

# National Identity, Plurality and Interculturalism

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## Abstract

This article examines the similarities and differences between multiculturalism and interculturalism, with particular reference to the impact of globalisation and changing patterns of diversity. It reflects briefly on the origins of multiculturalism—largely from a European perspective—with its focus on ‘race’ and the socio-economic analysis that accompanied it. The article suggests that while multiculturalism was right to continue to focus on inequalities, it failed to adapt to super-diversity and the multifaceted aspects of difference and ‘otherness’, including those based on disability, age and gender. Further, while multiculturalism became rooted in intra-national differences, between minority and majority populations, an intercultural approach is now necessary to support the changing patterns of national identity and respond to the recent challenge posed by the growth of far-right and popular extremist parties (PEPs).

**Keywords:** diversity, multiculturalism, interculturalism, national identity, cohesion, plurality

THE DEVELOPMENT of plural identities is often presented as a threat to notions of community and cultural solidarity. But plural identities do not necessarily entail the weakening of established forms, and can sit alongside each other. Indeed, the development of more plural identities—a process which is inherent in globalisation and diversity—should be viewed much more positively, as it greatly increases the possibilities for peace, tolerance and cohesion, by building relationships across many divides.

Far-right and popular extremist parties (PEPs) have grown across Europe, demonstrating that the ‘threat’ theory has some considerable popular resonance. The parties have based this threat on a supposed loss of cultural integrity and the very sovereignty of the nation. The response to this challenge has, however, been ambivalent in political terms. On the one hand, mainstream and established political parties are reluctant to give any credence to suggestions of a loss of national integrity or to suggestions that that migration has diluted national identity through greater diversity; on the other, they have tried to claw back some of their lost political support by suggesting a return of national powers and greater limits on immigration. This inadvertently serves to reinforce the threat theory.

A new response is now necessary. First, there is a need to recognise the new reality—that the powers of the state have been substantially eroded, along with a simple national identity. But the opportunity that this presents now also needs to be exploited, by enabling people to come to terms with diversity through intercultural education and experience. At the same time, the ‘threat’ needs to be countered with the development of more plural democratic arrangements and more multilevel and direct participation in the political system. In addition, the effects of globalisation—and immigration in particular—on those ‘left behind’, in both economic and political terms, have to be recognised. This will entail a more realistic assessment of the impact of migration on physical infrastructure and community services and revision of ideas about how economic growth is determined and managed. In short, the very fundamentals of our political systems need to change.

## Migration and multiculturalism

It is not intended here to give a full account of the history of migration and multiculturalism, especially as migration has been evident for at least a millennium. However, migration has

become ever more entwined with globalisation and economic growth. In Europe, the postwar increase in migration drew upon former colonies, building upon established cultural links, especially language. The migration was nevertheless characterised by 'visible' minorities, which were widely seen as a threat to the cultural integrity and values of the host nations. This heralded an age of anti-discrimination legislation, positive action programmes and some integration measures to try to ensure that tensions and conflicts were minimised. The multicultural model in Britain was noted for its emphasis on tolerance, equal rights and the avoidance of assimilation. This enjoyed considerable, though by no means universal, support but its 'success' was challenged by the finding of 'parallel lives' in 2001 with the report on the riots in English northern towns.<sup>1</sup> The subsequent concerns about extremism in Muslim communities following 9/11 and the London bombings added fuel (though more heat than light) to concerns about the multiculturalist model.

The multicultural policies followed by the UK and most European governments have become ever more exposed and, it is argued, are no longer appropriate to mediate the new era of globalisation and super-diversity. Despite some past successes, especially in terms of tackling discrimination and promoting equal opportunities, multicultural policies now enjoy neither governmental nor popular support. Multicultural policies have also failed to recognise that 'difference' is no longer simply defined by 'race' and that identity has become multifaceted and dynamic, developing support for a more intercultural model.<sup>2</sup> However, the lack of popular support for multiculturalism has led to a political paralysis in which the issues are only debated in a defensive mode, with little attempt to recognise that cultures are more fluid than ever before and the interconnectedness of the world demands a new and progressive approach which builds interaction between and within cultures. There has also been little attempt to develop the cultural navigational skills which help people to accept and endorse the change process, nor to remove the structural and institutional barriers that cause separation and lead to inequality. The opportunity to learn about each other through educational, experiential

and routine intercultural contact is seldom supported on anything like a pervasive basis, with communities encouraged to view their identities as special and fixed. Sen reminds us that conflict and violence are sustained today, no less than in the past, by the illusion of a unique identity.<sup>3</sup>

Multicultural policies have also been slow to recognise how the fluidity of population change impacts on national solidarity and governance. In 2010 there were 214 million international migrants; if they continue to grow in number at the same pace, there will be over 400 million by 2050.<sup>4</sup> The extent of population movement is such that all western economies are now characterised by 'super' or 'hyper' diversity, with cities such as London, Stockholm, Toronto, New York and Amsterdam housing over 300 language groups. At the same time, 'horizontal' human movement has taken place and is increasing across countries in other regions, such as South America and southern Africa, with newer forms of multiculturalism emerging. Consequently, multiculturalism is now much more complex and community relations are multifaceted, no longer simply revolving around majority/minority visible distinctions underpinned by their distinct socio-economic positions. Insofar as national identity has been considered it has been from the limited perspective of how minority cultures are 'accommodated' within a national framework, rather than the impact on the majority community and how all identities are being remade. The political response has inevitably been to cling to the idea of clear national boundaries supported by strong national identities, and any suggestions of the loss of sovereignty or political plurality are quickly contested. Rather than reflecting the process of globalisation, the political class also feel threatened by the interconnectivity of the modern world. They believe that it is a threat to their own (national) power base and are not prepared to acknowledge, let alone argue for, a more collaborative approach between nations, or devolution within them.

The postwar ideal of a more integrated international community, in which ideas and cultures may bridge national boundaries to create a world in which we are more at ease with each other, is seldom now advanced as a desirable political objective,

despite the evident interdependency of economic and political decision-making. Similarly, while people are themselves increasingly crossing borders, intermarrying, building new virtual networks and creating real and tangible personal relationships at all levels, this is seldom recognised, let alone championed. 'Identity politics', whether on the basis of narrow national, ethnic, faith or regional bases, often holds back transition rather than supporting and inspiring a new and interconnected world.

That there is a threat to cultural integrity and identity is ironically a view shared by both the far-right and PEPs and mainstream parties. At the same time, the more tangible impacts in terms of wage levels, public and community services (for example schools, social housing and health) and physical infrastructure (such as transportation, public utilities and private housing) has hardly been considered. This is because most reports look at impacts in terms of the additional call on resources arising from the increase in the number of *migrants*. These are inevitably small—for example, providing additional English language training, integration measures for schools, translation of documents. Such reports often fail to look at the additional call on resources arising from the increase in the number of *people*. For example, the Migration Advisory Committee (2012) noted: 'when a new motorway is being considered the IA [Impact Assessment] is relatively straightforward because the UK population is assumed constant.'<sup>5</sup> Similarly, they suggested that GDP is simply calculated as lost or gained as a result of less or more migration, without any assessment of the impact per head or on different communities. The Committee, having reviewed many other approaches to increased migration and population impacts, explained that 'quantification and monetisation were not straightforward in any of the areas we looked at' and stated a need for 'further conceptual thinking'.<sup>6</sup>

While the agonising over the robustness of calculations continues, the population increase in the UK over the past ten years or so has been at the fastest rate since records began. The 2001 Census reported the population as 58.789 million, which compares to 63.182 million found in the 2011—an increase of more than 7 per cent. Estimates vary as to

what proportion of this growth is due to migration, but recent reviews by the left-leaning *Guardian* newspaper and the right-leaning organisation Migration Watch both attribute more than half of the total growth to migration. The real issue here, however, is one of population, not migration; as the UK is one of the most densely populated countries in the world, population pressures are felt in everyday terms, such as motorway congestion, smaller gardens and reduced external spaces for new dwellings, difficulty in finding a place on a bus, underground or tram during rush hour, over-subscribed schools—and many other ways. Further, the benefits of population growth are seen at the national level in terms of GDP, productivity gains and new business entrepreneurialism and innovation; however, the resource need is at a local level, where local authorities, health, housing, education and other providers are struggling to cope with reduced budgets. Elsewhere, this is being felt 'with special sharpness in Greece, Italy, Spain and Ireland, countries where citizens have had to endure externally imposed austerity programs that have 'scythed through the public goods they had taken for granted and which they thought were their birthright'.<sup>7</sup> It is of course true that some dimensions of these issues are popularly exaggerated—for example, in terms of numbers of migrants or asylum seekers—but with no clear estimate of the additional resource requirement for public services and physical infrastructure, let alone forward planning, the scale and time lag in provision will always fuel perceptions of a threat to existing service levels which is specifically linked to migration.

These concerns are often either dismissed or not considered. Similarly, the 'threat' to the homogeneity and distinctiveness of national and regional identities is also often labelled as 'racist' or borne out of ignorance, but far-right groups in many countries are increasingly exploiting fear of the erosion of a simple national identity to build substantial popular support. This has grown across most of Europe, including France, Denmark, the Netherlands, Austria, Belgium, Germany, Greece and Italy. The recent European Parliament elections, in May 2014, illustrate the unprecedented growth in far-right support—with France's support for the Front National at

over 20 per cent and the UK's for the UK Independence Party (UKIP) at 26 per cent—and the failure of multiculturalism to respond to concerns about immigration and the threat to national identity.

## Plurality as opportunity

It might be assumed that the sole beneficiary of the popular response is those on the far right and in PEPs who have galvanised the 'left behind',<sup>8</sup> but while this might be apparent in political terms, many people are eschewing identity politics and taking advantage of the more open borders and transnational communications. The fastest growing ethnic group across Europe is that of mixed race, faith and nationality, with an enormous complexity in intercultural relations which defies political populism. Further, people are, contrary to the popular narrative, developing more plural and cosmopolitan identities. Castells<sup>9</sup> draws upon the research of Professor Norris of Harvard University, who has analysed the *World Values Survey* to show that regional and local identities are trumping national loyalties. Professor Norris calculated that for the world as a whole, 13 per cent of respondents primarily considered themselves as 'citizens of the world', 38 per cent put their nation-state first and the remainder (that is, the majority) put local or regional identities first.

A 2008 world public opinion survey of people in twenty-one nations around the world<sup>10</sup> found that nearly 30 per cent of people now see themselves as a 'citizen of the world' (10 per cent) as much, or more than, as a citizen of their nation (20 per cent). Further, the more people know people from different regions of the world, the more they see themselves as a global citizen—rising to 47 per cent among those who know people from five or more regions. As might be expected, the larger number of respondents from around the world (66 per cent) said that they think of themselves primarily as citizens of their country, but this varied considerably by country. In the poll, the nations with the highest numbers saying they primarily think of themselves as 'citizens of the world' were Italy (21 per cent) and Germany (19 per cent). Very substantial numbers say they see themselves as either a citizen of the world or as

equally a citizen of the world and their country. These include France (51 per cent), China (50 per cent), Italy (48 per cent), India (46 per cent) and Mexico (44 per cent). The lowest levels are found in Azerbaijan (9 per cent), Kenya (12 per cent), Jordan (15 per cent) and South Korea (16 per cent). Younger people tend to be even more globally oriented than older people. Among those aged 60 years and older, 24 per cent see themselves as global citizens. This rises to 34 per cent among those aged 18–29 years old. Global identity also increases with education. Among those with less than a high school education, 28 per cent think of themselves as global citizens. This rises to 39 per cent among those with education. These are, by any standards, remarkable results, and demonstrate the enormous shift in patterns of self-identity.

Similarly, a more recent opinion poll carried out by Ipsos MORI for the BBC's 'Who Do We Think We Are' Project illustrates the extent of the change in the UK:<sup>11</sup>

- Almost a quarter (24 per cent) say they feel a greater sense of connection to people in other countries around the world than they did ten years ago. For those aged 15–34 years, the figure is 31 per cent.
- More than four in ten (44 per cent) say that their leisure activities are important to their identity, with a similar proportion saying their values or outlook matter (38 per cent) and slightly fewer saying their personal views and opinions are important (34 per cent).
- Traditional factors of age (22 per cent), nationality (20 per cent), gender (13 per cent), class (7 per cent) and ethnicity (6 per cent) were viewed as less important to people's identity.
- Only 20 per cent said their nationality was among the top three or four things they would tell a stranger was important about them. Only 10 per cent said religion, while 7 per cent picked social class.

Despite having little by way of encouragement for this, a surprising number of people are thinking of themselves in more complex terms. It may be, as Ben Page, Chief Executive of Ipsos MORI suggests,<sup>12</sup> that the connectivity brought by new technology is key to understanding the changing perspec-

tives. He also points out the striking fact about the responses that none of the new key aspects of identity are those people are born with.

In the face of this broader diversity and changing patterns of identity, governmental responses have been ambivalent. For the most part, they have attempted to deny the change and reinforce their view of national identity through such measures as the teaching of national history and promoting national citizenship and identity. By steadfastly retaining a pretence of the integrity of national borders and governance, and by attempting to deny the interdependence brought by globalisation, they reinforce a fear of 'others'. They then also appear to lag behind the current reality of multifaceted identities within their communities. Already there is clear evidence of a decline in traditional democratic traditions across Europe, with election turnouts and political party membership in decline. The growth of new political movements, from the *indignados* in Spain to that led by the comedian Beppe Grillo in Italy, and the current lack of trust and disconnection from mainstream parties suggests that these movements could grow still further. Indeed, the elections for members of the European Parliament across Europe in 2014 saw many new parties (of the left and right) gain ground.

People are now often able to draw upon heritage, faith, language, diaspora and new national identities to create hybrid or multiple identities. It is also the case that the variation within ethnic groups is as great as those differences between them, and there is a great danger in homogenising any particular identity. All types of hyphenated identity—for example 'British-Asian', 'French-Muslim' or 'Swedish-African'—also run the risk of simply replacing the limited notion of a single identity with an equally static hybrid identity, becoming bounded and ascribed: what Sen describes as 'plural monoculturalism'.<sup>13</sup> Identity is a process and not a fixed category, although it is often regarded as the latter.

None of this should suggest that national identity could or should be downplayed. In fact, there is a great danger in suggesting that the one area of identity that some lower socio-economic groups feel able to cling to in a time of uncertainty should be wiped away. The reality is, however, that city, regional, national and cosmopolitan identities now need

to sit alongside each other—they are not opposed: something that multiculturalism has never acknowledged. Interculturalism recognises that people can have more than one identity at the same time and that these are not necessarily in opposition to each other; rather, they simply represent different aspects of human relations.

## Plurality of power and the state

The strength of national identity depends to some extent on the powers and responsibilities of the nation-state and to what extent they create a sense of solidarity. If the powers and responsibilities become diffuse and diluted as a result of both more localised and more transnational agencies, this may have an impact on feelings on solidarity, distinctiveness and allegiance. That is not to say that national identity is about to fade away, but feelings of solidarity may become more plural, in response to the political plurality, and sit alongside national, regional and other forms. For some, there has been a retreat into hardened national identities as people 'hunker down' and attempt to cling to what they believe are their own separate and distinct certainties. This has gone further for those groups that see such certainties in the form of subnational, regional and local identities.

Globalisation has brought many new international agencies and structures into being and fundamentally altered power relationships, with national politicians now appearing to be controlled by them rather than leading them. These new agencies have responded to a range of common issues, from international finance and crime to environmental concerns such as climate change, the proliferation of nuclear weapons and many more. The European Union perhaps stands out most in this regard. At the same time, non-governmental organisations are also developing and taking on new roles, again at the expense of nation-states. Held charts the rise of these organisations and calculates that whereas there were 176 such organisations in 1905, there were 4,615 in 1984.<sup>14</sup> Agg suggests that the figure had reached nearly 50,000 by the end of the 1990s.<sup>15</sup> This, together with the rapid growth of global business and brands, has created a

popular sense of powerlessness and alienation. Castells<sup>16</sup> supports the view that the state has been bypassed by networks of wealth, power and information and lost much of its sovereignty. Not everyone agrees with his view,<sup>17</sup> but even defenders of state power, such as Ignatieff, who would very much like to see the current role of the national sovereignty to be restored, is forced to recognise that 'we live in a world where power seems elsewhere. We feel that power lies somewhere in "the global market" and that we are its play-things'.<sup>18</sup>

The problem for the 'statists' is that they assume the boundaries and powers of the state have been fixed and become immutable. In fact, they have been made and re-made many times over, with a clear trend towards smaller states. In 1950 there were just fifty nations, compared to over 200 today. There are indications that this number will increase further, with the growth of more ardent separatist movements and areas where people no longer feel able to share the same land or government. Around twenty nations have been created in recent years, which stem partly from the break-up of previously constructed federations in the Balkans and Eastern Europe or divisions being turned into official separation, for example in the recently divided Sudan. More divisions may be on the way, as states such as Belgium are becoming virtually ungovernable as single entities; there are around twenty secessionist movements in Europe alone, with Scotland and Catalonia being the most notable.

A more radical view of the fragmentation of states is provided by Barber, who believes that nation-states will be replaced by cities as the main instrument of the polity and suggests that this is not only inevitable but also desirable, because cities are a more functional democratic unit and more capable of responding to cross-border challenges than are states. States will resist change, however, as they 'are quintessentially indisposed to cooperation . . . too inclined to rivalry and mutual exclusion'.<sup>19</sup>

Governmental responses have largely rested on denial, even to the extent of failing to recognise that there is now no barrier between domestic and foreign policies.<sup>20</sup> However, by steadfastly retaining the presence of the integrity of national borders and

governance and attempting to deny the interdependence brought by globalisation, they reinforce a fear of 'others' and give credence to popular nationalism. They then appear to lag behind the current reality of a more plural power structure and multifaceted identities. This approach undermines their credibility still further, as electorates have begun to recognise the reality of the limits of national power—as is evidenced by a decline in traditional democratic traditions across Europe, with election turnouts and political party membership in decline. New ideas of solidarity and political agency are also moving in other directions and forming 'horizontally', particularly through social media—transcending traditional power structures and constantly redefining who 'we' are.

The power balance within states has also profoundly changed. Ford and Goodwin describe the 'left behind' not only in economic terms, but also in terms of their position in relation to politics.<sup>21</sup> These mainly older, working-class voters, with few qualifications, were once central to the political and social debate; trade unions wielded real power, and no party could secure election without winning significant support from them. But this group is now rapidly declining, and in the meantime there has been a dramatic expansion of university education and professional white-collar employment, with middle-class graduates and professionals now at the centre of society and politics. The working class have become 'voiceless'.

## A progressive way forward

The political class appears to deny the reality of political change. It therefore seeks to claw back ground lost to the far right and PEPs by hoping that a little less migration, the tackling of alleged abuse of benefit rules and the improvement of integration will suffice. This is unlikely to convince the 'left behind' and simply confirms their perception that this is *the* problem. It fails to tackle the economic and political realities of an increase in population and people's movement, and also fails to address the changing reality of politics and power.

Clearly, the economic realities of the 'left behind' do have to be tackled. This means, first, recognising—in a more realistic way—

the increased pressure upon the physical and social infrastructure that results from an increase in population. But it also means presenting a vision of a future world in which power has to be exercised more collaboratively, across boundaries, and at many different levels to tackle global issues—and, by championing more plural identities (simply supporting the existing trends), improving the chances for peace, security and prosperity.

It is not possible, as several commentators seem to believe, to simply turn the clock backwards. Ignatieff, for example, states that the survival of democratic politics depends on reviving sovereignty and ‘regaining the sense that we’re masters in our own house’<sup>22</sup>—perhaps not unlike UKIP and the other nationalist parties who are desperate to repatriate powers taken from the EU. Goodhart is also an advocate of a ‘return to sovereignty’, and positions this in binary terms as a choice between ‘two liberalisms’ of either ‘solidarity on the one hand (meaning a high trust/high sharing society) and an increasing diversity of values and ways of life on the other’.<sup>23</sup> But he creates a false choice between ‘a more individualistic and diverse society . . . more dynamic and competitive [, which] is likely to manifest lower levels of sharing and a weaker sense of belonging . . . [with] common norms and mutual regard damaged by too much diversity’ and the ‘communitarian notion of club membership’ in which ‘people will always favour their own families and communities’.<sup>24</sup>

The answer must involve a fundamental rethink of power relationships within and between states, as suggested by Micklethwait and Wooldridge’s 2014 book.<sup>25</sup> Even Ignatieff recognises that ‘sovereigns need to combine . . . we need sovereign co-operation more than ever, because no single power . . . is in control of globalisation anymore’.<sup>26</sup> A more profound change, accepting the need for more plural forms of democratic engagement, will enable people to participate in politics at different levels and in different forms—including the ‘voiceless’ part of majority populations. We therefore need to remake democratic institutions to reflect the reality of modern-day populations, in order to reinvigorate democracy and better respond to resource pressures at a local level. This may be through the thousands of ‘city-states’ as envisaged by

Barber<sup>27</sup> or through single-issue politics, at both the international and local levels. But it may also take the form of more ‘horizontal’ forms of direct citizenship engagement through social media. This has already begun to transcend established power structures and national and other boundaries. In fact, these could democratise international agencies which have clung to the ideal of representative democracy even though it has become increasingly remote. As Micklethwait and Wooldridge suggest, power can now be pushed downwards much more easily if new technology is embraced. It is unfortunately notable that the only significant use of an international plebiscite is that of the Eurovision Song Contest!

There has also been little by way of any systematic attempt to develop a more global outlook through intercultural education, which might enable people to become more at ease with diversity and globalisation. Many of our present programmes of education and socialisation doggedly attempt to promote a primordial sense of national identity. Cannadine has recently illustrated how the state provides an historical account which depends upon an exaggerated ‘them and us’ perspective.<sup>28</sup> He also sets out at length the way in which national identities have been created and reinforced through a Manichean concept of a ‘divided past’, ignoring the elements of collaboration and exchange between nations. The development of a plural democracy must now go hand in hand with a plural identity. The pretence of a homogeneous national or cultural identity has always been open to challenge, but the pace of change is increasing, with the very powers and nature of states and their democratic frameworks in flux. A static concept of democracy is as untenable as a static concept of identity.

## Notes

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