NOTES ON THE PORTUGUESE EXPERIENCE OF INTEGRATION*

ABSTRACT

Maritime expansion and expatriation are key references of Portugal's history. Until recently, mass expatriation largely surpassed in-migration. This article summarizes the integration experiences in Portugal, providing an overview of the migratory movements in the last decades and the policies established since the mid-1990s, as well as the current situation of the second generation of immigrants. Integration policies adopted to date have assisted in structuring migrant groups into social collectives, fashioning them into social partners. But actual involvement of migrants in effective articulation processes aiming at a regular and full participation in the Portuguese society are still a long way from the State's goals.

Outward projection is a basic structuring vector of the way Portuguese conceive of nationhood. Maritime expansion and expatriation are key references of history. And one of the more persistent myths associated with these views is that the Portuguese are specially endowed to deal with the others and tolerate difference. This is often presented as an important asset to adapt to the new experience of mass immigration. This presentation of integration experiences in Portugal will start with a brief overview of migratory movements in the last decades, then carry on to present the basic structuring axes of policies since the mid 1990s to this day. A short excursus into the situation of the second generation will allow a discussion on the capacity built by the State for facing immigration issues is actually translated into results.

Migratory movements

A Portuguese scholar defined out-migration as a "structural" factor in Portuguese society. Until recently, in fact, mass expatriation largely surpassed in-migration. The turning point of this trend started with both the change in the regime in the 1970s and the return from the former African colonies, after decolonization, and from emigration destinations after the so-called first oil crises. Another scholar estimates that the magnitude of these returns reached approximately 10% of the total population, with important consequences, in the short term, for a rapidly ageing population.

Another significant consequence was the formation of a process of chain migration, notably from the former colonies. A process that started as a forced return, fleeing the political change and the social unrest in the new African countries, creaming off their elites, rapidly evolved into an economically-driven process, involving a majority of low-skilled labour and their families.

Meanwhile, Portuguese external policy targeted new partnerships, aiming at a rapid accession into the European Community. The distant attitude toward expatriate communities was abandoned in favour of a strengthening of the "natural" ties binding the communities in an archipelago-like nation. This was accompanied by a significant shift in ideological terms, with important consequences in the redefinition of the concept of nationality. From an inclusive, imperial understanding of the Portuguese including the "new worlds" built afar, a narrow, blood-premised understanding of the Portuguese as communities spread around the world.

With EU accession, and the Marshall-like programs associated with it, other migrants came, from elsewhere and with other characteristics. Contrary to the first period, the latter cohorts had no significant historical or cultural (real or imagined) ties with Portugal. The upsurge of Eastern Europeans in the 1990s is probably the best known. The large presence of women in the pioneer waves made it a most noticeable flow from the onset. Asians are less numerous, but no less conspicuous in the public opinion, because of the high numbers of small businesses they were rapidly able to establish, as well as the evidence of symbolic references different from the mainstream – notably religious.

Presently, Brazilians form the largest legally settled group of foreign citizens living in Portugal. The highly-skilled migrants from the first waves, fleeing social unrest, and often of Portuguese ancestry, were rapidly outnumbered by the later waves that keep coming to this day. In this case also, there are large numbers of women migrating alone.

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All in all, estimates of the foreigners living in Portugal point to a figure of about 5% of all inhabitants. This is a modest figure in comparison with the share of immigrants with Portuguese citizenship, and also involves native-born with non-Portuguese citizenship.

Policy instruments

Until the early 1990s, no specific policy instrument was drawn in order to face the rapidly growing number of arrivals from Africa, nor their immediate channelling into shantytowns and the informal economy spreading in the larger cities. A limited and tenuous expression of outrage began gaining more voice and reached the media, coming from leftist party members, as well as individuals and organizations of Christian churches.

Worries about border control were also voiced. The first significant policy measure, taken in the late 1980s, consisted of creating a specific control body to deal with the surveillance of borders and the admission of foreigners.

In 1992 and 1993, two decisions were taken, which had a major impact on alleviating the harsh conditions of thousands of settled migrants: to carry on an amnesty and to initiate a vast social housing program – not exclusively targeted at foreigners. Both met with some resistance – and harsh criticism. But the public resources involved were way behind those channelled to meet the needs of integration of the returnees arrived from Africa just two decades before.

It was not until 1996, when a High Commissioner for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities (HCIEM) was appointed, that was forged a coherent policy towards migrant populations and other groups marginalized because of their ethnic background. From the onset, two vectors underpinning this policy were: 1) a redrawing of the norms regulating the access of migrants and their families to public life in general, systematically purging them from discriminatory dispositions (from the labour market to social security, from children's enrolment in school to access to public health services, etc.); and 2) creating the conditions for involving migrants in the decision process itself, when migration issues are at stake. In parallel, a device for monitoring and fighting against racism and discrimination was set up.

During the first in-migration period, stringent restrictions were applied to hiring foreign workers, which had the boomerang effect of making migrants massively enter through the back door in fast-growing sectors of the economy. Purging the labour laws from the former restrictions to foreign labour was a major step, both in guaranteeing some dignity to the foreign labour force and in fighting against the rapid increase of the informal sector, plaguing entire sectors of the economy (from construction and public works, to domestic and personal services). But access to work in public administration is still restricted. Such measures went hand in hand with an active approach, arguably endowing public authorities with means of controlling the labour market. This capacity building of the State was not, however, immune to variations in other agendas, and actual control has met with some oscillation.

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Access to social housing was also restricted to citizens. But as the large-scale re-housing process of the 1990s was set in motion, both local and central government authorities found ways of circumventing these restrictions. Other social rights were progressively recognized for foreign citizens, and the legal dispositions adapted accordingly. Such were the cases of the entitlement to social benefits, including training/schooling, public health care, unemployment dole, minimum subsistence subsidy, access to justice and the right to family reunification. Recognizing some of these entitlements was easier than acknowledging the right to others. All in all, however, one can say that, concerning social rights, legally settled foreigners today are not different from citizens, as stated in the Constitution (Article 15). As argued by some decision makers, rights to foreign citizens should be no less than rights required to citizens settled abroad.

The National System for the Support of Immigrants, a network set up by the HCIEM in 2004 in cooperation with some third-sector organizations (including a one-stop public administration service providers), testify to the will of facilitating migrants' access to public services. It also represents a way of optimizing articulation with third-sector organizations, notably Catholic organizations, which often play the role of social support providers (language or ICT training, sports, adolescent single mothers support, etc.).

In the political realm, however, things evolved quite differently. From the onset, a consultation body was built in 1998, next to the HCIEM, but with an autonomous statute, termed the Consultative Council for Immigration Issues (CCII). This was meant to be an organization bringing together selected immigrant and civil society representatives (notably trade unions and employers) and have them cooperate with public authorities in all

decisions regarding immigration issues. Criticisms were voiced, concerning the ability of the chosen immigrant associations to truly represent migrants. The decision nevertheless had the effect of helping to shape migrants as constituencies, according to national affiliations. This body was recently redesigned to integrate, since 2002, the HCIEM, and to co-opt new members.

Migrants are entitled to freely form their associations. These can have very distinct outlooks. They can operate as just another local association, devoted to tackling situations arising at the local level. This was, in fact, the main goal of the bulk of local associations created during the first period of immigration. Many were called the "survival" associations, as their leaders had to deal with such basic issues as the power and water supply in the shanties they built, taking care of children when the parents were at work, etc. They had also played a major role in the 1996 and 2001 amnesties, operating as reliable mediators of the process. Other types of associations range from third-sector agents, providing social services in the context of partnerships built with public authorities (they are called Particular Institutions of Social Solidarity), to pressure groups, recognized as immigrant associations by the State, and who oftentimes liaise with central government on initiatives concerning immigration.

Since 1996, and as long as reciprocity has existed, migrants can vote in local elections. A slight privilege is accorded to citizens from Portuguese-speaking countries. Voting rights were in fact easier to recognize than some social benefits entitlements. But in fact, given the reciprocity clause, only citizens from two major national groups can participate: the Cape Verdean and Brazilians. Voting turnouts are modest, particularly in the case of the latter group. There are, however, strong defenders of the idea of reinforcing a "municipal citizenship," notably through mobilizing migrants and their offspring to enrol and participate in local political structures.

The norms ruling acquisition of citizenship are presently being revised, after two decades of pressure to do so. With the change of the regime in the mid-1970s and decolonization, came a new concept of nationhood and change in the nationality law followed (in 1981). The shift away from an imperial *jus soli* rule, and the adoption of a reference premised on blood bonds was also meant to redress the wrongs of the former regime towards the expatriates. It was also counter-cyclical with the ongoing processes of chain migration and settlement of people coming from Africa. The new law is premised on a balance between blood and residence rights. It is meant both to facilitate the re-acquisition of citizenship to those foreigners having a Portuguese background, and to ease the acquisition of nationality to foreigners legally settled, and notably to the children of immigrants. As for voting rights, again a bias in favour of Portuguese speaking people exists, and the idea of a "lusophone citizenship" has been suggested – which so far met with no effective success.

Except in the case of the consultative bodies, the very possibility of participation is strictly limited to individual citizens. Some exceptions exist, notably concerning cultural rights, and particularly religious minority rights. But, as a scholar showed, the only social problems arising with minority religions in Portugal occurred with Christian denominations involving a majority of Portuguese, not with those brought along by migrants (Muslims, Hindus…), which have a very modest expression. Most non-Christians come from sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. The law on religious freedom was issued in 2001 not only to ensure that all denominations are equitably dealt with by the State, but also to ensure that they can express themselves in the public sphere. All denominations can apply to the use of free time in the media, and public schools can have religious education (if required by students' families).

Young people, socialized in the Portuguese society, are particularly active in giving voice to discontent. They do it in different ways, from expressive culture (notably music) to deviant behaviour – but only seldom using institutional forms of political voice.

Finally, another important vector of integration policies concerns fighting against racism and discrimination. The Commission for Equality and Against Racial Discrimination, created in 1999, shortly after the HCIEM and the CCII came into force, also includes migrants' representatives. As the CCII, it was incorporated in 2002 into the HCIEM. The results obtained so far in the fight against racism and xenophobia are however quite meagre. As the public sanitary authorities ran a large scale inspection on Chinese restaurants early this year (2006), with wide and loud media coverage, this Commission issued a public protest against the way the inspection activities were being carried out, targeting specific nationalities' businesses. This didn't avoid a significant crash in the Chinese restaurants' economic performance all over the country, also reported in the media.

In sum, integration policies adopted so far have helped to make migrants themselves into social collectives, with a national or ethnic connotation, fashioning them as social partners. But actual involvement of migrants in effective articulation processes aiming at regular and full participation in the Portuguese society is still very far away from the goals stated in some public discourse. Young people, socialized in the Portuguese society, are particularly active in giving voice to discontent. They do it in different ways, from expressive culture (notably music) to deviant behaviour – but only seldom using institutional forms of political voice.

As of 2002, a Monitoring Centre aiming at supporting research in the domains of migration and ethnic relations, created next to the HCIEM, was launched, and cooperation with scientific research institutes was further explored.

This initiative contributed to boosting research on the topic and the dissemination of results in a significant way. This was the case with the studies on children of immigrants.

The emerging second generations

As Alejandro Portes once said, it's the path the children of immigrants follow that will decide on what the outcomes of migration will be – not the adaptation of the first generations.

When one takes the aggregate statistical data on (pre-tertiary) school performances by foreign students, the prospects seem gloomy. Nearly one in every two students leaves school before concluding an upper secondary degree, according to European Commission data (EC 2006). But early school leavers in the EU25 at large are just below one-third among foreign students – thus suggesting differences in degree, not in the nature of the much heavier burden of disadvantages hampering children of migrants' school career all over the EU. However, as national students also have a high share of early school leavers in Portugal (more than twice the EU25 average), one might say that the problems that children of immigrants face in school are both of adaptation of the education structures to new publics, compounded with the fact that the State is having difficulties in building the necessary capacities to meet the propounded goals of achieving the knowledge-based society.

But studies now being made on the children of immigrants in Portugal convey a heterogeneous panorama. The lingering imbalance gives families and other informal networks of support the upper hand in determining school performances. Migrant families from the first waves of returnees are, in general, better equipped (in human and social capital) to face the knowledge-based society. They are also better off in socio-economic terms than the more recent flows, and children often have mixed parentage, with one parent being Portuguese. The students with this background are in fact doing better than the average students.

As for the first type of problems, a survey done by the Ministry of Education showed how the students who don't have Portuguese as their mother tongue were disadvantaged in schools. The so-called Groups of proficiency level were created in 2006, in order to provide language training in Portuguese and are now mandatory in schools with a large presence of foreign students. Schools are also being given a more autonomous role, as the students foreign credentials' recognition is committed, since 2005, to the schools where the students enrol. Sustained efforts are thus being made in order to match goals and achievements, thus building the necessary capacity to deal with these new publics in schools.

In sum, one might say that the first vector of integration, the recognition of social rights, was more fully achieved than the second one, the conditions for full participation in the public sphere. State capacity building is having a difficult time catching up with social needs, as evidenced by the problems faced by children of immigrants, most notably in the educational system.

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Note

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