong welfare state, assured pensions, an economy respectful of human values etcetera. In fact, it is the kind of society that social democrats keep promising but, in the eyes of many people, do nothing to defend. On the contrary, social democrats are perceived as soft on crime, as promoters of immigration, as privileging immigrants against their “own people”, as positively disposed towards all forms of globalisation, as pro-Europe and uncaring about issues of sovereignty. These criticisms are, of course, not wholly justified, but sufficient enough to be believable, and it is quite obvious that even people who believe only half of it will not vote for social democrats and will be attracted to views of the world in which there is legitimate room for dealing with the problems of crime, immigration, loss of sovereignty and increased economic competitiveness in a way deemed decisive.

### **What to do?**

Social democracy, so much is obvious, has failed to develop a coherent narrative and policies consistent with such a narrative, that address the worries of its electorate in a way that offers both an attractive vision of the future of society and dignity to personal lives. Worse, it has often denied the problems, sometimes in a quite insulting way. Anti-immigrant attitudes were interpreted as irrational expressions of xenophobia, not as reactions to genuinely experienced problems that eventually led to ethnocentrism.

It is clear social democratic parties should address the worries and criticisms in a more adequate and effective way. Recognising the role of culture, and of the structures of symbols, is an important element of such an adequate response. The response should also be consistent with social democratic values (largely Enlightenment values); be geared towards making a more diverse society work, which entails the effective integration of the immigrants and their descendents; be geared also towards the forging

of a coalition between the so called cosmopolitan and communitarian segments of the electorate, in fact towards forging a grand coalition of what remains of leftist forces in Europe; and be based on the recognition of the structuring force of culture, in fact addressing a wider range of cultural issues than those dealt with in this discussion note.

The response should obviously take the form of a convincing and coherent narrative, addressing the worries of the people and using policy proposals as a way to illustrate and implement that narrative. In order to make this somewhat more concrete I will use the example of immigration and integration, which of all the problems mentioned in this discussion paper appears to be the most pressing, the one most destructive of support for social democratic parties and policies.

A category of people is integrated when it does not deviate significantly and problematically in terms of educational achievement, employment situation, poverty rate, incarceration rate, health indicators, life expectancy and suicide rate. People with elementary skills, low levels of education, immigrants and their descendents, are not well integrated in most European societies. This should be a high priority concern for social democrats.

Contemporary societies have two strong mechanisms of integration: education and the labour market. In many European societies these mechanisms have to varying degrees failed the immigrants and their children and grandchildren. Identifying the causes of that failure and implementing the necessary reforms, compatible with social democratic values and principles, should receive high priority. This is likely to imply far reaching measures, at least in some countries (such as reducing the free choice of schools and the inequality between schools, increasing the guidance of parents, reducing the protection of the well established on the labour market, and reforming the labour markets in a way that offers better chances for people with elementary skills and newcomers). It is quite likely that such policies will only be acceptable when accompanied by provisions that clearly and convincingly link rights and responsibilities. Where this is not yet the case, access to social welfare provisions and child support should be made conditional; the quality of neighbourhood life should become a prime concern of policy and policing.

Contemporary societies have two strong mechanisms of integration: education and the labour market

At the same time social democrats should step up their fight against discrimination and actively resist all attempts to create religious intolerance and promote Islamophobia, but

they should also come out in favour of monitoring and combating the diffusion of hate by Islamist groups. Such policies, inevitably based on delicate balancing, are unlikely to be successful when immigration pressure (by way of asylum or family reunion) remains strong. Countries in which those pressures are high should reduce them, among other ways, by significantly restricting the possibilities of family reunion.

The attempt to create a balanced package of policies and discursively formulate them in a convincing narrative can only succeed when this is done aggressively and presented as a major innovation, as an element of a new and bold vision of the future of society.

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## Progressives should embrace diversity

Philippe Legrain, author and commentator

Pandering to populist sentiments is a dangerous game. Principle, pragmatism and economic logic all point in the direction of robust support for immigration and diversity. The progressive left must build a positive narrative around diversity congruent with social democratic values and in tune with the reality of modern communities and identities

Progressives are running scared of a media-fuelled public backlash against immigration and diversity that is sweeping across Europe. People born abroad and those with foreign-sounding names or different-looking faces – all of whom are often lumped together as “immigrants” in both public and political debate – are blamed for all manner of ills: stealing “our” jobs, scrounging off the welfare state, occupying scarce social housing, committing crime and even terrorism, changing “our way of life”, failing to fit in.

Cultural issues – race, religion, identity, fear of foreigners and fear of change – cannot easily be separated from social and economic ones. The two are linked: the recession has exacerbated fears that Europe is in decline and threatened by outsiders, be they Chinese workers, Polish plumbers or Islamic immigrants. A comparison with the US debate underscores this: many of the fears projected on to Muslim immigrants in Europe mirror those projected on to Latino ones in America, even though they are very different culturally.

Faced with the tricky task of unpacking the many underlying reasons for this backlash, carefully picking apart myth from fact, and crafting a coherent political narrative and policy response, progressive politicians often prefer to avoid the subject or, worse, to pander to – and thus legitimise – anti-immigrant and racist views.

That is a big mistake. Principle, pragmatism and economic logic all argue in favour of robust support for immigration and diversity. This needs to be combined with bold policies to help make the most of the talents of everyone in society and considered ones to tackle the issues that lie behind many anti-immigrant views. And it all needs to be wrapped together in a political narrative that is relevant to diverse 21st century European societies.

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### Solidarity and diversity

Start with principle. Concern for the less fortunate is a core progressive value, as is a belief that all human beings are equal and deserve a fair chance in life. Within society, those who are poor, denied opportunities, discriminated against, marginalised or abused surely need help – whatever their background may be. More broadly, while it is true that we all care more for those closer to us than for others, and that politics remains primarily based around nation states, this doesn't imply that we shouldn't – or don't – care at all for everyone else. The EU redistributes from richer regions to poorer ones, international aid is small but not zero, global campaigns rally support on everything

from global poverty to climate change. Surely such international solidarity extends to migrants too – or do we only care about poor people provided they remain at a safe distance from us?

Cherishing diversity is another core progressive value. We are all different and equal. Many of those differences are innate: age, gender, race, sexuality – not to mention where you were born and who your parents are. Others are developed and expressed to varying extents within a social and legal framework: how you define yourself, how you dress and behave, what religion (or none) you practice, what languages (and how) you speak, what political and moral values you hold, what groups you belong to, what your job is, whether you marry and have children, where you live, and so on.

Modern European societies are wonderfully diverse, only partly due to immigration. People are also freer to express their differences since the liberating 1960s. And in our globalising world of easyJet, Erasmus and European integration, Facebook, foreign holidays, fusion food and global campaigns, people have an increasingly wide range of international connections. The notion that there is a single way of being British or German and that this wholly defines who you are is now more absurd than ever, whether your parents were born in Birmingham, Berlin or Bangladesh. As Amartya Sen has pointed out, we all increasingly have multiple and overlapping identities – a British citizen may also consider himself a Christian, of Irish origin, a European, a Londoner, a doctor, an Arsenal fan, a Beatles lover, a father, a husband, a Labour voter, a supporter of gay rights, an environmentalist and above all an individual. And if European societies are now broad enough to find a place for both nuns and transsexuals, Marxists and libertarians, radical environmentalists and billionaire bankers, surely they can embrace immigrants too?

Conservatives often hark back to a Golden Era in the mists of time, or more recently the 1950s, when each European nation was supposedly united, uniformly white and everybody knew their place. That is a myth, of course: 55 years ago, Britain, for instance, was a country riven by class, where women were second-class citizens and gays imprisoned. But whether traditionalists like it or not, modern European societies are inescapably diverse, so any definition of shared identity that fails to recognise this inevitably excludes some members of society and thus divides it. Progressives have mostly been on the correct side of the cultural change that began in the 1960s. Conservatives have been forced, kicking and screaming, to adapt. Why on earth would progressives now want to become reactionary?

Vainly trying to turn the clock back is deeply reactionary and can lead to discrimination, exclusion and xenophobia

PolicyNetworkdirectorOlafCrammehelpfully distinguishes between “cosmopolitan” and “communitarian” responses to these issues. I would frame this slightly differently. The choice is between those who favour open societies that are dynamic and progressive and those who want to try to go back to closed societies that are stagnant and reactionary. Open societies are open to everyone in society, whatever their background may be – including those born abroad. They are based around overlapping communities that welcome newcomers who want to belong. These communities – which include family, friends, colleagues and networks of people with shared interests, activities and values – cut across the traditional communities of place, class or ethnicity. These largely chosen communities are no less real and important than the often coerced ones they coexist with or replace. While there is of course nothing wrong with spending one’s life in a single place surrounded by familiar people, doing the same job for life that your parent did, is increasingly rare in modern Europe. Vainly trying to turn the clock back is deeply reactionary and can lead to discrimination, exclusion and xenophobia. Step back from the waffle that tends to surround

communitarian thinking and think about your own life: are your friends, colleagues and associates mainly people you grew up next to or those you have encountered throughout your life? Do they all look like you? Are the ties that bind you any less real or meaningful?

### Diversity versus solidarity?

Yet some critics claim that greater diversity undermines solidarity and that progressives therefore ought to limit diversity in order to preserve social cohesion and support for the welfare state. Critics often reason that since ethnically homogeneous Sweden developed a cradle-to-grave welfare state, while the more heterogeneous United States has only a threadbare social safety net, an increase in diversity in Sweden will cause its welfare state to shrivel to be like America's. They support their argument with research by the American political scientist Robert Putnam which suggests that in the US increased diversity correlates with diminished feelings of trust within a community.<sup>1</sup> (Putnam himself, however, does not share the critics' antipathy towards diversity.)

It is true that immigration could conceivably pose a political challenge to the welfare state. For instance, white Swedes might be less willing to pay for social insurance for

black Swedes – or white Poles. But the issue is not whether immigration could pose a problem, but whether it does, or is likely to. In truth, there is no obvious correlation between ethnic homogeneity and the size of the welfare state: America is diverse and has a threadbare welfare state, while Belgium is split between Flemish and French speakers, but has a developed one; Sweden was ethnically homogeneous with a big welfare state, while South Korea and Japan are still ethnically homogeneous, but do not have European-style welfare states. Support for the welfare state is much higher in diverse cities such as London and New York than in more homogeneous Surrey or Wyoming. And even though one in eight of Sweden's population is now foreign-born, the same proportion as in the US, the Swedish welfare state has hardly collapsed.

Putnam's findings about America have not been replicated in Europe. A comprehensive study of 21 countries concludes: "Despite several such findings for US society, in Europe it was not confirmed that rising ethnic diversity or even the rate of influx of foreign citizens had any significant detrimental effects on social cohesion."<sup>2</sup> Another study finds that "there is no relationship between the proportion of the population born outside the country and growth in social spending over the last three decades of the 20th century, controlling for other factors associated with social spending. There was simply no evidence that countries with large foreign-born populations had more trouble sustaining and developing their social programs over these three decades than countries with small immigrant communities."<sup>3</sup>

In short, there is no evidence that diversity is undermining social cohesion and European welfare states.<sup>4</sup> Progressives do not need to choose between diversity and solidarity. That should not be surprising: the notion that strong communities need to be ethnically homogenous is incorrect. And if ever immigration did undermine public support for the welfare state, reforms could shore it up. If new arrivals are seen as a drain on the public purse, they can be denied social benefits initially. If some people – wherever they were born – are perceived as lazy or undeserving of assistance, welfare rules can be tightened up. Welfare systems can also be reformed to increase incentives to work and tie some benefits more closely to previous contributions.

### Pragmatism as well as principle

There is no evidence that diversity is undermining social cohesion and European welfare states

<sup>1</sup> Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Simon & Schuster, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Marc Hooge, Tim Reeskens, Dietlind Stolle, and Ann Trappers, *Ethnic Diversity, Trust and Ethnocentrism and Europe: A Multilevel Analysis of 21 European Countries*, paper presented at the 102nd Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia, 31 August-3 September 2006

<sup>3</sup> The research paper is Stuart Soroka, Keith Banting and Richard Johnston, "Immigration and Redistribution in the Global Era", in Pranab Bardham, Samuel Bowles and Michael Wallerstein, eds, *Globalization and Social Redistribution*, Princeton University Press and Twentieth Century Fund, in press. The quote is from Keith G. Banting, *Canada as Counter-Narrative: Multiculturalism, Recognition and Redistribution*, paper Presented to the Panel on Canada's Contribution to Understanding Rights and Diversity, Canadian Political Science Association, University of Western Ontario, 2 June 2005.

<sup>4</sup> I discuss this at greater length in "Is free migration compatible with a European-style welfare state?", Expert report no.11 to the Government of Sweden's Globalisation Council, 2008.

Progressives know in their hearts that support for outsiders is right: if progressives won't speak up for the marginalised, who will? And progressives should not be afraid to embrace change: after all, by definition, a belief that we can and ought to build a better society entails change. Set against that are pragmatic arguments that seem to argue for a different approach: that many traditional voters for progressive parties – in particular members of the white working classes – in fact dislike immigrants and fear change. The rise of populist, far-right, anti-immigrant parties that draw some of their support from former progressive voters seems to reinforce this line of argument.

For sure, progressives need to respond to the concerns of disaffected voters. Yet appropriating the arguments and even the language of the far right is morally wrong – far-right sentiments scarcely become respectable just because they are expressed by mainstream politicians – and electorally counterproductive. Short of becoming “national socialists”, progressive parties can scarcely become more hard-line about immigration issues than conservative, nationalist ones. Nor can progressive parties ignore that voters of immigrant descent and those from the liberal-left middle classes, both of whom make up a growing share of progressive voters, tend to be much more positive about immigration, and are turned off by anti-immigrant messages. For every vote that Gordon Brown gained by disgracefully echoing the old National Front slogan of “British jobs for British workers”, he lost several more to the Liberal Democrats and Greens.

Successful political parties must balance principle – what their members believe to be right – with pragmatism: what will appeal to voters. They must adapt to changing circumstances without being wholly reactive – otherwise, they become empty vessels. In office and in opposition, they need to persuade as well as listen. The art is judging when to adapt to public attitudes, and when to seek to change them.

In the 1950s and 1960s, racism was far more prevalent in Europe than it is today. Progressive parties could have taken this racism as given, or tried to change racist attitudes and practices – as they have, successfully. Those who argue that we should take anti-immigrant views as given – “Voters are always right. Even when they are wrong, they are right,” as John McTernan put it at a recent Policy Network seminar – are unduly fatalistic. Younger generations who have grown up in diverse communities tend to find diversity normal and desirable; attitudes towards immigrants among people of all ages tend to improve through personal contact; and focus groups show that reasoned discussion and presenting people with the facts about immigration tend to make people much more positive towards it.

Progressive politicians need to challenge the myths that immigrants are responsible for the lack of jobs or housing, that they strain public services, and that they are workshy, criminals or even terrorists.<sup>5</sup> To give but one example, contrary to the perception that Muslim immigrants are a particular threat, the EU's Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2010 states that of the 294 failed, foiled, or successfully executed attacks in Europe in 2009, Islamists were responsible for only one.

Positive, well-grounded messages need to be accompanied by policies to address points of tension. Build more social housing; this could be funded by a tax on land values. Invest more to create jobs and growth, and reform labour markets so that they facilitate economic change and do not exclude outsiders. Make public services more responsive to people's changing needs. Tackle terrorism through measures such as surveillance and intelligence that are effective and proportionate. And so on.

5 . For evidence, see my book, *Immigrants: Your Country Needs Them*, and articles on my website, [www.philippelegrain.com](http://www.philippelegrain.com).

## Economic logic

Pragmatism as well as principle argues in favour of a positive approach to immigration and diversity issues. So too does economic logic – and people tend to be more accepting of cultural change if they believe it will make them better off. While Silvio Berlusconi has vocally expressed his hostility to a “multi-ethnic” Italy and launched sweeping crackdowns against immigrants, he made an exception for those (often in the country illegally) who care for elderly Italians.

Like Italy, other European societies are ageing rapidly. Over the next decade Western Europe’s working-age population will shrink by around 0.3% a year, with some countries, notably Germany, more affected than others. At a time of high unemployment, an impending fall in the labour supply might not seem much of a problem. But if we do nothing, an ageing population and shrinking workforce will lead to permanently slower economic growth, and hence less ability to pay for the pensions, healthcare and social care needs of the growing ranks of elderly people, less ability to pay for the welfare state in general, and less ability to service the huge mountains of public debt. If we do nothing, Europe is threatened with Japanese-style stagnation and decline.

Immigration is part of the solution. As well as getting more people of working age into work, encouraging people to retire later and finding ways to boost investment and productivity growth, Europe needs to attract more migrant workers – to improve the dependency ratio, help provide social services, and boost economic growth.

While immigration alone cannot offset the impact of population ageing, it can help societies adjust and more specifically it can help pay for the big bulge of baby boomers who are set to retire over the next 20 years and are leaving smaller younger generations with huge debts and other obligations. Young newcomers who were educated abroad are generally net contributors to public finances, and by widening the tax base, they reduce the debt burden on existing taxpayers.

Migrants also disproportionately work to provide health, social care and other public services, jobs which not enough Europeans are willing to do. Such jobs are going to multiply in coming decades. According to the United Nations, the share of Europe’s population aged over 60 is set to rise from 21% in 2006 to 34% in 2050, while the population aged over 80 – those most likely to need care – will rocket from 3.8% to 9.5%. Already over the past decade, the fastest job growth in Europe was not in high tech but in care for the elderly. Those who say that such jobs could be done by Europeans rather than migrants if higher wages were on offer are ignoring the huge costs that this would impose, not just the extra burden on public finances but also the cost of diverting Europeans away from more productive tasks. Migration could also boost growth by making Europe’s economies more flexible, as recent experience with (mostly temporary) migration from the new EU member states to the EU-15 shows. Across the eurozone, greater labour mobility is a particularly important form of adjustment.

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All this is well-known and generally accepted by European policymakers. What is sorely lacking is a recognition of how the greater diversity and dynamism that migration brings can boost innovation and enterprise, and hence productivity growth. Newcomers’ different perspectives and experiences and burning drive to succeed can help stimulate the new ideas and businesses on which our future prosperity depends. But to make the most of the benefits of diversity requires a set of economic,

social and cultural policies that progressives should champion, as I shall explain below.

Some of the dynamic gains from diversity result from migrants' individual characteristics. Migrants are a self-selected minority who tend to be young, hard-working and enterprising. Like starting a new business, migrating is a risky enterprise, and hard work is needed to make it pay off. And for people who start off with few contacts in mainstream society, entrepreneurship is a natural way to get ahead. Studies show that newcomers are more entrepreneurial than most: in the case of Britain, they are twice as likely to start a new business as people born in the UK.

History and global experience shows that the exceptional individuals who come up with brilliant new ideas often happen to be migrants. Instead of following the conventional wisdom, they tend to see things differently, and as outsiders they are more determined to succeed. Some 70 of America's 300 Nobel laureates since 1901 were born abroad; 25 of Britain's 117 Nobel-prize winners are foreign-born, most recently the two Russian-born scientists at the University of Manchester who won the physics prize last year and Chris Pissarides of the London School of Economics, who was born in Cyprus and shared the economics prize.

Newcomers' contribution is potentially vast – yet inherently unpredictable. Nobody could have guessed, when he arrived in the US as a child refugee from the Soviet Union, that Sergey Brin would go on to co-found Google. Had he been denied entry, America would never have realised the opportunity that had been missed. How many potential Brins does Europe turn away or scare off – and at what cost?

The biggest dynamic gains from diversity come from the collective efforts of newcomers and natives (people born in the country in which they live) working together. Most innovation now comes from groups of talented people sparking off each other – and foreigners with different ideas, perspectives and experiences add something extra to the mix. If there are 10 people in a room trying to come up with the solution to a problem and they all think alike, then no matter how talented they are, their 10 heads are no better than one. But if they all think differently, then by bouncing ideas off each other, they can come up with solutions to problems faster and better, as a growing volume of research shows.<sup>6</sup> This is true of adding women to an all-male board, politicians educated in a state school to a cabinet full of privately educated ministers, and people born around the world to a team of people born locally.

It is striking that more than half of the start-ups in Silicon Valley over the past decade have a migrant as a chief executive or lead technologist; Google, Yahoo!, eBay, and YouTube were all co-founded by people who arrived in the US as children; and foreign-born inventors contributed a quarter of global patent applications from the US. If we want to realise the aims of the Lisbon Agenda and now the Europe 2020 programme and create Silicon Valley-style entrepreneurial dynamism here in Europe, we need to be open to the rest of the world.

The value of diversity applies not only in high-tech but also to every business and organisation that needs to solve problems and innovate. It could be the cabinet trying to come up with innovative and vote-winning new policies or a parliamentary committee that is trying to find ways to improve a piece of legislation. It could be a local council that has to find more effective ways to implement policy objectives, or an NGO that is trying to find better ways to put its message across. It could be a community organisation that is trying to find better ways to deliver its services, a small business that is trying to think up better ways of marketing its products, or a larger one that is trying to become greener.

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Scott Page, *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies* (Princeton 2007) and Steven Johnson, *Where Good Ideas Come From* (Penguin 2010).

Diverse societies not only tend to create more new ideas, they also tend to be more receptive to them. Exposure to different cultures tends to broaden people's horizons and make them more accustomed to difference. That makes them more open to change. Psychological research shows that this is especially true of people from a mixed cultural background and those who speak two or more languages. And because diverse societies have a wider variety of skills at their disposal, they can adapt more readily to change.

Diversity can also be a big advantage in international trade. Migrants can provide contacts and insight into foreign markets around the world. They speak the language and understand the culture of the people you want to do business with. They can open up new markets, and generate new trading links and investment opportunities. Just look at the trading networks that have long existed among ethnic Chinese across Asia.

Diversity can also act as a magnet for talent. As Richard Florida documents in *The Rise of the Creative Class*, "Regional economic growth is powered by creative people, who prefer places that are diverse, tolerant and open to new ideas".

Last but not least, a diverse society offers a much wider variety of cultural experiences – a wider choice of ethnic restaurants and innovations such as yoga, salsa classes and R&B music. This added variety isn't captured in GDP statistics – which lump all spending together, whether it was spent on one Hollywood blockbuster or on a diverse range of films – but think how much richer it makes our lives. Thus diversity offers huge benefits – increased creativity and innovation, added adaptability, more enterprise, increased trade, a magnet for talent, and greater variety – all of which make us richer and helps pay for schools, hospitals and other things we cherish.

### **Making the most of diversity**

The big question is: how do we make the most of the huge potential of diverse societies? This is an economic, a social and a cultural challenge. Think back to those 10 people in a room trying to come up with the solution to a problem. If they all think differently, they may not only be more creative, they are also like to disagree more. They may fail to understand each other, or talk at cross purposes. They may end up arguing, or even come to blows. Clearly, without the right framework, diversity can generate more heat than light.

Learning to live together can be tough. Throughout history European societies have wrestled with the issue of how diverse individuals and groups can live together

freely, peacefully and productively and find a place for themselves in society. The best solution that we have come up with is modern, liberal democracies where – however imperfectly – differences are tolerated within the framework of the rule of law that applies equally to all and robust democratic institutions help settle issues through political negotiation.

How far, though, can liberal societies tolerate illiberal people? This is another age-old question now posed as if it arises only because of immigration: what if immigrants don't subscribe to "European" values? In fact, of course, liberal values are not uniquely European. They are shared by many non-Europeans and rejected by some Europeans – right-wing extremists and Islamist ones. The important distinction is between illiberal views and illiberal behaviour. While people cannot be forced to believe

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in liberal values, they can be required to abide by the law: even those who believe that women are not equal to men must treat them as such.

The flipside of insisting that everyone must abide by the rules, wherever they were born, is that everyone who does so must be allowed to be different and still feel that they belong. Yet people often insist that immigrants need to “integrate” – one of those dangerously woolly words that mean different things to different people. For some, it is code for assimilation: “immigrants must become like us”; for others, it means “immigrants must have access to jobs”; for still others, it means “communities should have things in common”. Very often, I suspect, people who use the word “integration” don’t actually have a clear idea of what they mean by it.

So when someone says “immigrants should integrate”, my first response is “integrate into what?” In a British context, should newcomers model themselves on Katie Price or Nasser Hussein, Melanie Phillips or Boy George, Tony Benn or Margaret Thatcher? The notion of integration plays into a false notion of “Them” and “Us”; each European society is not a monolithic whole, and neither are immigrants. If integration means anything, it is a surely a two-way process: how each of us, every day, interacts with and adapts to others, at home, in the street, at school, at work, as citizens accepting the rule of law and activists mobilising to change particular laws, as voters supporting different political parties and citizens accepting the rule of a majority government that respects minority rights. It is about participating fully in society – which is only possible if society will accept you as a member.

Ensuring everyone can participate fully in society is partly about economics: people need access to jobs and public services. And it is also about culture: helping newcomers to become fluent in the local language, without neglecting the other languages they may speak; promoting awareness of the potential for conflict and misunderstanding; educating everyone – not just immigrants – about the law, public services and the political system. But trying to impose “integration” through arbitrary tests of “Britishness” or “Dutchness” that many locals would fail is absurd and discriminatory.

To reap the full benefits of diversity, different people need to be encouraged to mix at school, at work, in the street, and socially. This applies as much to rich white people in Chelsea as it does to poor immigrant communities. People have to communicate and be open to new ways of doing things. That means doing more than just pay lip service to the benefits of diversity and truly valuing it. So rather than trying to impose a stifling and contrived uniformity on the huge variety of people in modern European societies, why not make a virtue of their diversity? In Canada, diversity is seen as a vital part of what makes people proud to be Canadian. Its minister of citizenship says: “There are no degrees of ‘belonging’ or classes of ‘membership’. You don’t get bonus points if your ancestors arrived 200 years ago, and you harvest maple syrup, and play hockey on weekends... The very notion of ‘Being Canadian’ is constantly transforming itself thanks to newcomers’ unique skills, work ethic, and the heritage traditions they add to what we call our ‘multicultural mosaic.’” Londoners too treasure the city’s diversity as a key part of its identity. European countries manage to celebrate diversity in national football teams – is it such a stretch to apply this more widely?

At a more practical level, businesses and organisations need to try to attract diverse employees. Society needs to make newcomers feel welcome. Governments need to help everyone to fulfil their potential: invest in education and training, remove the barriers to employment and enterprise, bolster efforts to combat discrimination and promote equality of opportunity, and encourage social mobility more generally. They need to enact labour-market reforms that better combine security, adaptability, employability and opportunity and adopt welfare reforms that provide protection while

minimising disincentives to work. Last but not least, government, businesses and organisations all need to be geared towards promoting innovation and enterprise, and invest in new ideas.

All of this can be summed up by what I call the 7 Cs:

1. Connect people together
2. Channel their collective efforts constructively
3. Communicate clearly
4. Create cultural awareness
5. Cherish diversity
6. Champion opportunity
7. Cultivate innovation, enterprise and change

These are big reforms that have a cultural dimension as well as social and economic ones. They seek to change attitudes as well as practices. And they go beyond the bare minimum required for coexistence within society. They differ from traditional “multicultural” policies in that they treat everyone equally: they are not about special favours for some, or putting people in a box, they are about making sure everyone can participate fully in society. And they also differ from “integration” policies that require more of immigrants than of other members of society.

Progressives should champion this positive approach to diversity. It is true to our values, in tune with the reality of modern European communities and identities, and a vehicle for economic progress for all. Different and equal, our diversity can be a source of strength, not of weakness, a reason to belong not an excuse to exclude. We should embrace it rather than seek to deny it.

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## The Three I's: Immigration, Integration and Islam

Trevor Phillips, UK Equality and Human Rights Commission

The social democratic left's inability to develop a persuasive account of the role of identity in modern politics or engage its power as a means of understanding a changing world represents a significant intellectual failure. To be successful at combating the rise of populism, social democrats must develop an immigration and integration policy that focuses on equality for all, emphasising the common ground between different ethnic and religious groups and finding fundamental principles that can govern our interactions at community, society and national level – a new agenda for living together

The major challenges of the 21st century can be broken down into two big questions: how can we live sustainably on the planet and how can we live with each other? The business of the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission is the latter – how do we find ways of living together graciously? This is something we know to be difficult at the best of times, but which is even harder in a time of rapid change and resource constraints.

### Peculiar problems?

To start with it is necessary to outline a few truths, inconvenient or otherwise. The first truth is that this is neither a peculiarly modern nor a particularly European problem. We have been facing these issues, in their various guises, since history began. In the UK, over the course of our history we have attracted individuals from most corners of the globe bringing with them a rich diversity of influences: from Eastern European, Irish and Jewish to Somali, Senegalese, and Spanish.

Neither is this a phenomenon that's confined the West. One of the underlying themes of the book *Anna Karenina*, written in the 1870s, was her husband Karenina's preoccupation with what policy to recommend for Russia's minorities. Stalin, too, wrote extensively on this issue, and once he took up his position as Commissar of Nationalities he had responsibility for the nearly half of the country's population that fell into the category of 'non-Russian'.

More recently, a few years back, my Chinese counterpart came to visit me at the Commission for Racial Equality and asked for my advice on what to do about the 123 million minority individuals in China: including the 11 million Turkic-speaking Muslim Uighur minority with whom ethnic tensions have simmered for years. I dodged the question. It seemed sensible to suggest that the scale of his problems might make the experience we had here look pretty trivial.

Without immigration and with an increasingly ageing, deskilled and shrinking population, it is impossible to imagine us competing in a 21st century globalised world

The second truth is that Europe needs immigration. Our population stands at approximately 490 million, but the number of people living in the EU is set to decline over the coming decades. By 2050 a third of the population will be over 65 years of age. The need for extra workers in many states, including the UK, is already apparent. This demand will grow as the European workforce declines

from well over 200 million to fewer than 180 million by 2050. Without immigration and with an increasingly ageing, deskilled and shrinking population, it is impossible to imagine us competing in a 21st century globalised world. At the macro level the economies of Europe need access to global talent if we are to remain competitive. More personally, who would staff our hospitals, trains and shops if we closed the gates?

The third truth is that the fiscal negatives of immigration are often exaggerated; indeed, they are dwarfed by the benefits of growth, which may be as high as 2% a year according to the UK Treasury. That immigration is now an economic issue was recognised by the shift to a points system – a system which no longer asks the racial question that my parents faced when they came to London, “*where do you come from?*”; but asks instead, *what are you bringing* by way of skills, capital and contribution to our economy? I think that’s progress, but the consequences cannot be managed by a points system alone.

So for me, the question is not *whether* we have immigration, but *how* we manage its consequences; in particular, its social and cultural impacts.

### Today’s challenges

None of this is meant to deny the importance of these risks in the current context. The pace, scale and scope of change today has made some people nervous. There are now 200 million people around the world who live and work outside their country of birth. Nationally, public concern at the scale of immigration into Britain was evident in our last election. Between 1997 and 2009 net immigration totalled more than 2.2 million people. This is not insignificant, and it is well established that rapid change coupled with reduced resources – from water to healthcare, school places to overall austerity – tends to see communities experiencing greater friction. In some cases, this can lead to a fundamental return of what is essentially tribalism: the age-old ‘us’ and ‘them’ of identity politics.

Of course, this discussion isn’t only about numbers; it’s also about culture and identity. Back in 1978, Margaret Thatcher spoke of some British people’s fears that they might be swamped by people of a different culture; and we have to accept that, in many towns and cities, not just in Britain but across Europe, this fear remains prevalent today. Justified or not, it would be wrong not to recognise that the scale of unplanned inward migration has been unsettling for many communities; people are worried about the perceived cultural and social impacts of people entering the continent and politicians need, at the very least, to articulate these anxieties without automatically labelling those who have them as racists and xenophobes. Why? Because failure to address them allows far-right parties to step in. We can see that, across Europe, such parties are increasingly flourishing, and in some countries now make up part of coalition governments. At the same time, an increasing number of European countries have banned or are proposing to ban face veils in public places.

There is also a cultural effect of immigration. Most scholars would argue that modern states – particularly those in Europe – were built on notions of shared identity and values, constructed or otherwise. Immigration is seen as a threat to these established identities and values because immigrants bring with them seemingly different values and ways of life. Muslim culture has been seen as being particularly difficult to reconcile with existing identities.

## Why Islam?

As already noted, in the past few decades the continent has seen rapid demographic, social and cultural change. In the UK, Muslims are a central part of that shift – they make up about 4% of the population. As this process has taken place, Muslims have emerged at the heart of countless critical conversations: on security and cohesion, participation and integration. In my view, Islam does present a particular kind of challenge. This is firstly because, unlike other Abrahamic religions, which tend not to mix the state with religion, many followers of Islam would probably say that the dictates of the Koran should come before the rule of man-made law and, unlike those of other faiths who say the same, they really mean it. Secondly, it is because it is apparent that aspects of globalisation, by which I mean, instant communication and the internet, have made the possibility of the Umma much more concrete. Global events, from Lebanon to Palestine, are beamed directly into our living rooms and this new found access to information is matched in equal measure by the fluidity and ease with which people can now jump on a plane and make their way to radical training camps in Pakistan or Somalia. The outcome is that some of those radicalised by images of perceived injustices are able to attempt swift retributive action.

## The real issue?

Taking a step back from the pros and cons of a globalised world brings me onto what I think of as the real issue. Clearly, we need to weigh the balance between economic benefits and social and cultural implications of immigration. Key questions are: how do we mitigate the pressure on schools, health services and, above all, housing? And how do we do so at a time when most of us are facing budget constraints? We need to support areas that are changing rapidly; we need to help migrants to learn the language and the rules of the communities they are joining. We need to prevent discrimination, but we also need to tackle illegal immigration and trafficking.

Even more fundamentally, how do we maintain a strong sense of ‘British’ or any other European identity when so much around us is shifting? And how do we negotiate the everyday frictions between different world views? Especially if, as I suggested above, we may now be entering a period in which these frictions become more common and more abrasive, we will need to find a new way of managing these tensions: what might be called an agenda for living together.

The left has spent much of the past two decades hiding from the truth, failing to develop a persuasive account of the role of identity in modern politics

All this presents some serious challenges for the social democratic left in Europe. But they are part of a wider pattern of intellectual failure on the left, of which the matters we are discussing are only one aspect. I want to highlight some these themes before returning to my more general conclusion.

First, there has been a failure of theory. We have been scandalously poor at understanding the kind of work done by economists like George Akerlof which applies psychology and culture to understand the apparently irrational choices made by disadvantaged groups (for example, why it is that despite the evident advantage of having a university degree African American community norms specifically discount the extra earning potential associated with a college education; I imagine we could show similar self-defeating behaviour herein Europe). It is manifest that, as several writers point out, the social democratic left has spent much of the past two decades hiding from the truth,

failing to develop a persuasive account of the role of identity in modern politics. Our conservatism has therefore led us to undervalue the role of identity in inequality. We under value autonomy and choice – we haven't developed an effective political response to the work on capabilities pioneered by Amartya Sen, for example.

What do I mean by autonomy and choice as separate from class? Here's an example: if you happen to be a billionaire wheelchair user who wants to go to a particular restaurant, it doesn't matter if you could buy it ten times over. If there's no ramp or no one can be bothered to find it, it doesn't matter how rich you are – the thing that determines your life-chances at that moment is your disability and, at that moment, you're just a bloke in a chair, stuck on the pavement in the rain.

Here's another: you fancy going out for a pizza with your mates. You head for your favourite chain. They find you a table, take your order, and then politely tell you that because of their recent experiences with people ordering, eating and then running off without paying, they'd like you to pay in advance. The trouble is they haven't asked the four white guys on the next table to pay in advance. It doesn't matter that they're all unemployed, and you're a ten-grand-a-week professional football player – the thing that determines your life-chances at that moment is that you're a black man.

Second, we have failed to do what the right does as though it's a part of its DNA, which is to engage the power of identity as fundamental to our account of the way in which the world is changing. What might a left analysis that engages the power of identity look like? And how would it answer Michael Kenny's call for a politics of recognition? It could go like this: the left's quest is for greater freedom of the individual to be fully themselves; what separates us from the libertarian right is that we believe that we can never be truly free as atomised individuals. This isn't just the old-fashioned class based analysis – the left still believes that class can determine access to life's better opportunities, but we now know that this isn't a complete analysis. We also believe that we are each a unique configuration of several shared identities, or identity categories – our race, our religion, our gender, etc. – each aspect of which is shared with others. If we can keep any of the individual aspects from controlling our life chances then we can consider ourselves relatively free; but, sometimes, our treatment by others means that one aspect limits all our options. For example, we can find ourselves in what you might call an identity well – racism, sexism or Islamophobia might trap us inside our race, gender or faith in such a way that no matter what else we are that one characteristic determines our life-chances.

We need to abandon the multiculturalist delusion. By this I do not mean rejecting the fact of multiethnic and multicultural societies

There is a converse phenomenon which gives rise to a kind of self-limiting behaviour which one might call the identity spike, where one aspect of our identity becomes so important and defining to us that it overshadows all the others. We see this in racial and religious extremism. Poor whites, for example, can in certain circumstances come to believe that their poverty isn't the result of where they live or their parental background or their lack of skills, but is because of their colour. It's not surprising that they then begin to interpret all politics through a racial prism.

Third, we need to abandon the multiculturalist delusion. By this I do not mean rejecting the fact of multiethnic and multicultural societies; I mean that mindless assertion that such a society is inherently more vibrant and productive, unless recalcitrant or reactionary forces in some way contrive to undermine its natural harmony, typically an anti-immigrant or anti-Muslim intervention. It may be that this proposition is true if certain conditions are true; but the opposite may also be

the case. In the UK, for example, there is substantial evidence that foreign-born entrepreneurs have the energy, contacts and creativity to boost the growth of the whole society. The social and cultural isolation of some communities, however, both reduces their life-chances and raises the likelihood of friction with others. In fact, as I've pointed out, it is the *laissez faire* multiculturalism of the past twenty years that allowed the problems of infrastructure pressure and apparent unfairness to grow unchecked. Isn't it bizarre that it is the left which resists the idea that the community might seek to establish the common standards – equality and human rights standards, for example – that would bring some order to the cultural sphere?

Fourth, the left's aversion to stigmatising groups has led us to excuse the role of culture in creating disadvantage – and also to ignore its potential for rescuing people from inequality. We don't even interrogate the question of why some groups succeed and others do not. Why aren't we asking why poor Chinese children do better at school than well-off whites, while there is a class gap among the almost equally successful Indians? What's the left's explanation for the observation that being black and male is a better correlation for low numeracy skills than having a learning disability? What do we have to say about the fact that infant mortality among black and Pakistani communities is twice that among white and Bangladeshi communities, suggesting that neither age nor class can account for this particular difference?

Fifth, because we have no script for identity politics, we constantly attempt to force every issue into either an unrealistically economic model or fall back on a rigid essentialism that places everyone in categories to which they may not belong. This is most comical in the attempts to prove that women as a group are poorer than men as a group, though most women share a household with a man; it is true that a quarter of households are single-parent households, with mostly women in that role – but many of these are supported by men who are no wealthier on their own. This crude categorisation can produce unhelpful policy outcomes. For example, the UK government's proposal to cap rent subsidies, known as housing benefit, are said by Labour to attack black and minority ethnic households. In actual fact, while it is true that some ethnic minority families have benefited from a conspiracy between the state and landlords to drive up rents on the back of local authority payments for poor and unemployed minority families, and this would be undermined by a cap on housing benefits, the policy may benefit working minority families if it drives down rents overall, since those minority families are far more likely to be in rented accommodation and there are far more in this group than in the non-working group.

### The political outcomes

The political problem is that people can see these contradictions in their real lives, and they can see our determination not to recognise them. No wonder, then, that they assume the following:

The left's aversion to stigmatising groups has led us to excuse the role of culture in creating disadvantage

- (a) that we have little idea about what's going on in their communities and by implication don't care very much about anything or anyone who does not fit our preferred narrative;
- (b) that we apply double standards, with one rule for the settled Christian and white groups and different rules for other groups;
- (c) that we are ready to trade their interests and their right to a flourishing identity in order to benefit employers who receive cheap, compliant labour, and to middle-class professionals who can outsource the drudgery of their domestic and professional lives, thereby making more money and spending more time with their families.

How can we remedy this? First, we must recognise and start to develop the theory that leads to the “ethical cleavages” at the heart of identity politics.

Second, we must recognise that social category groups are overlapping and sometimes apparently contradictory – the disadvantages in society may be visited on different groups at different times and, in this time of change, people may be both victim and victimiser. An Asian man may be racially abused at work in the morning, but could equally be a wife-beater in the evening.

Third, we can behave differently in politics. We need to be more diverse as political forces.

Fourth, we need to assert the principles of fairness and reciprocity and observe that basic golden rule of reciprocity in England: do as you would be done by.

Fifth, we need to make the case for fairness as part of our response to austerity – everyone shares the burden of fiscal restraint; everyone shares the benefit of recovery.

Sixth, we should be clear about the meaning of integration – not a universal love and loss of separate identities but a society in which when we measure life-chances by category; in which there is steady convergence between different identity groups; in which we devise remedies for avoiding conflict between categories; in which we focus on making public encounters more integrative; and in which we emphasise shared values – schools and workplaces can have uniforms which mean the burkha may not be worn but both should have dress codes that are sharia compliant, so the rules can be the same for everyone. We use the same principles for every building development – don’t treat mosques as special even if Muslims want you to.

### The Highway Code – an agenda for living together

I believe that British and European cultures will respond dynamically to these challenges. We’ve responded to much greater ones in the past. In Britain, we are lucky enough to have no successful far-right anti-immigrant party. Right from the very first Elizabeth, when we faced all sorts of issues about Catholics entering the country, the British approach has been pragmatic. Elizabeth said, *‘I will not make a window into the hearts and souls of men’*; meaning that, essentially, as long as you play by the rules then everybody’s welcome here and everybody can contribute. That’s been the way in which Britain has always dealt with these challenges. The Commission’s recent review, *How Fair is Britain?*, confirms that our tolerance of difference is still remarkably resilient.

One of our strengths is that being British is not an ethnic identity, it is a civil one – an identity that you can adopt if you sign up to certain values and behaviours. Despite the failure of the European Constitution, Europe too could be an important source of civic identity: helping us to define our rights and responsibilities to one another. In Britain, a strong part of that identity is based on the concept of fairness, which is a constant theme for us. If you ask people what activity most typifies being British the most likely response is ‘a queue’. A queue typifies our obsession with fairness.

Our preoccupation with fairness provides a foundation for dealing with difference

Extremists aren’t going to take over the pitch but we need to keep a keen eye out to make sure they don’t move the goalposts. We can’t be complacent. Answering some of the questions I set out above might be a start. But as I have said, more broadly, for us in Britain, our preoccupation with fairness

provides a foundation for dealing with difference, whether those are ethnic or religious, based on gender or sexual orientation.

To make this clear, let me use a metaphor. There are millions of cars on our roads. The vast range of vehicles reflects the wealth of human diversity and what we choose to do with them reflects the myriad different choices we make as individuals – evidenced by the everyday tasks we perform on the narrow streets that we all share. We all want to drive to our own destination in our own car. Most of us want to get where we are going in the shortest possible time.

Given this, it's remarkable how smoothly things run. Why is it that we're not all crashing all the time? That's because we have rules, encompassed in our Highway Code. The code is not a rigid set of laws but a common sense understanding about what to do when we face potential conflict. We all learn the Highway Code, but most of us can't remember ever reading it; we just instinctively know what is demanded of us when we interact with other road users – at junctions, roundabouts and traffic lights.

In the old days, when cars were few and pretty much identical, this code wouldn't have mattered so much. But increased numbers and greater diversity bring special challenges. They demand ways of managing our interactions. We stop at lights, we give way at junctions, we drive on one side of the road. You could say that this is just good manners and in some ways it is, but it goes a bit deeper than that. The code is based on a set of values, the idea that all road users have the same rights that must be respected, irrespective of shape or size – Massey Ferguson, Rolls Royce or Skoda. We take this for granted on our roads today, but we had to create the rules. This thing we take for granted isn't just the natural order.

The Commission and its sister organisations across Europe cannot address these issues alone. We do not 'own' the principles for the Highway Codes. Part of this journey is the responsibility of government, but it will take the efforts of the whole of society to work out these principles: people, communities and businesses. Organisations like ours can promote, facilitate and monitor that change. We can identify inequality and discrimination; point governments in the direction of remedies; and, where possible, help organisations and individuals take the steps that will promote sustainable change. Or, to continue the transport metaphor: we are helping society to Mirror, Signal, Manoeuvre.

## Conclusion

To conclude, this isn't some local problem, it's a huge issue of historical forces – to which we don't have any concrete answers. We know that living together graciously makes our lives richer, more secure and happier. Conversely, inequality and discrimination makes life harder, meaner and more brutish. We need to find some new way of pursuing 'gentle integration' but of doing so at speed and in a time of greater economic restriction.

To do so we will need some constants. A simple, set of principles that should run through our behaviour; which embraces us all; and which guides our actions in times of uncertainty. Those principles endure long after all of us, these discussions and our organisations have been forgotten.

**Trevor Phillips is chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission**



## Progressive multiculturalism: a social democratic response to cultural diversity?

Elena Jurado, Policy Network

The abandonment of the underpinning principles of multiculturalism is ill-advisable and reactionary. The concept of “Progressive Multiculturalism” highlights how recognition of diversity can be reconciled with the development of strong nation building narratives which emphasise common culture

Last November, the Labour MP for Oldham East and Saddleworth and former immigration minister was kicked out of parliament after a specially-convened election court ruled he had misrepresented facts about his opponent to win his seat in the general election. In the language of the court’s ruling, the MP had knowingly made “false statements” about his liberal democrat rival and was therefore “guilty of an illegal practice” under British election law.<sup>1</sup> Among the MP’s “false statements” was an allegation that his liberal democrat opponent was pandering to Muslim extremists, including his refusal to condemn death threats made by these extremists against the Labour MP himself. Within hours of the court’s ruling, the leadership of the Labour Party condemned their former MP and suspended his party membership.

In its reaction to the ruling, the Labour Party missed a golden opportunity to write something down on Ed Miliband’s “blank sheet of paper”. Instead of addressing how the leadership would deal with the issues of cultural diversity and multiculturalism, the internal party discussions which surrounded the MP’s suspension focused on legalistic questions about the limits of free speech. In the words of Labour’s deputy leader, “it is not part of Labour politics to win elections by saying things that are not true”. The backbenchers who protested their leadership’s decision to suspend the MP pointed to the “chilling effect” that this episode would have on political debate. It was left to Labour’s opponents, and the population at large, to ponder the episode’s implications for Labour’s stance on multiculturalism.

The Labour Party’s treatment of this episode has more than anecdotal significance. It reflects the party’s longstanding refusal to discuss an issue perceived to be too electorally sensitive. During and after the general election campaign, Labour politicians

When it comes to cultural pluralism and how public policies should respond to it, Labour politicians prefer to stay mute

have showed an unprecedented willingness to discuss the economic challenges of immigration, with numerous candidates expressing concern about the number of immigrants entering the UK and their impact on jobs and wages. However, when it comes to cultural pluralism and how public policies should respond to it, Labour politicians prefer to stay mute.

This was not always the case. From 1997 to 2001, during Labour’s first term in office after years in the political wilderness, the Labour government introduced some of Europe’s most bold and innovative pieces of equality legislation and embraced the language of ‘multiculturalism’ – a term which has been variously defined but generally insists on some form of public recognition of group identities within society as an important, even a necessary, vehicle for societal integration. The new policies ranged from tougher anti-discrimination laws to opportunities for individuals belonging to minority ethnic groups to use their mother tongue in hospitals and other public services.

<sup>1</sup> The ruling, by Mr. Justice Teare and Mr. Justice Griffith Williams, can be found on the website of the Judiciary of England and Wales: [www.judiciary.gov.uk](http://www.judiciary.gov.uk).

The results of these policies were mixed. On the one hand, Labour's new equality legislation transformed Britain into a role model for other European countries, producing significant results in the fight against discrimination. On the other hand, substantive equality between Britain's different ethnic communities remained elusive, with certain minority groups, especially Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, continuing to face higher unemployment rates, more likely to live in sub-standard accommodation and more likely to be over-policed than the majority population. The 2001 Cattle Report, commissioned by the Home Office in the wake of violent riots in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham, revealed increased segregation of residential areas and state educational facilities in some of Britain's most multi-ethnic cities experience.<sup>2</sup>

In 2001, the persistence of disadvantage among certain ethnic groups combined with international events, especially the terrorist attacks in the US, to transform the politics of multiculturalism in the UK and many other parts of the world. From a set of policies eliciting indifference on the part of the broader public, multiculturalism became the target of widespread hostility, associated with the growing number of radicalized Muslims among Britain's immigrant population.

The then Labour government's response, egged on by Britain's largely xenophobic media, was to abandon its commitment to multiculturalism. In Labour circles it quickly became a truism that, by emphasising group differences, multicultural policies created barriers rather than bridges between communities – including through the provision of financial incentives for minority groups to set up their own schools, preserve their mother tongue and observe their own religions. According to this thesis, multiculturalism hindered the advance of underprivileged groups, making it harder for Muslim women, for example, to break out of the traditional roles "imposed on them" by their elders. By weakening the ties that bind different communities together, multiculturalism is said to have heightened feelings of prejudice and intolerance towards other communities, especially Muslims and white working class groups.

In fact, the factors which have contributed to rising extremism in the UK have of course been numerous and cannot be reduced solely to multiculturalism. This is not to say that Britain's multicultural policies played no role at all in the country's growing ethnic divisions. However, in its wholesale rejection of multiculturalism, Labour has forfeited the opportunity to interrogate what was wrong in its approach – and what was right. Today, as the Labour Party regroupes under a new leader, it needs to adopt a more measured approach – one which recognises the flaws in Labour's past multicultural policies but also acknowledges the achievements that were made and seeks to build on them.

There were three main problems with Labour's practice of multiculturalism. The first was a blizzard of apparently contradictory legislation. In the year 2000, Britain introduced a Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 which placed a duty on all public bodies to promote racial equality. A year later, the same government introduced a number of anti-terrorism measures which caused resentment among minorities and contributed to stigmatising the minority groups in the eyes of the majority population. This included the 2001 Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act, providing for the indefinite detention of foreigners suspected of involvement in terrorism, and later legislation denying refugee status to any asylum seeker who has committed, prepared or instigated terrorism. The first of these was later struck down by the House of Lords as unlawful.

A second area of weakness was the Labour Party's tendency to essentialise identities, to treat minority cultures and identities as static and unchanging. A very visible example of this was the government's tendency to identify one organisation (e.g. the Muslim Council of Britain) to represent all members of that group. This contributed to the sense that minority groups are homogeneous entities, whose

<sup>2</sup>The Cattle Report – Community Cohesion. A Report of the Independent Review Team (Home Office, January 2001).

members all think alike, whereas the reality is considerable internal diversity within each group. This tendency to essentialise minority identities helped create barriers between minorities and the majority population (camouflaging similarities between minorities and majorities) and made it difficult for alternative (often more moderate, dissenting) voices to be heard from within the minority groups.

Finally, Labour's embrace of multiculturalism was problematic in the exclusive attention it gave to minority groups, neglecting the cultural needs of the majority population. Indeed, the question of what individuals belonging to minorities were meant to integrate into was neglected. This question requires a refocusing of attention away from the identities and cultures of minorities to give more attention to the cultural symbols and state-building narratives of the majorities. Multiculturalism is a two-way street: just as individuals belonging to minorities need their cultures to be respected in order to enjoy self-esteem and autonomy, the same is true for individuals belonging to the mainstream.

By refusing to interrogate its previous commitment to multiculturalism, today's Labour Party has effectively thrown out the baby with the bathwater. It can try to look tough by veering to the right and introducing more assimilationist policies towards

By refusing to interrogate its previous commitment to multiculturalism, today's Labour Party has effectively thrown out the baby with the bathwater

minorities, but this will only result in stoking further support for right-wing populist parties. Instead of courting populist sentiment, the Labour Party should re-visit multiculturalism, acknowledging its pitfalls but also its strengths. In this respect, they have much to learn from the work of Tariq Modood and Maleiha Malik, two British scholars whose critique of Britain's equality legislation is helping to delineate a new, progressive form of multiculturalism.<sup>3</sup>

According to their progressive model of multiculturalism, the recognition and celebration of minority identities is not only compatible with, in fact it requires a simultaneous process of state-building. The politics of difference, essential for minorities to 'buy into' a common culture, needs to be complemented by a vibrant and dynamic state-building narrative as seen, for instance, in the United States and Canada. Otherwise the recognition of difference, on its own, will only lead to social fragmentation and division. However, if we are to ensure that individuals belonging to both minority and majority cultures enjoy the necessary self-esteem and autonomy to progress as individuals, the process of creating and sustaining cultural narratives must take place at both levels (and possibly on more than two).

Moreover if we are to ensure that the two levels of creating symbolic meanings – at the level of groups and at the level of the state – are integrated, we need to avoid essentialist understandings of both the minority and the mainstream. Thus, for example, the tendency of conservative nationalists to depict 'national identities' as something that is handed down by history, rather than a matter of choice or negotiation, will necessarily exclude immigrants and lead to fragmentation. The same applies to the identities of minority groups. Identities need to be understood in inclusive, dynamic terms; and all groups, mainstream and minority, need to be able to make a claim to the national identity. Thus, Pakistani Britons must feel that they can shape what it means to be British, as much as Britons from Scotland, Wales or England can.

This form of progressive multiculturalism is not only the fairest and most effective way of managing diversity. It is arguably also the most compatible with social democratic principles. As Maleiha Malik

<sup>3</sup> See in particular, Tariq Modood, *Multiculturalism* (Polity, 2007) and Maleiha Malik, 'Progressive Multiculturalism: Minority Women and Cultural Diversity' (2010) 3 *International Journal of Minority Group Rights*.

has argued in her work, the group recognition that lies at the heart of multiculturalism is concerned purely with individual progress and freedom, one of social democracy's key goals. In doing so, it recognises that this can only be achieved if individuals are allowed to flourish within cultural communities of their own making. It therefore marries social democracy's interest in individual advancement with recognition that individuals are not free agents in any pure sense but rather influenced, and often constrained, by social structures. In this sense, progressive multiculturalism would offer social democrats an approach to diversity distinct from that of liberals.

The conception of culture at the heart of multiculturalism (understood in a progressive sense) is as real and tangible as that of conservative nationalist visions, thus fulfilling the need of individuals for a sense of belonging. However, unlike the essentialist definitions of culture advanced by conservatives (where culture has to be handed down through history), progressive multiculturalism uses a dynamic and therefore inclusive definition of culture and identity. This definition is the only one compatible with the importance that social democrats give to a pluralist and open society. In this sense, progressive multiculturalism offers social democrats an approach to diversity distinct from that of conservatives.

Ed Miliband is right to say that the outcome of recent by-elections in Oldham East and Barnsley send a clear message to the government about the unpopularity of some of its policies, including the rise in VAT, the trebling of tuition fees and police cuts. These victories will most likely be followed by further victories in May's local elections, as the impact of the spending cuts continues to bite. While helping to cheer labour supporters, these results run the risk of lulling the Labour Party into a false sense of security. The Labour party cannot return to power by waiting for the government's popularity to drop. Restoring Labour's economic credibility will be a first crucial step. However, if Labour is to seal its reputation as a party that deals with difficult issues, it cannot afford to focus on purely economic questions. The Labour Party also needs to bite the bullet and embark on a nation-wide conversation about multiculturalism.

**Elena Jurado is head of research at Policy Network**



## Reputations matter: What is needed for a competent immigration policy and effective integration policy?

Shamit Sagar, University of Sussex

Politicians have to be seen as competent managers of immigration in the eyes of the electorate. This requires a balancing act between political instincts or leanings – based on worthy principles such as social justice – and the more skeptical views of the wider electorate. A carefully coordinated policy approach to immigration, integration and equality is required

Fifteen years ago Jack Straw, then Labour's shadow Home Affairs supremo, argued forcefully that his party's policy on immigration should not be separated by anything more than a cigarette paper from that of their Conservative rivals. This claim became a hostage to fortune in subsequent New Labour years in office. For one thing, immigration emerged regularly as one of two or three issues that most troubled voters generally, and Labour sympathisers specifically. The issue has been blamed, alongside economic management, for the May 2010 defeat, and a significant electoral post-mortem is currently under way on that basis.

### Immigration politics, then and now

Labour's implicit desire to be trusted on immigration has very deep roots. Academic analysis from the British Election Study has shown that the issue contributed directly to Labour's electoral decline in 1979 and its subsequent routs in 1983 and 1987. The party's reputation for weakness and liberal-mindedness also unsettled many voters in the 1960s and 1970s. The BES again demonstrated the reputational strength that the Tories enjoyed – often by default – on this issue, alongside welfare and trade union rights, in the 1960s and 1970s.

The Straw dictum spoke to a leadership generation who had witnessed early on in their adult lives the spectacle of a Labour Government haemorrhaging votes – and trust – on immigration. Not surprisingly, the party's leadership set out to resist further mass immigration, but it nevertheless failed to comprehend the drivers of labour migration, family reunification and asylum. The record in office between 1997 and 2010 quickly demonstrated how hard it was to keep numbers down and present electors with a credible picture of control.

### Controls and competence, alongside numbers

But set against this familiar account is another interpretation of what voters want of leaders, and what, therefore, the latter should better focus on. This is best encapsulated by Sir John Gieve, former Home Office Permanent Secretary. His observation was that the task of effective control over borders lay at the heart of the immigration issue. He continued that ministers remained intent on devoting limited political time and capital to the overall quantum of immigration, some of which was temporary and cyclical and much of which from the late 1990s was driven by voracious employer demand egged on by a Labour administration basking in the nirvana of a non-inflationary path to growth.

Inevitably, there is much in both interpretations and it is wise to hold both thoughts in our heads at the same time. Certainly the scale of largely unanticipated and unplanned inward migration into the UK in the last decade has been unsettling in many communities. The impacts have been numerous and acute in GP surgeries and school classrooms and playgrounds, in exacerbating housing shortages and

overcrowding, and in fuelling unspoken worries about fairness of treatment between newcomers and natives. A very casual glance at attitudes among settled immigrant communities towards new wave immigrants quickly reveals the scale of the problem.

Describing it as a crisis would not be a great exaggeration in the sense that many existing communities have not just struggled to adjust to the new picture but, crucially, also struggled to make sense of a Labour government's position on the immigration issue. Tellingly, Matt Cavanagh, a former No 10 special advisor, recently confirmed that as late as the start of 2009 the Labour cabinet remained divided on whether the issue should be tackled in terms of raw numbers of migrants as opposed to addressing the impacts on local employment, housing markets and congestion in public services.

Yet, irrespective of the need to face immigration's quantum and immediate impacts, the insight of Gieve is that voters are equally animated by questions of control and management. Charles Clarke, another former Home Secretary, was firm in his belief at a Policy Network seminar in September 2010 that voters sought evidence that borders were under control and that entry and settlement were closely correlated with earned entitlements and genuine skills shortages. Assertion alone on these fronts does not chime with voters. Indeed, it may make things worse by painting a picture of political elites who were winners from immigration but tin-eared when it came to the grumbles of those feeling squeezed on the front line.

### **Immigration, the economy, schools, hospitals**

It is useful to see the management and control of immigration not in stand-alone terms but rather as an extension of the managerial competence that voters now seek of parties and leaders on the economy and many other issues. This is the prism through which we now commonly think of voters' evaluations of leaders and parties. It contrasts with earlier orthodoxies that laid weight on ideological division and the sense that electoral blocs existed and could be mobilised on behalf of broad, collective interests. The electorate's general sense of confidence in the competence of parties to handle the economy, organise public services, control immigration, enhance school attainment and so on is what matters today.

Confidence in the competence of parties to handle the economy, organise public services, control immigration, enhance school attainment and so on is what matters today

Therefore, it is profitable to probe what voters – in very rough terms for many – expect by way of competence on immigration. This probably means clearer selectivity on the skills needed to match both short and long term gaps. It also involves careful thought on reducing social impacts by avoiding sudden surges in settlement. Competency also implies that voters must be able to trust government claims about numbers (polling evidence shows they generally do not), and this suggests that there is a role for watchdogs to hold ministers and officials to account. For example, there is a strong rationale to bolster the use of objective criteria to weigh up asylum claims and to show demonstrable independence from government to identify who should be encouraged to settle (and who should not).

### **Building cohesion through trust and equality**

Even allowing for political parties attaining greater competency on immigration, one of the bigger, underlying anxieties surrounds the extent to which immigrant communities have integrated and been seen to integrate. There are of course a number of fairly objective measures for this in areas such as educational attainment, employment achievements, housing and residential patterns, health and so

on. The difficulty stems from the relationships that immigrants and immigrant-descended communities have developed within their own ranks and with the larger society.

Some have intervened to point out that bonding relationships within communities have overshadowed bridging relationships across communities. In other words we have neglected the importance of encouraging, and perhaps incentivising, immigrants to learn about the wider society they now find themselves located with and, in particular, the task of learning to navigate issues, choices and trade offs with others who are not like them. So it has been – and remains – possible to remain within immigrant-only worlds that have virtual no tangible contact with the wider society. The ghetto, as it was once called, can be a haven for those who shun the value or need to join mainstream society.

Others have suggested that this kind of diversity can be risky because groups remain aloof from one another in a Balkanised Britain. Commentators such as David Goodhart have suggested that ethnic diversity and social solidarity are effectively fighting in opposite

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directions, since people will not easily back the idea of sharing across ethnic lines when interaction across these boundaries is minimal in any case. But there is a problem with making this simple two-way link. For one thing, it naively assumes that social cohesion and trust are nested in whether or to what extent Britain is ethnically diverse. This is only one conditioner. Another can just as easily be the degree of equality and inclusiveness experienced by people in different communities. For example, young black men in troubled inner-city settings have held numerous grievances about policing and criminal justice at large. The Citizenship Surveys point to significantly lower confidence in these important institutions among black men than their white counterparts. The burgeoning evidence around ethnic penalties in employment – chiefly experienced by black and Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities – again points to a big divide. And a similar picture can be seen in health outcome across ethnic groups. All of this cannot be easily sidelined, since a sense of inequality – as well as the impacts of such inequality – certainly conditions the way in which weaker, marginalised groups are prepared to reach out and interact across ethnic lines.

In short, the appetite for trust and common cause between white and non-white Britain is not just dependent on who integrates and who does not. It also hangs on who is more equal than whom and, in the old saying, who gets what, and why. This is fundamentally a political matter so it is important to signal that, whatever worries there are about parallel communities that do not mix and interact, these concerns cannot and will not be met by greater integration in itself. Rather, such integration is likely to be an outcome from a more ethnically equal society.

If the objective is greater trust, interaction and confidence between different ethnic and immigrant communities, it is only fair that we are willing to see that this problem is not solely the result of inward facing new communities. It is not in doubt that such communities do exist in Britain today, and several are in fact long-standing communities. But their doubt and scepticism about integration is not just a cultural, lifestyle choice, an unintended consequence of our laissez faire traditions on integration. The tendency to hold back and avoid interaction beyond the minimum is heavily shaped by the experience of inequality, discrimination and outsider labelling. So the task of bearing down on discrimination and prejudice remains as relevant today as it did when the country's first equality laws were adopted almost two generations ago. And creating a more equal society will matter not just for those who currently lose out. It will also be a valuable goal and benefit for all who wish to live in a more diverse, cohesive and equal Britain.

## Restraining tribalism

Ultimately, political and policy competency also derives from another, critical ingredient. That is the sense that a governing party is willing and able to restrain its own tribal instincts. This point has been very powerfully articulated by Matthew d'Ancona recently in relation to the Labour opposition's chances of regaining a reputation for competency on the economy. The same insight has, incidentally, featured in another Policy Network seminar on progressive approaches to economic management.

Such tribal instincts are deeply rooted and highly pertinent in the case of Labour and immigration. The party's rank and file quite rightly are moved and motivated by questions of social justice. There is nothing new in this. The leadership has often been a mixed story, having to balance entrenched values and sentiment of core supporters with the more sceptical leanings of the wider electorate. The worst possibility is that the latter admire in loose terms a leadership that seeks global economic justice – but punishes it for seeing national immigration policy as an instrument of such a cause.

The evidence on Labour Party members and activists shows that they both take a far more upbeat view on the intangible benefits of immigration than the electorate at large, and also, crucially, mistakenly assume that voters are more liberal than they really are. The evidence also demonstrates that the wider electorate are far from convinced that the economic benefits of immigration are clear cut or significant. They are also doubtful that the indirect costs in terms of disruption and hidden divisions have been properly acknowledged by government, let alone factored into the big equations shaping policy.

Ultimately, political and policy competency also derives from another, critical ingredient. That is the sense that a governing party is willing and able to restrain its own tribal instincts

## Reputations matter

Achieving success – or avoiding great failure – on immigration is ultimately about building, projecting and delivering a reputation for competence in the face of pressures that often cannot be controlled directly. Failure to pay attention to how reputations are made, and how they are squandered, lies full square at the heart of the lesson-learning exercise. Half a generation ago, Jack Straw stood in the grey area between the tribal instincts of his party and the managerial competence agenda of his colleagues. The lesson may be that voters simply want leaders to make credible claims on immigration and are able to deliver against these. They will certainly punish those that cannot and do not, and they will discount against false promises. In essence, they are accustomed to performance politics. This necessarily entails a very sober examination of which policies, institutions, levers and partnerships are needed to deliver credible control over immigration and the successful settlement and integration of immigrants themselves.

Reputations matter, nowhere more so than on immigration. The first lesson, therefore, for regaining a reputation for competence and balanced judgement is that tribalism and competence are pulling in opposite directions.

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## The open society and its believers

Paul Scheffer, University of Amsterdam

Immigration is the most visible aspect of globalisation and it is as difficult for receiving communities to cope with as it is for the dislocated immigrants to adapt. Social democrats must pursue a conception of diversity that plays down the differences between people and understands all as citizens operating in the public sphere as equals; where receiving populations do not expect immigrants to contribute more than they themselves are prepared to, and where a plurality of voices is allowed to flourish

### Avoidance, conflict and accommodation

How often do we hear the unanswerable ‘immigration has always been with us’, the notion that people are always on the move and our own time is no exception? The Amsterdam municipality writes, matter-of-factly: ‘Almost half of all Amsterdammers were born outside the Netherlands. This is nothing new. For centuries Amsterdam, as a city of immigrants, has been open to people of different origins and faiths. Think of the Portuguese Jews, French Huguenots and seasonal workers from Germany.’

Even if we accept that from a historical perspective there’s nothing new under the sun, no one can doubt we are witnessing a profound change to the composition of Western populations. People certainly moved around a great deal in the seventeenth century, but that surely does nothing to mitigate the upheaval that cities are going through now. The guest workers from Morocco and Turkey who are changing Dutch neighbourhoods aren’t simply counterparts to the seasonal workers from Germany who spent time in the Low Countries in centuries past. The fact that Jews from Portugal fled to the Netherlands to escape the Catholic Church’s Inquisition doesn’t make it a matter of course that refugees from Islamist despotism in Iran and Afghanistan should come to live here.

Receiving societies are hesitant in their dealings with newcomers; established populations are becoming noticeably more rigid and tending to turn away from the outside world. There’s a need for a more candid approach to the frictions and clashes that always result from the arrival of sizeable migrant groups. Earlier generations of historians and sociologists have left us a remarkable body of work to draw upon. Oscar Handlin, the best known historian of immigration in America, is one source of inspiration. In *The Uprooted* (1952) he describes the causes and effects of migration from Europe to America. They can be summed up in one sentence: ‘the history of immigration is a history of alienation and its consequences.’<sup>2</sup> Alienation and loss are key features of any description of the arrival of migrants in a strange environment.

Handlin is thinking primarily of those who came, ‘for the effect of the transfer was harsher upon the people than upon the society they entered.’<sup>3</sup> He tells the story of the millions who were set adrift by industrialization and by the astonishing population growth of the second half of the nineteenth century. The dislocation and poverty that resulted, especially in rural areas, led to mass emigration from countries including Ireland, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Norway and Poland. Huge economic and social forces were at work, and people were torn loose from environments they had occupied for centuries. Hardly anyone welcomed this liberation, Handlin says, since above all it meant separation.

Note: These are some shortened paragraphs from my book *Immigrant Nations* that will be published by Polity Press in May 2011. It has been published in German in 2008: *Die Eingewanderten* by Hanser.

<sup>2</sup> Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted*, Introduction, p. 4

<sup>3</sup> Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted*, Introduction, p. 5

In unfamiliar surroundings many sought refuge in the certainties of their religion. 'In that sense all immigrants were conservatives...All would seek to set their ideas within a fortification of religious and cultural institutions that would keep them sound against the strange New World.'<sup>4</sup> This hankering after old structures and customs served as an aid to survival in an urban environment. It's easy to see why many migrants tried to perpetuate village life in foreign cities, which makes it all the harder to understand why immigrants are so often described as great innovators.

In their new country, so confusing and full of dangers, people felt a need for the support of their religion, but maintaining religious faith was a challenge: 'The same environment, in its very strangeness and looseness and freedom, made it difficult to preserve what could be taken for granted at home.'<sup>5</sup> The end result was all too often a sense of not belonging anywhere any longer. 'They had thus completed their alienation from the culture to which they had come, as from that which they had left.'<sup>6</sup> This is an experience shared by many contemporary migrants as they try to connect with a new society.

It was not only the migrants themselves who were afflicted by insecurity. Those already living in the new country, which after all was not a blank canvas but had customs and traditions of its own, were thrown off balance. Handlin acknowledges their side of the story: 'Everything in the neighbourhood was so nice, they would later say, until the others came. The others brought outlandish ways and unintelligible speech, foreign dress and curious foods, were poor, worked hard, and paid higher rents for inferior quarters.'<sup>7</sup>

In an earlier study Handlin had examined the reaction of nineteenth-century Bostonians to the arrival of Irish immigrants, who came in huge numbers. After the two groups clashed it took at least half a century for the city to regain its balance. 'Group conflict left a permanent scar that disfigured the complexion of Boston social life.'<sup>8</sup> Yet Handlin's approach was subtle and he avoided laying the blame on one side or the other. He used cautious terms like 'latent distrust' and 'social uneasiness' to describe the attitudes of longstanding residents.<sup>9</sup>

It's not hard to understand reactions like these. People saw their world changed by immigrants and instinctively harked back to a shared notion of the community as it had been before. It serves little purpose to impress upon people who no longer feel at home in their neighbourhoods that we all have to move with the times. In the often hostile expression 'stranger in your own country' lies a recognition that migration has brought people from all over the world to settle in today's major cities. We need to face up to the feeling among established populations that a tried and tested society is being lost, just as we need to acknowledge the feeling of uprootedness among many newcomers.

Yet that alienation does not last for ever, quite the reverse in fact. Back in the 1920s American sociologist Robert E Park described what was then generally referred to as the race relations cycle as beginning with isolation and avoidance and moving on via contact, competition and conflict to accommodation and assimilation.<sup>10</sup> There is an underlying logic here: on arrival migrants tend to keep to themselves, partly as a result of the attitude of avoidance they detect in the society around them. In the years that follow, migrants and their children struggle to claim a place for themselves in the new country, and this leads to rivalry and strife. The question of how everyone can live together becomes unavoidable. If a satisfactory answer is found, the descendants of the original migrants will be absorbed more or less smoothly into society. This is a hopeful view and it suggests the familiar model of three generations.

Of course the process can't really be divided into phases or generations as neatly as this, but the important point is that every story of migration involves conflict. That was, and is, the case in America

4 Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted*, p. 116

5 Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted*, p. 141

6 Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted*, p. 285

7 Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted*, p. 189

8 Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants*, p. 206

9 Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants*, p. 184

10 Robert E. Park, *Race and Culture*, p. 150. See also Ulf Hannerz, *Exploring the City*, p. 44

and the pattern is being repeated in contemporary Europe. It's difficult to say how long or how severe the period of conflict will be, but the phase of avoidance is gradually coming to an end. We should see today's frictions as part of a search for ways for newcomers and the established population to live together. Conflict has in many ways a socializing effect.

Emancipation will not be achieved without pioneers. In the pressure cooker of the past few years there has been an unmistakable quickening of developments. Conflict is ultimately a sign of integration, so we should make a clear-eyed assessment of the anger and frustration of many migrants' children. Far more often than we may realize, behind what they say lies a burning ambition to be part of society. In 1918 sociologist Georg Simmel wrote about the significance of conflict. His verdict on indifference is wholly negative, whereas he believes conflict has something positive at its core: 'Our opposition makes us feel that we are not completely victims of circumstances. It allows us to prove our strength consciously and only thus gives vitality and reciprocity to conditions from which, without such corrective, we would withdraw at any cost.'<sup>11</sup>

Immigration is the most visible aspect of globalisation, which gives many people a sense that their familiar world is vanishing. This is not yet felt to be an improvement. In European countries many people are convinced that a period of stagnation or even decline lies ahead. Few still believe their children will have a better future, whereas the post-war generation enjoyed the prospect that their offspring would live freer and more prosperous lives. It doesn't really help to say that future generations will see these as the good old days. Right now all that counts is that a sense of loss has taken hold and people are looking for ways of reaching beyond that experience.

In the history of immigration the pendulum swings back and forth between openness and withdrawal. Later we'll examine the American experience at some length, but we should note at this point that after forty years of mass immigration between 1880 and 1920, new legislation was introduced that kept the numbers to a minimum until 1965. The similarity with present-day Europe is striking; here too, after decades of mass immigration, there's a widespread desire for tighter controls.

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In other words, the call for the influx to be curbed is not an exclusively European phenomenon, nor does it represent an inability to get along with migrants, a failing that could perhaps be ascribed to Europe's relatively short history of immigration. A more restrictive policy as a means of restoring the social balance is an option that ought to be taken seriously. History shows that spontaneous rapprochement between indigenous populations and newcomers is rare. The risk that each side will keep raising the stakes with opposing declarations of loyalty – both in effect openly saying 'my own people first' – means we must take the trouble to explore what lies behind this hostility.

### Intergration requires self-examination

The movement of people over the past few decades has had a considerable impact. Natives and newcomers often seem far apart, and beneath a veneer of harmony countless stories can be heard – by those willing to listen – about daily cultural clashes. A conflict successfully avoided for years has erupted all the more fiercely. Where silence reigned for so long, too much is now being said and too stridently. Multicultural diplomacy alone will not be enough to build mutual trust, but for a long time

<sup>11</sup> Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms*, p. 75

few awkward questions were asked, both because no one was particularly interested in the answers and because it was felt too much would be stirred up if they were. Noiriel remarks that crises surrounding migration 'are moments in which the social rules for the whole of the receiving society are ruptured and redefined'.<sup>12</sup>

The call for integration prompts the response: 'Integration, fine, but into what?' A society that has little or nothing to say for itself will quickly be exposed as flawed. This has not escaped the attention of migrants, who respond with a combination of 'What do you actually want from us?' and 'For heaven's sake leave us alone'. As one student remarked: 'You never know where you stand here. What is integration, in fact? What are Dutch or French or British norms and values? I have a feeling politicians are deliberately vague about them, so that they can always say: no, that's not what we meant.'

Such reactions are all too often expressed in aggrieved tones, but anyone aiming to close the chasm nevertheless needs to come up with a convincing response. 'Diversity' is a commonly deployed concept, but it does little to clarify matters. It ought to go without saying that an open society is characterized by divergent outlooks, lifestyles and beliefs, but even in a liberal democracy there are limits: not everything that's different is valuable. Embracing diversity indiscriminately is tantamount to protecting traditional habits and customs from critical scrutiny. There's a tendency to address migrant families as members of the groups to which they're presumed to belong. This applies not only to the first generation, which is to some extent preserving the traditions of its countries of origin, but to the children and grandchildren of migrants as well. They are regarded as perpetuating a particular culture, whereas it may well be that many 'Turkish' children prefer listening to American rapper 50 Cent than to Turkish pop star Sezen Aksu – quite apart from the fact that many different influences can be found in Aksu's work.

There's another reason why the prevailing view of diversity doesn't necessarily represent progress. If minorities continue to see themselves primarily as ethnic groups, there's a real danger that majority populations too will increasingly conceive of themselves in ethnic terms, especially when in many cities they find themselves outnumbered. American sociologist Charles Gallagher has observed: 'Like it or not, middle-class and lower middle-class whites see themselves as a minority and have adopted a posture of being the victims.'<sup>13</sup> This is the risk we run by emphasizing ethnicity. Why should one group be allowed to appeal to its own ethnic identity if another group is not?

Embracing diversity indiscriminately is tantamount to protecting traditional habits and customs from critical scrutiny

It's important always to keep in mind the aim of creating a society in which people are asked how they see their futures, not one in which they're judged according to their pasts. Getting there will be a process of trial and error, and all citizens will need to look beyond ethnic dividing lines.

It's often argued that integration should engage both newcomers and natives, but what does this actually mean? Instead of emphasizing the differences between minorities and the majority, we should concentrate on shared citizenship as an ideal to which everyone can aspire. Migrants can be invited and challenged by a society only if it has a strong culture of citizenship. Problems surrounding migrants and their children are generally social issues writ large. They concern not only important institutions such as education but constitutional rights like freedom of expression. This is the reason migration cuts so deep: it goes to the heart of institutions and liberties.

The basic principle is simple: native populations cannot ask of newcomers any more than they are

<sup>12</sup> Gérard Noiriel, *Le creuset français*, p. 274

<sup>13</sup> Samuel Huntington, *Who are we?*, p. 315

themselves prepared to contribute. Those who encourage others to see themselves as fellow citizens must have at least some notion of what it means to be a citizen and, as far as possible, turn that notion into practical reality. Hence the embarrassment that typifies debates about integration. An established population that asks people to integrate will sooner or later find itself facing similar demands. This is all part of an ongoing quest, a process of social renewal.

Take linguistic skills. There can be no doubt that the command of a country's official language is a prerequisite for all those trying to hold their own as citizens. The Dutch have therefore talked a great deal over the past few years about language deficits in migrant families, a problem currently referred to as 'low literacy'. It was only a matter of time before people started asking: How good are the reading and writing skills of the indigenous Dutch population? It quickly became clear that hundreds of thousands are struggling, and initiatives are now being implemented that are aimed at raising levels of literacy across the board.

This is just one example of how debates about integration can make hidden social problems visible, introducing issues that go far beyond the emancipation of migrants. The growing divide between low-skilled and educated people demands attention; Flemish writer David van Reybrouck regards this as the most important cause of current dissatisfaction with democracy. Many people with little more than a basic education no longer feel represented: 'As in the Netherlands, a parallel society has grown up in Belgium. The low-skilled are in the majority, but they genuinely feel themselves to be a minority that is subjected to discrimination.'<sup>14</sup>

Integration conceived as a reciprocal process confronts society with profound questions about what it means to be a citizen. What skills are essential? What kind of knowledge is required? Those who think migrants should know more about the development of their adoptive country's constitution, for example, cannot avoid the question: What exactly do you know about it yourself? This has revealed another weakness of Western societies. Doubts about the historical awareness of the average citizen matter, because citizenship involves a realization that something came before us and something will come after us. It's hard for any sense of responsibility to develop unless people see themselves as part of a continuing history.

Which brings us to another series of questions: What image of the past do established residents want to present to newcomers? Might there not be a need to discuss this image with everyone, irrespective of background and origin? Are schoolchildren taught in any meaningful sense about colonial history? Is any attention paid in schools to migration into and within Europe over the centuries? Gestures are of little use. It's essential to hand down as truthful and self-critical an account of the past as possible. The issue of integration has forced many countries to take a fresh look at school curricula.

There's an even more fundamental sense in which the principle of reciprocity prompts societies to question themselves. It concerns the rights and duties attached to citizenship. Citizens are now well aware of their rights but far less likely to have been given a clear understanding of their duties. This is a crucial problem, since freedoms unaccompanied by a sense of responsibility will start to erode. The issue of religious freedom illustrates the point. Muslims invoke the right to practice their religion and that right is non-negotiable, as long as it's exercised within the bounds of the constitution, but it also confers upon all believers a responsibility to defend the rights of people of other faiths or none.

There's a need for shared norms to which both the majority and minorities feel bound, and they include the right to freedom of conscience. The question that needs to be addressed is: What do the difficulties surrounding integration tell us about the strengths and weaknesses of society as a whole? The search

<sup>14</sup> David van Reybrouck, *Pleidooi voor meer populisme*, p. 42

for ways to live together demands self-examination on all sides. That's the deeper significance of the reciprocity we seek: those who ask migrants to take a critical look at their traditions must be prepared to hold their own cherished assumptions up to the light.

Citizens, whether newcomers or otherwise, should not be required to absorb themselves into society as it is now but rather to identify with society as it has the potential to be. Everyone should feel invited to help society move closer to its ideal of equal treatment. Reciprocity as a basic principle of citizenship means that anyone trying to combat discrimination against migrants and their children must be prepared to oppose forms of discrimination within migrant families, against unbelievers, for example, or homosexuals. We can't pick and choose when it comes to equality.

This became clear on a visit to a school in Antwerp where a large majority of pupils are from Muslim families. One commented, as a joke: 'I've counted the Belgians at our school. There are twenty-three.' The school has a long tradition and many of the children do well, but the teachers say it's become difficult to talk about evolution in biology lessons, about the Holocaust during history lessons and about 'perverts' like Oscar Wilde in literature lessons. A choice has to be made. Should teachers give in to the religious prejudices many children bring from home or oppose them, with all the patience and dedication that requires?

The reverse is also true, of course. A society that cherishes the principle of equality must be willing to listen to those who claim they've been discriminated against at work or in pubs and clubs. Sometimes legal action is necessary, but in many situations the key to success is persuasion, not compulsion. Campaigns and rules may help to combat discrimination, but we all need to confront prejudices publicly, challenging them as a step towards developing mutual trust.

What do the difficulties surrounding integration tell us about the strengths and weaknesses of society as a whole?

Not everyone favours such reciprocity, as is clear from comments like 'they came to us, we didn't go to their country'? This amounts to saying that the majority has the power and the right to force minorities to adapt. Such an imbalance of power can never produce a truly integrated society, if only because the protection of the rights of minorities is a defining element of democracy. The opposite view is equally unproductive. It often takes the form of claims that there can be no reciprocity while the imbalance between the established and newcomers is as great as it is now. In other words: 'You can't ask the same of those at the bottom as you do of those at the top.' This attitude leads nowhere, except to the paternalistic notion that people in migrant communities are not responsible for their fate. Shared citizenship means, by definition, that we are all invited to enter the public arena as equals.

### Believers in an open society

Having looked at integration in a general sense we must now turn our attention to the inability of receiving societies to find ways of dealing with Islam. A number of clear choices have to be made, but they will be acceptable only if based on the principle of equal treatment. Nothing feeds suspicion so much as a sense that double standards are being applied.

What would relations with Islam on the basis of equal treatment look like? The separation of church and state, on which freedom of religion is founded, is the first priority. Not only must the state be safeguarded against improper pressure from the church; to an equal or even greater extent the church must be protected against meddling by the state. Certainly where Islam is concerned, as a matter of principle nothing must be laid in the way of Muslims who want to practice their faith openly. Mosques

belong here, even though many people will be shocked to learn that the Essalaam mosque in Rotterdam, with its fifty-metre-high minarets, is expressly intended as a major feature of the city's skyline.

If we are going to emphasize the principle of equal treatment, then we need to ask ourselves whether Europeans are complying with it. Many countries have regulations that are at odds with the separation of church and state, such as the obligation to pay church taxes in Germany and Denmark. The secularization of institutions needs to go further, and those who ask Muslims to respect religious freedom should feel obliged to summon up a comparable willingness themselves. The recent decision by the European Court that the requirement to display crucifixes in Italian state schools is incompatible with the principle of equality is therefore a move in the right direction.

This certainly does not mean religion must be banished from the public sphere. Behind the unwillingness to accept a highly visible Islam lies the notion that religion is purely a private matter, but the separation of church and state is not the same as the separation of church and society. Religions are an essential part of a pluralist society, which is why Muslims, especially given the differences that exist between them, must venture into the public arena of the countries in which they now live. This is a paradoxical invitation, since as someone remarked: 'You only really want to accept a passive Islam.' Indeed, up to now there's been little willingness in the West to see Islam as part of social life.

First of all, then, a clear commitment to the equal treatment of religions is needed. Political Islam can be combated effectively only if the principle of freedom of religion is defended unambiguously. A leading question can then be posed: Doesn't the exercise of the right to religious freedom inevitably bring with it a duty to defend that same freedom for other believers and for non-believers? This is of course exactly what political Islam contests, not only in words but with threats and violence.

The political ambitions of Islam do not exist in a vacuum, rather they are based on a fairly common habit of dividing the world into Muslims and non-Muslims. Far too often, Muslims withdraw into a believing 'us' that strives to keep its distance from an unbelieving 'them'. When freedom of religion is exploited as a means of spreading contempt towards non-Muslims, the right to that freedom is eroded and sooner or later a time will come when Muslims start to undermine their own ability to live in a democracy characterized by religious diversity. The right of one is after all the duty of another. This holds true for everybody, including members of the Muslim community. If a significant majority cannot summon respect for this rule, Muslims will stigmatize themselves.

Interreligious dialogue, which is underway everywhere, requires a number of principles to be held in common. At the very least such a dialogue has to be based on the acceptance of religious freedom. Experience shows that quite a few religious leaders reject this: 'Yes, it is laid down in the law of European countries, but elsewhere it may be different; higher authorities will have to decide.' We can simply take note of such reactions, but that is to follow the path of least resistance. When it comes to equal treatment a more principled stance would be appropriate from those who lay claim to equality as a matter of principle. The integration of Islam into democracy therefore requires it to make profound adjustments.

Finally, the principle of equal treatment has another inevitable consequence. Anyone claiming freedom of religion for a group must be able to summon a willingness to grant the same freedom to members of that group. Alternative movements are now quite often excommunicated, as Tariq Ramadan is forced to acknowledge. He's extremely critical of the absence of a culture of dialogue within the Muslim community, where denunciation is rife.<sup>15</sup> We need only think of how some of the more wayward groups

within Islam, such as the Alevis and the Ahmaddiya movement, have been excluded. Ramadan believes there's a lack of willingness to enter into dialogue with those who hold different beliefs.

The ways in which disputes within Islam are handled are most problematic of all when it comes to the loss of faith. Most Muslims have exceptional difficulty on this point. But again, anyone who demands the right to practice his religion freely has no choice but to grant that same right to other members of the same religious community. Faith must either be practiced in freedom or abandoned. This too is a long way from the situation as it stands, since for Muslims openly saying you no longer believe means social exclusion or worse. Young Salafists leave no room for doubt about this: 'An intruder inside the house is certainly more dangerous than one outside,' said Mohammed Bouyeri.<sup>16</sup>

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is perfectly clear on the issue of apostasy: 'Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief.' (article 18). Like many other articles of the Declaration, this has remained a dead letter in many countries, where freedom is restricted in the name of a state religion. In the Western world too, the freedom to abandon the Muslim faith is disputed and ex-Muslims have formed groups in order to stand up for their choice publicly in the face of serious threats. Muslims will have to learn to accept the decisions of those who want openly to bid farewell to their faith.

Freedom of religion does not exclude criticism of religion. On the contrary, part of the price of an open society is that religious traditions can be the subject of public debate. Some sensitivity on the part of critics is only right, since speaking freely about things some people regard as holy can be deeply hurtful. Nevertheless, if Muslims intend to live in liberal democracies while retaining the idea that the Koran or the prophet are above all criticism and must never be the object of ridicule, then they condemn themselves to the role of eternal outsiders. Freedom for Muslims can be defended only if Muslims are willing to defend the freedom of their critics.

Statements made by the British and Dutch governments as they consider making blasphemy punishable under law once again have not always been sensible either. Why should insulting the gods be any worse than insulting people? Anyone who supports the principle of equal treatment is obliged to regard religious and secular worldviews as equal before the law. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is clear about this: religion is on a par with other convictions. There are certainly limits to freedom of speech, but we can't draw the line at criticizing or ridiculing a faith, otherwise we'd have to start by tossing onto the pyres *The Praise of Folly* by Erasmus, with its passages about 'folly in the Bible'.

Conflict avoidance is the wrong response when freedom of expression is at stake, not only for reasons of principle but because it does nothing to calm the situation when feelings run high. One evasion leads to another. If a decision is made not to publish any more cartoons, then what about the commotion surrounding an opera on the subject of Aisha, one of the prophet's wives? The performance was abandoned in response to threats. If objections are met in the case of opera, what should be the reaction when a newspaper discovers that even an image of the Koran on the front of its monthly magazine section is reason enough for some delivery boys to refuse to distribute it? The ban on images embraced by part of the Muslim world can never be a guideline for journalistic or artistic expression, if only because it's a short step from banning images to banning spoken statements, and from there to banning comments made in writing. By that point openness has been abandoned altogether.

Conflict avoidance is the wrong response when freedom of expression is at stake

<sup>15</sup> Tariq Ramadan, *Les musulmanes d'occident*, p. 350

<sup>16</sup> Mohammed Bouyeri, as quoted in Frank J Buijs et al., *Strijders van eigen bodem*, p. 45

On balance, freedom of speech contributes to peaceful conflict resolution. Precisely because people are able to convert their anger into words or images, the road that leads from resentment to aggression becomes longer. It's no accident that the cartoons affair eventually led to violence in Middle Eastern countries, where freedom of speech is much more limited and people are therefore more likely to resort to violence as the last available means of expressing their discontent. The idea that limitations on freedom of speech could help to calm feelings within the Muslim community is therefore based on a misconception.

The impasse over Islam shows there's still no generally accepted basis for a discussion about its place in a liberal democracy. Diplomatic avoidance doesn't help, whereas honesty about the principle of religious freedom does. Most liberal societies do not yet live up to the ideal of equal treatment. There's every reason for a critical reconsideration of the majority culture and at the same time a need for self-examination on the part of the Muslim minority. Muslims could be far more open about what is happening in the mosques and take a more active stance against expressions of intolerance in their own circles.

Shaping public opinion in this way remains difficult for many Muslims. Solidarity with your own community is often understood as a promise to say nothing about the things that give offence within that community. Often people think: we're not going to hang out our dirty washing, we're vulnerable enough as it is. But room for newcomers in a society actually increases when differences of opinion are made more plainly visible. What Islam needs are whistle blowers, people who're willing to let go of their spurious loyalty to 'the community' and break out of that deadly encirclement by friend and enemy to speak freely about wrongdoing within the divided world of Islam – like the parents who revealed financial mismanagement at an Islamic school, for instance, or the writer who brought to light the way mosques were orchestrating claims for welfare payments, or women who draw attention to tyranny and violence behind the closed doors of the home, or leaders of mosques who inform the security services about extremism they come upon there.

Such whistle blowers will ease relations, counteracting the crude caricatures on both sides that result from distrust. Something that is by no means cohesive – whether it is the culture of the majority or of a minority – is too often seen as monolithic. To put it another way, peaceful co-existence is an extremely limited interpretation of what integration means. Compare the Europe of before and after 1989. Where there was cold peace and distance there is now space for interaction and rapprochement. The same applies to the multicultural society. We are still too much caught up in the era of diplomacy and non-interference, but society demands more than that. The future of Islam affects everyone, not just Muslims. Trust is another word for integration, and it will develop far more readily if pluralism becomes visible on all sides.

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## Social democracy and the fall-out from multicultural collectivisation

Dilsa Demirbag-Sten, author and journalist

Muslims in Sweden, as well as elsewhere in Europe, have been afflicted by policies that have gone too far in paying special attention to their religious status and group identity, leading to their homogenisation and lending currency to extremist minorities. Promoting individual rights above those of the group is fundamental to tackling such negative identity politics and ensuring a more genuinely egalitarian society

In many European countries anti-immigration parties have swept into the halls of parliament. Extreme right-wing organisations are flexing their muscles, and the Romani people are coming under attack in eastern Europe. Radical Islam is growing stronger. Anti-democratic forces in Europe are gaining recruits and even seem to be in symbiosis with each other. A Swiss majority has voted in support of a ban of minarets, although it has been vehemently emphasised that the ban is only on minarets, not mosques - as if that would make it any better.

An open society doesn't dispense special treatment. No religion or ethnicity should get more rights, nor should they have any rights denied or taken away. I have a right to criticise Islam without being persecuted, imprisoned or murdered, just as those of a contrary opinion have the right to criticise me. We may like, hate, respect, or revile each other, but we can't deny the other side its right to declare its view. Prohibiting a certain religion's architecture could easily be the first step in such a rights-denying process. But this is happening in Europe even as we speak – a corner of the world that ought to remember the Holocaust, nazism and communism all too well. How did we end up here?

An open society doesn't dispense special treatment. No religion or ethnicity should get more rights, nor should they have any rights denied or taken away

Ever since the Iranian high priests' fatwa against Salman Rushdie, bearded Islamic men who burn books and hate individuals' freedom have come to appear as representatives for all Muslims. In the eyes of the free world, Islam is a formidable threat to freedom of speech – the pride of democracy and an essential instrument to the securing of any individual's human and civic rights. The odd thing is that most Swedish Muslims have the same kind of democratic worldview as most other Swedes do.

Secular, cultural and atheist Muslims are just not sufficiently interested in religion to side with radical fundamentalists. Indeed, how many Swedes organise their lives around Christianity and let it dictate every aspect of their daily life? Few people can or want to be nothing but Muslims or Christians. We're a myriad of other things: parents, neighbours, journalists, entrepreneurs, homeowners, pet owners, feminists, to name but a few.

But for some restless, lost and cornered people, political Islam has become attractive as an instrument to obtain greater leverage in their new societies. They are loud enough and there are enough of them to maintain an image of Islam as intolerant, and sometimes they also pose a very real security threat. In a secular democratic state the people who see religion as a political project are also the ones who are the most outspoken in the public debate about religion, and, of course, these are also the same people

who demand collective rights in the name of religion.

The forces of political Islam that now find support among some young Europeans are the same forces that support stoning women as well as imprisoning and murdering anyone who opposes them. They are homophobic and anti-Semitic. Still, it is important to note that supporters of Islamic organisations and movements are in a minority among Muslims in Europe. But that doesn't prevent them from acting as the voice of all Muslims in the political and public arena. The free world appears to be confused. It has a compass when it comes to Christianity, but not Islam. In Europe, Islam is treated as a religion, an ethnicity, and a nationality, all bundled into one, successfully claiming the respect that comes with these collective identities. Without the warm reception of the Swedish media, politicians and the cultural establishment, Islamists would never have gotten as far as they have. What does this say about contemporary Sweden? Well, one thing it certainly says is that the defence of individual rights and freedoms is not as strong as it should be.

Politicians find it natural to turn to organised groups to broaden their constituencies. This is simply what politics is about – getting the support of groups of citizens big enough to have an impact on election results. Muslims have become such a group. The discussion concerning integration in Sweden has also become more and more focused on Muslims, making them an important target group. However, the majority of immigrants to Sweden actually come from Finland.

In order to reach out to Muslims, politicians have become increasingly anxious to hold and maintain a dialogue with people who present themselves or can be thought of as representatives of the Muslim community. These people, for their part, have been quick to take advantage of these empowering discussions by advancing demands for religious rights. Both the former and current governments have turned to self-proclaimed community leaders who are happy to provide a voice and a face for Muslims' indignation and demands.

To compensate for racism and discrimination, which certainly are real problems in our society, representatives of the political establishment have accommodated outspoken Islamic groups by granting funds and resources to strengthen Islamic identity. Soon there won't be a publicly financed institution, organisation or association that hasn't initiated "bridge-building" and "dialogue processes" with various Islamic organisations, thus politicising Islam even further. Politicians don't speak directly to Muslims, like they do to other Swedes. They go through the self-proclaimed religious leaders to understand Muslims. However, this is the approach least likely to succeed.

Secular parents are horrified when their children turn to, and are recruited by, political Islam. The current climate of debate, however, throws a young and troubled generation into the arms of orthodox religious forces that despise democratic values. We happily try to satisfy the demands of a minority from which we should distance ourselves, a minority that has always been marginal among Muslims in Europe. Religion, in this case Islam, scores 1–0.

### **How could good intentions turn out so badly?**

But let's take a closer look at what happened in Sweden. How could good intentions turn out so badly? It would appear as if our politicians have mistakenly assumed a certain fixed immigrant identity. We who have migrated to a country together with our children are believed to have certain common characteristics just because we were not born to Swedish parents in Sweden. This smacks of race biology rhetoric. In Sweden you remain an immigrant for two generations, as is revealed in the term

“second generation immigrants”. In the US, on the other hand, you are only an immigrant for four to six years. Bloodlines and cultural ties make someone a Swede, while in the US you become an American by living like one.

Official Swedish statistics on immigrants are very revealing regarding how ethnicity is politicised in Sweden. To be sure, newly arrived people find themselves in a special situation. They need a job, housing, and schools for their children. Regardless of nationality, ethnicity, religion, skin colour or gender, immigrants, at a certain point in time, have the same experiences and needs. Unfortunately, the state’s special treatment of people who have migrated to Sweden doesn’t cease once they’re established.

I migrated to Sweden as a child and my children, even though their father is a native Swede, are only seen as Swedes as long as they have a job and abide by the law. Should they become unemployed or commit a crime they are turned over to the statistics covering immigrants and are offered social rehabilitation, support, and protection as such. We have two parallel systems on the housing and labour markets: one for all Swedes and another that kicks in if an individual comes under the official immigrant statistics. When the economy takes a dive, integration efforts rise along with unemployment. Should a democracy define bloodlines and make political decisions based on them? I do not think so.

However, political Sweden is not alone. Swedish public television’s Halal TV is a striking example of how the media, like our politicians, entertains the belief that you can only communicate with Muslims through Islam. In order to compensate for a lack of diversity within Swedish public television and for increasing aversions against Muslims, they created a programme that intensely stigmatises Muslims. They picked out three veiled, orthodox women to lead a programme called Halal TV. These women avoid all physical contact (such as shaking hands) with men outside their family, and think that sex should only be permitted in a marriage between a man and a woman. They live strictly according to their own orthodox interpretation of Islam. The programme was more a projection of the TV staff’s idea of Muslims, than it was a reflection of Muslim reality in Sweden. The programme director for Swedish Television admitted that no other religious group would get the same opportunity to appear on television as the Halal ladies. However, benevolently lumping together Muslims into one homogenous group is not much better than doling out collective blame, especially when you thereby contribute to a fundamentalist conception of Muslims, shared by Islamist extremists and anti-Muslims racists alike.

A statistical citizen with a Muslim background, let us call him Azad, who despite his academic education is never called to a job interview, is hardly helped by Swedish television dishing up three religious women who will not shake a man’s hand and who talk about the prophet and the Koran in every programme. You can be pretty sure Azad thinks the veil is a symbol of oppression and considers these women homophobes and conservatives.

Swedish television and public service are not the only ones who do not understand or are confused by the difference between Islam and Muslims. In the Swedish cultural establishment the spread of post colonial theories has led to a relativisation of the idea of individuals’ freedoms and rights. Secular liberals who stand up for an individual’s rights are often accused of being intolerant and fundamentalist, just because they refuse to accommodate the demands for special consideration put forward by Islamists or other religious activists. We liberals can live with that, but we should be aware of the risk that we might get distracted by these accusations and lose focus on the primary issue: the rights and freedoms of the individual. These rights and freedoms are indeed at the heart of the matter.

Multicultural collectivisation, which is a misguided attempt to compensate for racism and discrimination, becomes a tool for xenophobic elements who blame Muslims for anything and everything bad going on in society. They believe all Muslims are pre-programmed to be undemocratic and oppress women. Once again Islam's underpinnings serve as a model. Based on lines from the Koran and political Islam, groups like the Swedish Democrats conjure up a threatening image of Muslims as being genetically evil, ready to conquer the free world by force. In their minds Muslims are collectively to blame for everything done in the name of Islam, in Sweden as well as in the rest of the world.

Muslims and immigrants live with discrimination and xenophobia on a daily basis. It affects their lives and what they can and cannot do. However, only the most orthodox Muslims who see Islam as a political project have anything to gain from multiculturalist compensation policies, like the Halal TV ladies, or from the fact that an imam, Abd al Haq Kielan, was invited by the Nobel Museum to censure an exhibition on freedom of speech. Azad, who is suffering from discrimination, might instead want to ban niqabs, or he might be a strong believer in freedom of speech. In other words, Muslims are a heterogeneous group and like everyone else in a democracy they have a right to decide for themselves how they want to relate to the world.

Only the most orthodox Muslims who see Islam as a political project have anything to gain from multiculturalist compensation policies

### Defending the principle of individual rights and freedoms

People, not religions or ideologies, have rights in a democracy. For example, freedom of speech and freedom of association are individual rights. A collective cannot exist without members. A collective is dependent on the people it is made up of and has no rights of its own. Only its individual members have these rights. Only in this way could the collective itself be morally justified, namely, by being formed by individuals with rights and freedoms. This ought to be self-evident in modern Europe, a continent which has risen from the ravages of war and genocide but whose triumphs are associated with democratic reforms and liberal rights and practices.

Multiculturalism's intellectual capital is supplied by postmodernists who have, by means of relativisation, undermined freedom - in particular freedom of speech, the necessary means to all kinds of civic and democratic rights. Unfortunately, the Swedish government has lent itself to this relativisation process, although the state is morally obligated to treat all its citizens equally. Our political and intellectual establishment has quite simply lost its way in a maze of structuralist conceptions and collectivisms.

When unemployment is high and the economy has taken a fall it is more urgent than ever to defend the principle of individual rights and freedoms being the foundation of a free and liberal Europe. The state's role is to guarantee its citizens their rights, not to discriminate between them. Equal rights for all. No less, no more, and no matter where our parents come from. If we achieve this, half our work is already done.

### Dilsa Demirbag-Sten is a Swedish author and journalist



## How can social democrats cherish identity and community in a multi-ethnic, cosmopolitan era?

Maurice Glasman, London Metropolitan University

Rather than getting tangled-up in debate about diversity, the starting point for social democrats must be questions of class, political economy and capitalism. The centre-left must advocate a “politics of common life” which does not demarcate based on identity, but rather speaks to the real concerns of people in a language that reflects the social democratic tradition

*“Structural changes and value shifts in recent decades have created new opportunities and risks in our societies which people are unequally equipped to manage and benefit from. Societies have become more secular, heterogeneous, diverse, individualistic and post-materialist. These trends have caused a dramatic shift in post-war traditions and institutions and produced (perceived and real) “winners” and “losers”, manifesting in a dislocation within the centre-left between cosmopolitan and communitarian world views, essentially a gulf between those who welcome globalisation and those who resist it. How should social democrats respond to the prevalent anxiety in Europe about moral and social decline and how can they advocate a style of cultural politics which resonates with social democratic voters, both liberal and communitarian?”*

This is the introduction I was sent in order to clarify the purpose of this reflection. Everything about its language, sensibility, methodology and philosophical assumptions are what is wrong with social democracy. It is the language of progressive social science, a genre characterised, more than anything, by unread journals, unhappy departments and disappointed lives. It is also the language of electoral defeat, or a party which has lost its popular support and is built on an alliance between public sector workers, ethnic minorities and the progressive middle class. Why is it so wrong?

*‘Structural changes and value shifts in recent decades have created new opportunities and risks in our societies which people are unequally equipped to manage and benefit from.’*

The assumptions here are of a value free scientific analysis which is to be understood in terms of objective processes, which then have to be assessed in terms of risk, benefit and the effective management of change. What are these ‘structural changes’ and ‘value shifts’? This is spelled out quite clearly: ‘Societies have become more secular, heterogeneous, diverse, individualistic and post-materialist.’

Every one of these assumptions is contestable and probably wrong.

Our society is not becoming more secular. Immigration has transformed that assumption. And neither is it the case that the second generation is following expected modernisation theory concerning assimilation. Islam is the fastest growing religious community in Europe. But there are also thriving African and east European Christian communities. These are organised communities with interests and agendas that are far from secular. And what is the relationship with post-materialism at the end of the list? While it may be true that a certain kind of spiritualist environmental paganism has its roots in the secular tradition, it is by no means the case that it is a form of secularism, understood as a rational disenchantment of the world. And it is that paradigm, neutral social science, which is far more besieged in its claims to predictive power than theology. While there was the odd dissident,

economics departments did not predict the crash of 2008. Theologians were equally emphatic that there was something wrong with the economic system.

'Heterogeneous' is another odd assumption. Are our shops and high streets more diverse? Are our work experiences more or less homogenised? Local foods are besieged and dialects are dying, as are local newspapers and football clubs. Globalisation theory always talked up diversity as a positive outcome but what it delivered was always more of the same. 'Diversity', a kind of back up word for the heterogeneity but once again is there greater regional diversity, economic diversity, ownership? Marketing and branding do not speak of a more diverse world but a more focused brand. 'Individualism' is of no help in understanding the emergence of gangs, management theory or nationalist revivals.

Each of the assumptions is contested and probably wrong.

*'These trends have caused a dramatic shift in post-war traditions and institutions and produced (perceived and real) "winners" and "losers"; manifesting in a dislocation within the centre-left between cosmopolitan and communitarian world views, essentially a gulf between those who welcome globalisation and those who resist it.'*

What are we talking about here?

What are the dramatic shifts in post-war traditions and institutions? Amazingly, we still have the Christian and the Social Democrats, Conservative and Labour, parliaments and prime ministers. The degree of continuity, in historical terms, is the most extraordinary thing. Germany has the most stable and enduring republic in its history. The dramatic shift is based on dubious assumptions and shows no signs of having happened.

The next sentence with its recognition of 'real and perceived' winners and losers is the first recognition of the subjective understanding of citizens but seems to refer to an inferior understanding of people who lack the benefits of social scientific statistics which would put their lived experience in perspective. This seems to be

And in all this there is no mention of class, of political economy, of capitalism...the starting point for all discussions of globalisation and how social democrats can generate more democracy

the cause of the divide between cosmopolitan and communitarian world views. Setting aside that cosmopolitans can only be understood as a community, communities can only be understood, as is the case with traditions, by internal arguments within themselves; in other words through diversity and heterogeneity. And in all this there is no mention of class, of political economy, of capitalism. And that should be the starting point for all discussions of globalisation and how Social Democrats can generate more democracy in the social sphere, including within the economy.

Instead, a low grade argument in political theory between a group of constitutional lawyers and theorists of the self, which has nothing to do with the history of Labour or the Social Democratic Party of Germany take centre stage. The winners and losers of globalisation, understood as the increasing prerogative of capital to invest at the highest rate of return throughout the world, are the rich and the poor. The distinction between those who welcome it, and those who resist it, is meaningless. There are class positions of mediation that do not conform to it. No one is suggesting that we do away with guilds and protection for doctors, lawyers and accountants as a response to globalisation.

Globalisation is a class issue and there are many immigrant workers who are very cosmopolitan and communitarian, and the same applies to the civic bourgeoisie of Hamburg. Germany was the most 'resistant' European economy to globalisation in terms of its labour market restrictions, vocational rules and pension fund management yet it has emerged as the most durable and successful productive economy. Sometimes 'resistance' is 'welcome'.

The introduction ends with the following question and it is worth trying to engage with it.

*'How should social democrats respond to the prevalent anxiety in Europe about moral and social decline and how can they advocate a style of cultural politics which resonates with social democratic voters, both liberal and communitarian?'*

Well, let us forget about the liberal/communitarian distinction for a moment. The distinction being made here is between a progressive politics and a politics of the common good which recognises 'anxiety' not as the result of false consciousness and social pessimism, but as a genuine response to insecurity and loss of status. Social Democratic politics should not be looking for a common ground between liberals and communitarians, but between immigrants and locals, Christians and Muslims, public and private sector workers, middle and working class; developing local leaders, engaging in common action, pursuing the common good of the country by valuing the institutions of a common life and strengthening them. This is consistent with the tradition of Labour and German Social Democracy, of its growth and success. Its present marginality and electoral failure is not a result of maintaining that tradition but of neglecting its resources in generating renewal.

The fundamental role of social democracy is a resistance to the commodification of human beings and nature through democratic self-organisation. It does this through generating a movement towards the common good that is prepared to confront powerful interests in its name. This also involves a cultural politics of a common life, of a national story and a role for the party within that speaks to the real concerns of people. Immigration is higher than any period in history, it is a form of commodification in which people leave their homes for more money and undermine local workers. Our response has been to honour this through multi-culturalism, treating an economic issue as a matter of political morality and human rights. Progressive politics despises nation and tradition, but Social Democracy did not. It resisted capitalism in the name of loss and dispossession and demanded recognition in the body politic of the nation.

This also involves a cultural politics of a common life, of a national story and a role for the party within that speaks to the real concerns of people

A language of democratic resistance to capitalism speaks to all that is best about our tradition, which in Germany's case would include Mitbestimmung, handwerk, pension fund management, local banks, city government and strong federal decentralisation.

The SPD was born as that party. It developed a strong resistance to capitalism while refusing to acknowledge the domination of an oppressive state that claimed a higher morality. There has been no stronger force for democracy and liberty in Germany than the SPD. Bernstein said that the movement was everything and the ends were nothing. It is an insight we would do well to remember now.

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## Rethinking suburbia in an age of insecurity: hard times on the edge?

Rupa Huq, Kingston University

The changing demographic mix of modern suburbia has made them key battlegrounds in British politics. Inhabited by diverse people, with multifaceted identities negotiating increasingly atomized and time-poor lives, they offer fertile ground for rebuilding community cohesion – and by extension, political rejuvenation. This can come about through local solutions to the common grievances of modern day suburbia’s ageing and anxious populations

This chapter touches on the themes of identity, community and social democracy to see how these concepts relate to contemporary suburbia. Although traditionally built as desirable areas in which to live, since their creation the suburbs – areas close to but distinct from the city, boasting the benefits of general salubrity and greenery – have been accused of social and architectural monotony. They are also where most people in the UK live, latterly attracting political interest from Conservative Boris Johnson’s successful 2008 London Mayoral campaign and alluded to in Labour’s post-mortem examinations of the 2010 general election defeat. Ed Miliband’s concept of the ‘squeezed middle’, Policy Network’s report Southern Discomfort Again and Nick Clegg’s “alarm clock Britain” all allude to suburban voters and their concerns, which make them an ideal test case for community living.

### Changing values and situations

In Anglo-Saxon parlance suburbs evoke aspiration and progress, security and social respectability. Stereotypically seen as middle class and “safe”, suburbs were built in optimism on the principle of defensible space in both their owner-occupier and social housing “homes fit for heroes” versions; their great expansion was in the inter-war years of the 1930s. Yet, as old models of hidebound class fragment in the face of occupational restructuring and ethnic diversity, it has been argued that insecurity characterises modern suburban living – polling shows that immigration and fear of crime are the top suburban fears. Added to this is economic and environmental instability and the spectre of domestic terrorism. All these are arguments for a rethinking of a suburbia that, in the 21st century, is increasingly culturally diverse with a built environment often suffering from un-let retail units and an ageing and anxious population.

Insecurity characterises modern suburban living – polling shows that immigration and fear of crime are the top suburban fears

How do these characteristics fit with centre-left positioning? Suburban values embody materialism – private house builders marketed suburban living as a consumer choice in contrast to the constraints of remaining in a decaying city. Yet suburbs no longer fit the traditional template of dormitory towns for a male breadwinning city-centre workforce with its attendant housewives. The dual-earner household is now the norm and a networked society allows paid working from home for all. Various centre-left shibboleths have fractured: trade union membership has long been in decline, the public sector is set to contract and, as Michael Kenny argues, the politics of redistribution has been replaced with the assertion of minorities who fight for recognition. David Cameron has continued the tradition of Conservative championing of the suburban values of moralism and property ownership (take Thatcher’s granting council tenants the right to purchase their homes) in promising tax-breaks for the married and changes to inheritance tax. The claim that “we’re all in this together”, coming from

George Osborne, a Tory of considerable means, has been contradicted by a lack of action on bankers' bonuses and the fact that women will be hardest hit by Conservative spending cuts that include changes to the child benefit system.

Other traditional suburban identifications, too, are in flux. Rising rates of divorce and reconfigured households help the property market remain dynamic, with the result that the nuclear family, once the cornerstone of suburban life, is less dominant. Increasing lifespans have made social care a key concern. And it seems the British are less and less a nation of joiners – many early suburbs were constructed around church buildings but attendance has fallen in an age of rationalism, science and progress (though church school admissions criteria has sustained congregations to an extent). Social class is less easily definable than before, requiring new classificatory models. Occupational groupings are more fluid, with indeterminate service sector jobs (e.g. call-centre staff) difficult to place in the old white collar / blue collar binary. However, your parentage and postcode at birth still play a defining role in future life-chances even if some politicians, including John “classless society” Major and croquet-playing John “we are all middle class now” Prescott, have indicated that class struggle is an anachronistic relic of the past.

Mainstream politicians in Britain have tended to pride themselves on the consensual practice of a restrictive immigration policy combined with allowing ex-colonial subjects the vote, which has made minorities a section of the electorate to woo rather than demonise. Old models saw suburbs as a place for ‘white flight’, where those who wanted to move out of cities with increasingly diverse populations could – and did. One could coin the term ‘brown flight’ for the embourgeoisement and suburbanisation of Labour-voting ethnic minorities along familiar arterial roads and transport links – African Caribbeans from inner-city Brixton to suburban Croydon, for example, or Asians from Southall to Harrow. Suburbia has been the point of arrival for others – South Koreans in the south London suburb of New Malden, for example. Asian communities (in British terms, those from the Indian subcontinent) have been particularly prone to suburbanisation though, importantly, there are many variations within the ‘Asian’ bloc term – in Harrow and Brent, affluent Indians have helped to deliver previously safe Tory constituencies to Labour since 1997, while in the north of England frustrations over structural decline among Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, stoked by extremist rightwing provocation, flared into riots in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in 2001. Ironically, the jobs that the now-parents and grandparents came from Sylhet or the Punjab to do in these former cotton-mill towns have since been outsourced back to the subcontinent. Of all the groups that Britain has sought to integrate, the rise of Islam has caused the most alarm (though anxieties around Islamic tensions predate the war on terror).

Some of the structural features common to the northern towns involved in the 2001 disturbances are also present in the south. Luton is the base of the English Defence League, formed specifically to oppose Islam. It was where the failed Stockholm terror plot was based and where the London bombers set out from in 2005. Once considered to be a town outside London, Luton has become a de facto suburb of it due to the capital's expanded commuting pull. Luton's biggest employer Vauxhall, once a thriving car plant allowing employees of different ethnic and religious backgrounds to mix on the production line, now has a dramatically shrunken workforce. Economic woes and an adjustment to de-industrialisation feed simmering tension. Barking and Dagenham, a borough just east of London's financial district, similarly suffered after its major employer Ford largely withdrew. The area has become popular with African immigrants who often move from inner-London boroughs in the same way as documented in the classic sociological work *Family and Kinship in East London* in the 1960s. The white electorate's disenchantment was tapped in the 2006 local elections, where the

BNP became the second-biggest force on the local council. One thing that radical Islam, the BNP and the EDL can all agree on is a lessening faith in mainstream politics.

### Prospects for social democracy in suburbia

Though opposition is a new phenomenon to many New Labour young Turks, the root-and-branch policy review currently underway allows Ed Miliband the opportunity to fashion a strong manifesto with a clear message that can be steadfastly stuck to at the next election. It is said that parties campaign in poetry but govern in prose. Electoral logic dictates that the resultant policies must appeal to mainstream voters in marginal, often suburban, seats without alienating traditional core Labour supporters. A convincing narrative has to be presented to the electorate without sacrificing principle. Labour tapped into suburban values in recent years by repeatedly emphasising 'hard working families' but their 2010 offer, 'A Future Fair For All', did not appeal to voters' instincts as directly as the Conservatives' policy of changes to inheritance tax, and were not as easily graspable as Labour's 1997 election pledges of targets that were universally popular and fitted on a calling-card. A pledge of equal access to life-chances for all could appear, to the status-conscious inhabitants of suburbia, to advocate a process of "levelling down" to the status conscious of suburbia. Signals that the new leadership considers the pre-emptive "liberal interventionism" rationale of the Iraq invasion to have been mistaken could rebuild bridges with those who deserted Labour after 2005 and win back lost seats. The collapse of the credibility attached to monetarism as an economic philosophy offers an opportunity to build a new economic policy focusing less on speculative asset bubbles like the housing market and more on better regulation of financial services to curb the actions of 'casino capitalism' bankers. A new programme could include employee share options. It should not ignore the politics of aspiration. It should address affordable housing with solutions not only for council housing but also reforming expensive shared equity schemes (often involving flats unsuitable as family homes) and recognising the natural impulse for home ownership. A welfare programme must be devised where the benefits system makes work pay. Political recovery may be upon us already: opinion polls and the Oldham by-election have put Labour decisively ahead, though the election is a long way off.

The Conservatives' 'big idea', the small-state 'big society' in which citizens and consumers become owners, exercising autonomy in public services, needs to be exposed as a dangerous dogma-driven cover for cuts. Looser community politics could be a beneficiary of the malaise surrounding traditional politics – Barack Obama's presidential campaign successfully mobilised voters via the principles of community organisation. Labour has effectively mobilised communities to vote for them. In the 2010 local elections the BNP failed to win a single seat on the council in Barking and Dagenham and its media-courting leader Nick Griffin failed to take the parliamentary seat there after concentrated activity from the pressure group 'Hope Not Hate', supported by the TUC and Daily Mirror. This rainbow alliance from inside and outside the party, while not allowing itself to be in any way tempted by the dog-whistle politics of racism, could be a possible model for moving forward. Labour also has a strong local government presence which it needs to build on.

The other story of May 2010 was Labour's impressive performance in the council elections held all over the country. Labour gains in suburbs including Ealing and Harrow provide a strong local government base where councils can propagate responsible financial stewardship in tough times to popularise the Labour brand country-wide. It is also a mistake to take any voters for granted: the settled UK Asian community often has the most anti-immigration stances. Conservative pandering to social conservatism, e.g. in the moralism of proposing tax breaks for marriage, could well be a

misjudgement when opinion polling has showed that attitudes once thought to be socially liberal are now more widespread, increasingly becoming the norm – tolerance of homosexuality, for example. Indeed, before their recession-induced about-turn the Conservatives had advocated sticking to Labour’s spending plans in much the same way as New Labour pledged to retain Tory targets in its first two years of office, suggesting that social democracy has ‘won’, at least intellectually.

The longstanding gulf between people and the authorities has occurred over time and, therefore, will not be solved overnight. Harnessing the opposition to coalition cuts, as exemplified in the recent student protests, could be fertile territory for Labour but it needs to channel that activism to the ballot box. Labour needs to demonstrate to voters that it is on their side and working with communities, i.e. doing things with people and for people rather than to them. The idea of citizenship is a relatively new one in the UK but could be one area that Labour could make its own. A referendum on the Alternative Vote system could be another area in which Labour can shape national opinion, campaigning for a voting system fairer than the one which it did, paradoxically, do well out of right up until 2010; even though, on the face of it, the issue is more suited to the chattering classes and lacks mass appeal. During the last parliament it was the Conservatives who opposed Labour legislation on detaining pre-trial suspects without charge and compulsory ID cards, with libertarian rightwingers like David Davis MP arguing that national security was being used as a cover for eroding civil liberties. Now that the coalition is renegeing on promises in this area, for example the pledge to abolish control orders, this is territory that Labour should move in on. At all times Labour should not forget that it is about defending society’s weakest, but this should not mean excluding the aspiring classes.

From 1997 to 2005 Labour was able, to some extent, to assert itself as the natural party of government – a task in which it failed in last year’s general election. The party does not have to be out of power for a generation. It needs to mobilise different groups including suburbanites, women, younger voters and left-wing intellectuals as well as its stereotypical natural voters in industrial heartlands. There needs to be a reconsideration of cohesive communities as a goal for everyone rather than something affecting various ‘other people’ elsewhere. Labour should be heartened that, despite unprecedented economic crises and the most unpopular prime minister since polling began, it was able to deny Cameron the overall victory he craved, forcing him into an alliance with the Liberal Democrats.

## Conclusion

Now more than ever before it is the suburbs that will be the most decisive battleground in deciding the next election outcome by which time the fragility of the shaky coalition, as well as the extent of the cuts, will be clearer. Suburbia, however, needs to be saved from its clichés and redefined as a vibrant place of possibilities rather than the neither-here-nor-there territory to which it has long been relegated. As stated in a recent leader in *The Independent*, “Suburbs and small towns can appear the very essence of parochialism, mediocrity and conformity” (29 December 2010). Modernity has taken its toll in the suburbs. The promised utopia of cool Britannia and its attendant urban regeneration with city centre pedestrianisation with a dash of greenery has barely touched many areas of the city limits or, worse still, has adversely affected them, leaving a trail of empty retail units engendering suburban decay. Labour needs to match and better this. Rather than Labour carrying associations of being in thrall to big business, finance and multinational-led globalisation, its strength in local government offers Labour councils a chance to show small businesses that it is on their side by incentivising local spending. Localism can still be a cause to be championed even if we are tied to international agreements.

Values reflect times and circumstances. The credit search company Experian recently found that 57% of Middle Britain struggle to find enough hours in the day to manage life. Ulrich Beck's 'risk society' concept describes individualism and choice triumphing over old bonds. In France, a country that, like the UK, has been dealing with the stresses of postcolonialism, the term *l'insecurité* has been part of political dialogue since the 1990s and refers to a clutch of issues including immigration, unemployment and law and order. More recently, it seems that we are constantly told we are in an age of uncertainty. The UK joint research councils launched a 10-year multidisciplinary Global Uncertainties strategic research programme in 2008 to investigate "environmental change and diminishing natural resources, food security, demographic change, poverty, inequality and poor governance, new and old conflicts, natural disasters and pandemics, expansion of digital technologies, economic downturn and other important global developments" (RCUK 2010). Such complexity could explain the solace sought in harking back to simpler times, as seen in the popularity of television costume dramas (the phenomenally successful *Downton Abbey*) and even a return to the land via social networking (the Facebook application *Farmville*).

Perhaps it is a mistake to seek one banner under which Britain's diverse multi-faceted mosaic can unproblematically unite

Suburbia is a territory fraught with multiple, overlapping and fundamentally contested cultures. Multiculturalism has fallen from favour, if not been all but discredited, in the post 7/7 climate but perhaps it is wiser to stopping approaching it as a problem to be treated in problem-solving terms. Old institutions (church, state, parliament, party, union etc.) may hold less sway with the suburban voter or British resident/citizen/subject at large but this a reality to be accepted and worked with rather than bewailed. Class consciousness, too, seems questionable as a leftist totem when workers have largely become customer-consumers. Suburbs built to appeal to traditionalism, as seen in their nostalgic architecture, now embody modernity. They are inhabited by diverse peoples, with multifaceted identities negotiating increasingly atomised and time-poor lives. Shoehorning them into constructed categories in a quest to find 'what people can unite around' seems a little forced when genuine community cohesion is more likely to be forged rather than occurring instantaneously. Perhaps it is a mistake to seek one banner under which Britain's diverse multi-faceted mosaic can unproblematically unite.

By 2015 we will be 18 years away from Blair's high-watermark of 1997: the same distance that 1997 was from 1979. Fighting the next election on the lessons of 1997 would be deeply misguided. So, what certainties can be relied on in an age of insecurity? With the economic crisis exposing the limits of untrammelled turbo-capitalism worldwide, Labour now has an opportunity, free of the strains of office, to develop a programme based on centre-left values to present to the electorate when the time comes, rather than simply promising more of the same. 'The economy (stupid)' matters, but not exclusively and not at the expense of culture. For electoral purposes, suburban dwellers should not all be seen as an undifferentiated mass. Britain's former imperial possessions and post-war immigration have changed the face of suburbia irrevocably. Global uncertainty should not be feared in itself but accepted and negotiated; perhaps the reason that it has perplexed us as much as it has is because in normal peacetime conditions life had become too predictable. Making this argument, Tim Lott has quoted Churchill as remarking that, "Without a measureless and perpetual uncertainty, the drama of human life would be destroyed." Contested terms like the neither-here-nor-there territory of 'suburbia' or a difficult to pin down 'age of insecurity' might be outside policy-makers' theoretical comfort zones but they need addressing head-on by Labour if it wants to avoid the next general election going the same way as the last one.

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## Identity and politics in Europe, Flanders and Belgium

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Social democrats need to do more to embrace collective identities. In viewing identity as a socio-economic question with a social policy answer, they have overlooked the multiplicity of ways in which people now define themselves. In remembering that every successful solidarity movement is rooted in a constructive sense of community, the left must do more to develop a persuasive account of the role of identity in modern societies

What is identity? 'Identity' refers to the ways in which we define ourselves, with some consistency throughout time, and in similarity to or distinction from others. Although everyone's identity is more or less contingent, having an identity is a real and inevitable human characteristic: every person has some idea of who he or she is as connected to the question where he or she comes from.<sup>1</sup>

From a social democratic perspective, this question seems to be limited to a particular significance: the socio-economic position. For example, a young man, from a lower social background without much schooling is also possibly discriminated against when searching for a job. This profile holds an ideal combination for someone to be socially needy and for running a higher risk of criminal behaviour of some kind. An appropriate policy, according to the social democrats, would be to invest, stimulate and motivate this person, while also tackling discrimination. One objective is to try and alter the statistics that social scientists present, knowing that whoever finds himself in a different, better group also leads a better, healthier, more accomplished life. This is a perfectly understandable and even laudable project. But there is a different question, namely how this person perceives of himself (or herself). Here the question of identity arises. Especially for social democracy, identity is crucial for the possibility of creating a successful social project. To the question 'who am I?', this person does not reply "socially slighted person" but "man", "Dutch-speaking Fleming", "Catholic", "fan of FC Antwerp" and so on. The rapidly changing world may pose a threat to this person, because it no longer suffices to speak one's own language. The social code in the area where he lives has changed and nuisances make him feel unwelcome in his previously familiar surroundings. I give this example, but I could have referred to the position of an immigrant, or of a French-speaking Belgian to make a similar point.

The problem is the following: in not really addressing the issue of identity, social democrats define the question of identity as a socio-economic one for which the appropriate remedy is an adequate social policy. But most people do not primarily define themselves in socio-economic terms. They refer to their cultural origin, gender, religious beliefs and so on.

Social democrats define the question of identity as a socio-economic one for which the appropriate remedy is an adequate social policy

Moreover, the attitude of social democrats is also inconsistent. They recognise multiplicity when they explicitly abandon references to the 'working class' and third way theoreticians have pointed out how outdated it is to consider left wing voters as 'workers'. But they do not take into consideration that the loss of this primary identification reinforces other possible identifications, also with cultural entities. Identifications are by definition to some extent collective, even if we partake in several forms of collectiveness at the same time.<sup>2</sup> Individualism has made 'belonging to' more flexible, but it has not

<sup>1</sup> From Oedipus to Darwin, wondering where one comes from appears as an essential human question. Maybe the interest in genealogy is one of the most fundamental differences between humans and other animals.

erased every sense of belonging, nor the emotional, personal attachment people can feel towards their identity (or identities).

Besides, multiplicity does not mean every identity is acceptable. There are values, norms and social positions with which one does not want to identify. Thus by affirming an identity we exclude others. For instance: a woman can feel sympathy towards the struggling of minorities, but sense a strong aversion to those cultures that do not recognise the equality of women. No matter how willing one is to realise that one's own identity and background are contingent and in terms of identification somewhat interchangeable, there are demands for identity to which a person will say: no pasarán! This is not a merely rational matter, and an abstract defence of human rights will probably not suffice. A mere abstract rhetoric of rights will not reassure a woman who observes the rise of anti-feminism in reality.

### Collective identity in politics

A solid democratic political system guarantees the plurality of political perspectives, and thus of collective identifications within the political debate. The democratic process is supposed to reflect the plurality in society.<sup>2</sup> If left wing parties do not create the necessary space for this evolution, voters will be attracted to parties that do. How should one go about this problem? An awareness of its importance is definitely a first step. Secondly, we must touch on the question of how to conceive of the role of the government, and how to determine the involvement of citizens in the political process.

The gradual move towards a liberal paradigm has caused several difficulties for social democratic theory. Left wing ideologues have taken over some essential elements from the implicit (neo)liberal anthropology: individuals are rational beings who choose whatever is in their self interest. Voters are like customers or consumers: they will pick what they feel serves their best interest between different offers on the (free) market. Individuals are also responsible for their choices (since they supposedly really have options). Consequently, political reflections are strategic and pragmatic: whatever works, matters. But what if the anthropological presuppositions of (neo)liberalism are wrong, or at least seriously lacking in depth and perspective for tackling the challenges of our globalised society? What if society is something more than the sum of independently striving individuals?

A solid democratic political system guarantees the plurality of political perspectives, and thus of collective identifications within the political debate

This anthropological question would not be so pressing if the individualist bias were not the (implicit) scientific model for the social sciences. Here we touch upon another issue: education and schooling. The question I want to address here is not only the gap between the educated and non-educated as the basis for the rise of populism.<sup>4</sup> But how diverse is the education of the educated? To what extent do we still find diversity in approaches? Or do most of the top universities offer small variations on the theme of free market appraisal with all the consequences for other fields that go with it? The days when Marxists such as Ralph Miliband, the father of the current leader of the Labour party, taught at the London School of Economics and offered contrasting views in the field of economy seem gone. If one looks at the Obama administration – supposedly a more left wing government than the Bush administration – it becomes clear that most of the top collaborators either come from or go to firms and research institutes that promoted exactly those financial models and theories which lead to the economic crisis.

<sup>2</sup> As Tom Nairn puts it: "no particular particularity may be essential, but particularity as such was inescapable, and inescapably promoted by the real conditions of modern development." in *Faces of Nationalism. Janus Revisited*.

<sup>3</sup> See Mouffe, Ch. (2005). *The democratic paradox*. London: Verso.

<sup>4</sup> This issue is well documented by Elchardus (2001). David Van Reybrouck (2008) also accurately describes the more recent aversion higher educated people feel towards the 'common' classes.

To give but a few examples: Larry Summers, director of the National Economic Council for President Obama, is also the former president of Harvard University. Previously he served under Clinton. Obama's new chief of staff, William Daley, was an executive at JP Morgan, and Rahm Emanuel had a career in finance between his work for the Clinton administration and his appointment as Obama's chief of staff. Upon the death of Milton Friedman, Summers published an article in the New York Times, entitled 'The Great Liberator', stating significantly that "any honest democrat will admit we are all Friedmanites now" (NYT, November 19 2006).

European social democrats seem to have followed somewhat along these lines: socialists claim to be on the side of the 'weaker', but they do not criticise or analyse which forces determine the existing relations of power. This reluctance to make sharp distinctions determines their economic view: that the socialist idea of solidarity implies responsibility on the part of the wealthiest and the acceptance of a fairness code.<sup>5</sup> But whether such measures are sufficient to redistribute goods in a system where the gap between the haves and the have-nots is widening, is highly doubtful. It is also unclear how and even whether such a fairness code will pass. Furthermore, the fairness code as a solution to market fundamentalism (to use Stiglitz's term) is a good example of how economic or political questions are reduced to a moral theme. I am not directly pleading for a revival of Marxism here. My point is rather that the dominant discourse in economics is no longer being contested,<sup>6</sup> and neither are its anthropological presuppositions that leave little place for a view other than the rationalist-individualistic one.

What, then, is left for politicians and citizens to do? As the proposed models do not question the existing relations of power, they hardly aim at directly empowering people in a political sense. Although social democratic politicians insist that they listen to 'people' ('*de mensen*', not 'the people', because that is a political concept, referring to the nation),<sup>7</sup> their idea is mainly that politicians will organise fiscal policy in a redistributive fashion. The remaining task for citizens is to vote for the 'right' representatives, who are mostly educated people with a very similar educational background. Members of parliament are more highly educated (in Belgium 93% of members of parliament attended higher education while only 25% of the general population were similarly educated) – this is the so-called 'diplomacy democracy' (Mark Bovens). Europe itself seems like an elite construction built by specialists and experts (method 'Monnet'). Many European citizens feel they have been ignored, and less well-educated people tend to be even more sceptical of Europe.

However, can left wing parties succeed in uniting people when they deny the necessity of collective identifications? Unfortunately, the issue is treated reluctantly. The Flemish journalist Paul Goossens, for instance, suggests social democrats should keep on considering the 'identity delusion' with suspicion (De Standaard, October 23 2010). At the same time, he regrets that Europe seldom figures in national debates, since discussing the European Union would offer some counterweight to the rise of nationalism. Yet, I believe it is very difficult to make citizens more involved in a European project without addressing the matter of a 'European identity'. This identity has to have a positive content. So left wing authors create their own difficulties as long as they only consider an unidentifiable multicultural non-identity as an identity. Besides, the postmodernist approach may be appealing for an elite group who have the choice between many options (they eat Chinese food, go on holiday in Kenya, read Greek poetry, drink Italian wine and follow a Spanish language course). But this lifestyle is less of an option for the lower social classes who benefit less from a globalised world. Naturally, this group will be more inclined to hang on to a more rigidly defined notion of identity.

Third way theoreticians describe our society as a risk society. But the risk is not equally spread. We live in a multicultural society, but not every group experiences this multiculturalism in the same way. The lower social classes run higher risks and live in more mixed areas. They are more frequently confronted

<sup>7</sup> I will return to the 'the people' rhetoric in Flanders.

with the downsides of globalisation (pressure on the labour market, an absence of cheap housing and so on). This also affects the question of identity: the 'us' versus 'them' becomes more apparent when there are effectively more 'other' people living around the 'us'. Especially when immigrant groups – as some tend to do – have a very outspoken sense of identity and consider it their right to fully express their traditions, even in public life. In conclusion, as a consequence of globalisation, the reinforcement of identity has become a permanent matter.

Actually, I doubt whether striving for one's identity and belonging to a left wing movement are incompatible. In fact, the opposite is true, and for a logical reason. Since globalisation is to a large extent a neoliberal project (or a consequence of the neoliberal free market ideology), minorities and popular culture are threatened. I refer to one example of a positive alliance between identity and a strong left wing engagement when, in 1974, the communist composer Mikis Theodorakis conducted his orchestra during the first concert after the fall of the Greek military junta. In a full stadium, they played Ise Elines (You are Greek). The song begins with this lyric: "you have to become again what you once were". Then it becomes clear how ambivalent being 'Greek' actually is, for instance that "you have to learn to recognise (or accept) your tears". Betrayal and grief are part of the experience. This is not surprising if one looks at the history of Greece, with its civil wars, invasions and political instability. Yet the last lyric of the song repeats the first. What being Greek then means remains for every citizen to decide.

Every left wing project has international ambitions - each wants to look beyond its own borders. But every successful solidarity movement is rooted in a constructive sense of community. At least, it remains doubtful whether a successful, ambitious movement can really do without this sense. Is it possible to strive for common goals, like more fairness and better distribution of opportunities or goods, without also sharing the expression of ideals and values; without sharing many variations of stories that remain recognisable to all? This is one of the main questions for the future of a successful left wing movement. Put differently: how do we deal with the individualism introduced by (neo)liberalism that we have grown accustomed to and cherish, but that also leaves left wing movements somehow disempowered? Does not recognising identity, or even discussing it, offer a workable alternative for social democracy?

Every successful solidarity movement is rooted in a constructive sense of community

In the main it is populist and nationalist parties that strongly express collective identities. They are increasingly successful. From a European left wing perspective, this is a nightmare scenario: it is part of Europe's history – and I believe part of its tragedy - that the notion of 'identity' is reminiscent of a very dark past. Even today, it seems as if using it would all too easily lead us to genocide and war.<sup>8</sup> But is this really so?

### Europe's history

At least one aspect of the solution to this question involves the relationship we establish with the past. 1989 was a turning point: we put the 20th century behind us, declared the "end of history" and began the era of the uncontrolled free market and optimism concerning globalisation. Ever since, the past seems to hold little interest for the present, at least too little to study it factually and with precision. The recent past has become a "moral memory palace", as Tony Judt<sup>9</sup> puts it.

Unfortunately, remembering the past is therefore reduced to an emotional or morally burdened memory. Examples of this evolution are the rapid analogies made between the situation of minorities

8 For example, Belgian's former prime minister (Flemish liberal party), Guy Verhofstadt, suggested that mentioning identity may lead to another Auschwitz. (De Standaard, February 24 2010).

9 Judt, T. "What have we learned, if anything?" <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2008/may/01/what-have-we-learned-if-anything/?page=1>.

today and the Holocaust. Such references may seem profound, but they only show how emotions prevail in the debate, how anxiety triggers reactions without adding to our knowledge or understanding, either of the past, or of our contemporary experiences. The past thus continues to exercise its influence, but in the realm of victimhood and suffering. We relate to the past through imagination, emotion or moral judgment. This, I believe, is a deplorable evolution. The main task is to know the past factually and to make peace with it. To see it for what it is, neither to worship it nor to vilify it. Precisely because the European past is problematic for many groups of immigrants a critical but rational assessment is crucial. This subject deserves another paper, but I will briefly indicate what I mean.

Human beings are equal but ideas are not, especially because ideas have an effect on society as not all ideas promote peace and wellbeing in the same way. The criterion here is not (just) a moral, but a political one. Equality between man and woman is not just another idea, it is a better one than inequality. Freedom of speech is better than its restriction. Free and critical research of any subject is better than censorship and idolatry. Taking responsibility for one's actions is better than putting the responsibility on someone else. I do not mean to suggest that these notions do not exist outside of Europe, but I do think that in Europe we have no reason for not applying (and explaining) them without compromise. The unambiguous and explicit support of these ideas, also through actions, is – or should be – part of a left wing programme.

Identity and history are closely related: in wondering who we are, a reconstruction of our past is inevitable. It is to no one's advantage to let imagination prevail (imagined one-sided European greatness, or one-sided European horrors; imagined one-sided Arab unity or greatness, one-sided Arab horrors and so on). To the extent to which diversity and interculturality mean leaving open the moralising memorials of the past, or the false imagining of each other's and one's own past without recourse to scientific analysis, western societies may lose their capacity for living together peacefully – at least in the long run.<sup>10</sup> There is an urgent choice to be made about how we deal without inheritance.

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<sup>10</sup> On the crucial and constructive role the 'elites' should play in keeping the balance between cosmopolitanism and national identity, see: Cuperus, R. *op. cit.*