The Strange Death of Europe

By Jon Hobrook, critique, 27 May 2017

In *The Strange Death of Europe*, Douglas Murray argues, as the title suggests, that Europe is in its death throes. He reaches this conclusion by weaving together two arguments. First, there are too many migrants, especially of the wrong sort, entering Europe. Secondly, they are coming at a time when Europe 'has lost sight of what it is'. Hence, he argues, 'the movement of millions of people into a guilty, jaded and dying culture' cannot work.

The likelihood is that Murray's supporters and critics will lock horns over the too-many-migrants argument, while ignoring his contention that European culture is guilty, jaded and dying. This would be a shame because the first argument can only be understood in the context of the second. If the nations of Europe had a strong belief in liberal democracy, then immigration would not be a problem. Strong European nations would recognise the importance of their political ideas, nurtured from Classical Antiquity, through Judeo-Christian traditions, to the present day. Strong European nations would see that immigrants from around the world, who do not hold liberal political values, would need to embrace a European political perspective.

European nations with a strong belief in liberal democracy would expect immigrants to assimilate, a process whereby immigrants would come to endorse the political ideas of their new society. Assimilation focuses on the political and public spheres and disregards religious and cultural differences in the private sphere, so long as these private practices do not conflict with the ideals of liberal democracy. A nation that assimilates its immigrants will have an integrated community. A nation that does not assimilate its immigrants will have parallel communities. Assimilation requires effort and determination from the host nation and the immigrant.

But Europe is no longer composed of nations with a strong belief in the political ideas of liberal democracy. Since the Second World War, therefore, these weakened nations have struggled to assimilate their immigrants. Indeed, in the postwar era, Europe's political and cultural elites have either ignored the issue of assimilation or championed its absence. Many postwar immigrants have assimilated into European societies, but they have done so despite the attitude of Europe's leaders. Moreover, there are many immigrants who have not assimilated and, with the passage of time, the problem of parallel communities has grown. Parallel communities tend to draw more immigrants towards them in a cycle that makes the problem bigger and harder to address.

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As Murray explains, 'The result was that what had been Europe – the home of the European peoples – gradually became a home for the entire world. The places that had been European gradually became somewhere else. So places dominated by Pakistani immigrants resembled Pakistan in everything but their location.' In these parallel communities, assimilation has not happened and the political ideas of liberal democracy rarely exist.

Although it is not a periodisation used by Murray, it is convenient to view the issue of assimilation in three stages: the immediate postwar decades; the era of multiculturalism, which endured for 30-odd years until 2010/11; and the past few years.

During the 1950s and 1960s, West Germany, Sweden, Holland and Belgium instituted guest-worker schemes to meet labour shortages. Britain and France also relied on immigrants to fill labour shortages, but with their stronger colonial ties they often granted their immigrants the right of citizenship. But what none of these countries had expected was that the migrant workers would, even when their work was done, want to put down roots in their new countries and bring their families with them.

In the immediate postwar decades, Europe's leaders eschewed the one issue that would have enabled them to address the immigration issue: assimilation. They did not do as America's leaders had done in an earlier era – project a strong and confident view of liberal democracy that they expected their new entrants to embrace. Whereas America's melting pot gave rise to the motto, 'Out of many, one' (*E pluribus unum*), Europe's postwar approach to immigration gave rise to this unspoken view: 'Out of many, many.'

The weakness of European political culture in the postwar era was evident in the absence of any notion that it was even possible to expect immigrants to endorse liberal democracy. Immigration, in the absence of assimilation, inevitably meant that parallel communities developed. And having discounted the possibility of assimilating immigrants, Europe's leaders were left with two options: either curtail immigration and encourage repatriation or ignore the problem. Enoch Powell's infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech in 1968 was an attempt to do the former. He warned that Britain was 'mad, literally mad… to be permitting the annual inflow of some 50,000 dependants'. He said this immigration was 'like watching a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre'.

Powell was immediately relieved of his position in the shadow cabinet, and his political career was over. But instead of giving rise to a debate about how to assimilate immigrants, the sidelining of Powell gave political leaders an easy way of silencing any debate on immigration: dismiss it as racist, or – and this amounted to the same thing – dismiss it as Powellite.

When the problem of parallel communities could no longer be ignored, European societies entered the era of multiculturalism, an era that advocated an acceptance and celebration of cultural difference. Those who advocated a desire to see immigrants embrace liberal democracy were dealt with harshly. In Britain, the experience of Ray Honeyford in criticising the problem of parallel communities was telling. In 1984, Honeyford, the headmaster of a Bradford school, published an article noting the refusal of some Muslim fathers to permit their daughters to participate in dance classes, drama or sport, and the silence of the authorities on this and other

cultural practices, such as taking children back to Pakistan during term time. He also argued for pupils to be encouraged to speak English and understand British culture.

The race-relations industry, which Honeyford had also criticised, organised a campaign against him and the Muslim mayor of Bradford claimed that, for his 'cultural chauvinism', Honeyford should be sacked. 'Raycist' Honeyford, as his critics dubbed him, was forced into early retirement for challenging parallel communities at a time when British politicians had abandoned any notion of assimilation in favour of its antithesis: multiculturalism.

In this second era, which started in the 1980s, European politicians made a virtue of their political weakness by implicitly recognising that their belief in liberal democracy was so lacking that they would promote the politics of difference, dressed up first as 'multiculturalism' and then as 'diversity'. In this era, there were few Ray Honeyfords who were intellectually strong enough to challenge the problem of parallel communities in the face of politicians who furnished a race-relations industry with money and prestige to celebrate cultural difference.

But bad political ideas that go unchallenged by the political class will eventually be challenged by the public. And so it was that the advocates of multiculturalism generated a public backlash. In 2006, the Dutch justice minister, Piet Hein Donner, caused significant anger in the Netherlands when he suggested that Muslims could change Dutch law to Sharia by democratic means. There was at least equal public outrage in Britain when, in 2008, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, suggested that the adoption of elements of Sharia law in the UK 'seems unavoidable'. Murray notes that 'it suddenly seemed as though some of the absolute bases of Western civilisation were being offered up for negotiation'. In the early 2000s, stories that the Sikh and white working-class communities had been telling for years about the organised grooming of young girls by gangs of Muslim men started to be taken seriously by the media and police. But the sharpest cause of concern over parallel communities was the increasing tally of Islamist terrorist attacks involving people born and brought up in Europe.

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The political leaders of Germany, Britain and France eventually responded. In October 2010, the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, gave a state-of-the-nation speech in which she said, 'Of course, the approach to build a multicultural society and to live side-by-side and to enjoy each other has failed, utterly failed'. That was why, she insisted, 'integration is so important' and immigrants in Germany must follow the laws and constitution of Germany and speak German.

In February 2011, Britain's prime minister, David Cameron, gave a speech in Munich critical of 'the doctrine of state multiculturalism' by which 'we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream'. A few days later, the French president, Nicolas Sarkozy, also pronounced multiculturalism to be a 'failure', saying: 'The truth is that in all our democracies we have been too preoccupied with the identity of those who arrived and not enough with the identity of the country that welcomed them.'

After six decades of allowing and encouraging immigrants to live separate lives, the public had forced Europe's leaders to change the narrative on immigration. Murray points out how extraordinary it was that it took 60 years of immigration before Europe's political leaders even stated that immigrants should speak the language of the country they entered. And, just as striking, that during those six decades 'such a demand would have been – and was – attacked as "racist"'.

In this new era, the gulf between the people and their leaders can no longer be ignored, but it still exists. Despite European leaders recognising that multiculturalism has failed, they lack a political perspective that can solve the immigration issue. The problem remains unresolved because, as David Cameron had recognised in his Munich speech, 'We've failed to provide a vision of society to which they [immigrants] feel they want to belong'. In the absence of a vision, immigrants will continue to have little to assimilate into, and political leaders will fall back on lightweight reasons in favour of immigration, such as short-term economic expediency, misplaced guilt about global hardship, or simply the moral affirmation that comes from appearing to be nice.

The vacillation of Europe's leaders was epitomised by Merkel's response to the migrant crisis in 2015: 'We can do this' ('*Wir schaffen das*'). But Merkel could not claim to be speaking for the German people, since the German public did not support more immigration, least of all an influx of one million asylum seekers in a year. Neither did she have any idea what 'this' referred to. But what mattered was that, as Merkel put it, 'The world sees Germany as a land of hope and chances. And that wasn't always the case.' This was Germany's chance to atone for the Second World War and to portray itself as a country that people would migrate into rather than flee from.

In the absence of 'a vision of society' that can command popular support, Europe's leaders will continue to stumble from one migrant crisis to another because the immediate emotional claims of a migrant will tend to trump the collective interests of a nation. The European public continues to have a sense of these collective interests, but they are mostly unknown and unarticulated by Europe's political class.

Liberal democracy has many political foundations such as the separation of church and state, free speech, the equal rights of women and gays, democracy and the rule of law. Yet these ideas are alien to many immigrants, particularly Muslims, who come from different political cultures. Only a nation with a strong political culture that believes in these ideas can challenge those who do not accept them. A nation with a strong belief in liberal democracy would appreciate the need to assimilate immigrants to its political values, and it would not accept the existence of parallel communities. Least of all would it celebrate cultures with backward views on politics, religion, free speech, equal rights and so forth.

Murray is a compelling writer who, in *The Strange Death of Europe*, has compiled an array of evidence and argument in support of his claim that 'the movement of millions of people into a guilty, jaded and dying culture cannot' work. As his colleague at the *Spectator*, Matthew Parris, says, he 'writes so well that when he is wrong he is dangerous.'

In my opinion Murray's conclusion is not wrong, but there is a difficulty for anyone tackling subjects as contentious as immigration, identity and Islam. And that is the relationship between cause and symptom. Immigrants are not the cause of Europe's woes, and parallel communities are a symptom of Europe's political weakness. Immigrants have never been required or incentivised to assimilate; indeed, since the 1980s, the politics of multiculturalism has incentivised them not to assimilate. Easy though it is to blame the immigrant (a mistake often made by the populist parties of Europe), those who criticise postwar immigration must never lose sight of the fact that the easy target is the wrong target.

When reading Murray's excellent book, it is worth remembering that, of his two arguments, it is the second that is causative of the first. In other words, it is because Europe is dying that immigration has become a politically fraught issue. The target of our anger has to be, not the immigrant, but our political leaders who, over six decades, have had so little belief in liberal democracy that they have never expected immigrants to assimilate to the political values that made Europe such a desirable place to live.

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