# MULTICULTURALISM, ETHNICITY AND INTEGRATION: CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

**ABSTRACT**

In most of the largest European cities, the proportion of non-White citizens currently reaches 15 to 30%. A high degree of racial/ethnic/religious mix in its principal cities will be the norm in 21st century Europe, and will shape its national economic, cultural and political life. The author explores similarities and differences between Western Europe and the American non-White immigration experience in order to shed light on future trends in this field, in Western Europe. At least three trends are currently visible: accommodation or novel compromises; renewal of Christianity as a cultural marker; and radical secularism. The author concludes that while the Christian Right could be a domestic obstacle to the civic integration of Muslims and Islam in the US, radical secularism risks playing the same role in Europe.

**TARIQ MODOOD**

Tariq Modood teaches at the University of Bristol and is the Bristol Director of the Leverhulme Programme on Migration and Citizenship. Author of *Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity and Muslims in Britain* (University of Minnesota Press and University of Edinburgh Press, 2005) and co-editor of *Multiculturalism, Muslims and Citizenship: A European Approach* (Routledge, 2006), his research interests include theory and politics of racism, multiculturalism and secularism, ethnic and national identities, ethnic disadvantage and progress in employment and education, and the politics of being Muslim in the West.

Currently most of the largest cities, especially the capital cities of North-Western Europe, are composed of approximately 15% to 30% non-White persons (i.e., of non-European descent). Even without further large-scale immigration, being a young, fertile population, these proportions will grow for at least one generation more before they stabilize, reaching or exceeding 50% of some cities in the next decade onwards, with Malmö, Birmingham, Leicester and Marseille leading the way. The trend will include some of the larger urban centres of Southern Europe. A high degree of racial/ethnic/religious mix in its principal cities will be the norm in 21st century Europe, and will characterize its national economic, cultural and political life, as it has done in the 20th (and will do so in the 21st) century USA. Of course there will also be important differences between Western Europe and the USA. Amongst these is that the majority of non-Whites in European countries are Muslims; the UK, where Muslims form about one-third of non-Whites or ethnic minorities, is the exception. With over 15 million Muslims in Western Europe today, this group is larger than the combined populations of Finland, Denmark and Ireland. In this context, with the "Cartoon Affair" and the riots in the suburbs of Paris and elsewhere being the latest in a series of conflicts focussed on minority-majority relations, questions about integration, equality, racism and Islam have become central to European politics. We need, however, some clarity about what the important questions are; we can also usefully learn – positively and negatively – from the American experience.

## Assimilation, integration and multiculturalism

A good place to start is to clarify the key terms of assimilation, integration and multiculturalism. I propose the following. *Assimilation* is where the processes affecting the relationship between social groups are seen as one-way, and where the desired outcome for society as a whole is seen as involving least change in the ways of doing things of the majority of the country and its institutional policies. This may not necessarily be a *laissez-faire* approach – for the State can play an active role in bringing about the desired outcome, as with early 20th century "Americanization" policies towards European migrants in the United States – but the preferred result is one where the newcomers do little to disturb the society they are settling in and become as much like their new compatriots as possible. *Integration* is where processes of social interaction are seen as two-way, and where members of the majority community as well as immigrants and ethnic minorities are required to do something; so the latter cannot alone be blamed for "failing to or not trying to integrate." The established society is the site of institutions – including employers, civil society and the government – in which integration has to take place, and they accordingly must take the lead. *Multiculturalism* is where processes of integration are seen both as two-way and as working differently for different groups. In this understanding, each group is distinctive, and thus integration cannot consist of a single template (hence the "multi"). The "culturalism" – by no means a happy term either in relation to "culture" or "ism" – refers to the understanding that the groups in question are likely to not just be marked by newness, or phenotype,

or socio-economic location but by certain forms of group identities. The latter point indeed suggests that a better, though longer, term might be "pluralistic integration."

### The American experience

While the 19th and first half of the 20th century Europe has been a continent of emigration and nation-states, 19th and 20th century America has been a continent of immigration and continental federation, the creation of a super-state. From the middle of the 20th century new processes were initiated in Europe both in relation to emigration/immigration and to national/supra-national formations. Europe began to move in the direction of American processes; though it was still somewhat short of the US by the end of the 20th century, this was moreso in relation to continental federation than to levels of immigration and of immigration as a source, not just of labour but of citizens.

Key features of the American experience:

- Constitutional patriotism/ nationalism, the American dream and economic expansion, early 20th century policies of assimilation giving way to hyphenation (Irish-Americans, African-Americans etc.), but integration perhaps being facilitated by the desire to be part of a successful nation, a superpower;
- No governmental or legal "recognition" of ethnic diversity in a major way but a *laissez-faire* attitude to the formation of residential concentrations, to ethnic community-based churches as a major basis for integrating new populations into an existing social landscape, to ethnic blocs in politics, and to various minorities actively campaigning in "homeland" politics and exercising influence on US foreign policy (e.g. Jews in relation to Israel, Cubans in relation to Cuba).

This has been labelled "the Ethnicity Paradox": allowing, even encouraging, ethnic identity maintenance in the form of community organizations and cultural pride displays as a way of not damaging the self-esteem of migrants and non-coercively achieving civic integration and national loyalty. This patriotic integration in a context of *laissez-faire* ethnic diversity was primarily the experience of "White ethnics," of European migrants and their progeny. For native Blacks, the primary experience has been that of "the colour line." Hence the US has had not one, but two dominant ways of dealing with "difference": expanding the nation to integrate Whites without top-down assimilation, and the perpetuation of racial segregation and inequality in relation to native-born Blacks. Both ways, however, allow for a degree of ethnic/racial explicitness within the socio-political system that is greater than is the norm or regarded as acceptable in contemporary Europe. Different again from the (later) experiences of White ethnics and Blacks is that of post-1965 migrant groups, which mainly consist of Hispanics and Asians. Their experience is somewhere between the other two, though with perhaps different groups exhibiting divergent trajectories. East and South Asians have been developing an entrepreneurial/professional profile and Mexicans a disadvantaged profile. While it is probably the case that no non-Black group is likely to end up having the socio-economically disadvantaged profile of Blacks, some Americans nevertheless fear the threat of linguistic division and for many the greatest contemporary multicultural challenge is seen to do with Hispanics.

Patriotic integration in a context of laissez-faire ethnic diversity was primarily the experience of "White ethnics," of European migrants and their progeny. For native Blacks, the primary experience has been that of "the colour line." Hence the US has had not one, but two dominant ways of dealing with "difference."

### Some questions for Europe

Following this brief discussion I would raise four important isuues. They are profound questions of public philosophy and policy but also require social science inquiry in relation to trends, possibilities and feasibilities, and are ranked from least to most challenging:

Will the dividing line in Europe be:

- A colour-line (stronger in the UK than continental Europe, where often the primary meaning of "racism" is "anti-semitism")?
- Or one of xenophobia (including white victims)?
- Or will the dividing line be one of Muslims (including some of European phenotype) and non-Muslims (including Jews, Blacks, Hindus etc)?

Perhaps, as in the US, it does not just have to be one division, but it is likely that one of these three divisions will be more salient and more intractable than the others.

Will Europe insist on assimilation, the dominant historical pattern, or allow some space for private cultural difference within a model of civic integration (the current French ideology but not comprehensive practice) or some degree of multicultural integration (found to some degree in the Netherlands, Britain and Sweden)? The latter was becoming influential in the English-speaking world until 9/11; since then the perception has grown that unassimilated migrants are a potential security threat, a fifth column. Nevertheless, there is a strong ideology of diversity in the air, for instance in relation to sexuality and to squashed nationalisms (such as the Catalonian, Scottish, Walloon, etc.).

It is unlikely to fade in the current context of globalization, and so second and third generations who breathe this atmosphere may continue to mobilize around identities of cultural difference and demand equality of respect, especially when those identities are the basis of discrimination and structural inequalities – as was so evident in the suburbs of France in December 2005.

At what level does integration take place (especially in relation to identity building): city/region versus national versus European? Another way of formulating the question is, what is the hyphenation on offer? What will work? In the US, the hyphenation always refers to America (not Texas, California, etc.) but in contemporary Europe, integration policies are directed to developing a sufficiently strong sense of national citizenship. Indeed, in countries like France and Britain a (hyphenated) national identification is quite strong amongst the "second generation" (and often a basis for complaints of unequal treatment), but identification with Europe is much weaker than amongst White/indigenous peers. While European identity as a platform for equality/belonging and lever for equality/belonging at the national level may or may not be helpful (in some countries), it is probably the case that ethnic minority identification with the city one lives in (e.g., Liverpool or Rotterdam) may be easier than to identify with "British" or "Dutch" because of all the national, cultural, historical and political (including foreign policy adventures like Iraq) baggage that go with the latter. For example, one can express pride in being a Liverpuddlian without feeling that this implicates him or her in the US/UK occupation of Iraq. Moroever, co-citizens may say of you "You are not really Dutch" but are less likely to say "You are not a Rotterdammer."

Will Europe insist on assimilation, the dominant historical pattern, or allow some space for private cultural difference within a model of civic integration (the current French ideology but not comprehensive practice) or some degree of multicultural integration (found to some degree in the Netherlands, Britain and Sweden)?

### Religion and secularism (political and legal norms)

The sociological fact of "secularization," the decline of religious authority in the public sphere and decline of participation in religious activity in the private sphere is strong in Europe (much less so in the US) but religious observance continues to be high everywhere else in the world, and in many places religion's public significance is on the rise.

In most if not all European countries, "secularism" – if not in theory, certainly in practice – allows some space for one or more churches in the public/national space, whether symbolic, institutional and in terms of resources/subsidies. Yet the historical and geographical trend has been for this space to have been decreasing for some centuries. Yet, in the very recent decades the presence of Muslims and Islamic "claims making" upon European societies and states has resulted in a (temporary?) reversal of aspects of secularization and the decline of collective religion. While there are also increased assertions of Enlightenment secularism, there are also increased assertions of cultural Christianity. Each of these is a domestic version of a "clash of civilizations" thesis that under some circumstances is, and could be, projected more internationally, even globally.

At least three trends are currently visible:

- Accommodation into existing or novel compromises: e.g., Islam as part of Council of Religions in Belgium and France, as a mini-pillar in the Netherlands or as recognized national or public religion in Austria and Spain. Each of these approaches is characterized as Europeans are willing to share public resources and symbols with Muslim identities (sometimes only by paying lip-service);
- Renewal of Christianity as a cultural marker: e.g., in Denmark, in the UK 2001 census and perhaps also in Germany, and in the EU Constitution debate and debate about Turkey as a future EU member. Note that these assertions of Christianity are not usually accompanied by any increase in expressions of faith or church attendance, which continue to decline across Europe.
- Radical secularism, evocations of the Enlightenment and the need to (re)defend it; this is now emerging as the dominant response amongst centre-left intellectuals but not necessarily amongst policy-makers. Which of these will become dominant, or how these trends may develop, interact and synthesize is not clear but (i) would probably be more conducive to better relations with Asia and the Muslim world, while (ii) would highlight differences with those areas (and partly its growth may be stimulated by that sense of difference).

The third trend is also likely to cause identity friction with Asia and the Muslim world, and while it is a more "universal" ideology, thus capable of having followers in all parts of the world, it currently stands in a more antagonistic relationship to non-European religions, especially Islam, than the second trend. Indeed, I will go as far as to say that while the Christian Right could be a domestic obstacle to the civic integration of Muslims and Islam in the US, radical secularism risks playing the same role in Europe.