

## ACCOMMODATING THE FLOW OF PEOPLE

One of the more salient aspects of the process of Globalisation has been the increased flows of people around the world. According to the UN, in 1965, the number of people living outside of their country of birth for more than a year was 75 million. By 2005, this had jumped to 195 million and the UN forecasts that, by 2050, this number will jump again to 294 million. The majority of the flows of people have been from what we might stylise as the 'poorer South' to the 'richer North'. Typically the flows are from South and Central America into the US and from the former European colonies and the former Soviet states into Western Europe.

This is quite a large flow of people that represents about 3% of humanity. The flow of people on this scale has exposed some of the internal tensions within the process of Globalisation. On the one hand, within the countries of destination, immigrants are accused of adding to over-crowded living spaces; placing additional burdens upon the existing infrastructure (e.g. schools, housing, transport, and so on); and crowding out the indigenous population from employment opportunities. There is also an aspect where newcomers are seen as a potential security threat that is impairing the national identity of the host country.

Equally, on the other hand, the evidence suggests that the newcomers actually boost the local economy by holding down the latent inflationary pressures whilst stimulating demand; that they tend to gravitate towards jobs that the indigenous population – for whatever reason - are unwilling to undertake; and that they act as a mechanism to counter the ageing populations of the economies in Europe and North America. The arguments are fairly even between the benefits and disbenefits of the flow of people.

As you can expect, the issue of immigration has been rising up the political agenda in recent years in both Europe and North America. Whilst it has to be admitted that a proportion of newcomers are only temporary visitors – they arrive in the host country, work there for two to three years, and then return permanently to their country of origin – it is the permanently settled newcomers that exercises the attention of the public in the host nations. Indeed, it often distils into a single question: how can we accommodate the numbers of newcomers to the nation?

Traditionally, there have been two models of accommodation – the mono-cultural and the multi-cultural approach. It would be incorrect to characterise the two approaches too dogmatically, but those readers in the US are likely to be more familiar with the mono-cultural model and those readers in Europe are likely to be more familiar with the multi-cultural model. It is worth briefly examining the two models in a little detail.

The key presumption of the mono-cultural model is that all newcomers are expected to adopt that cultural habits and *mores* of the country of destination. This obviously means that they will be expected

to lessen their links with their country of origin, possibly to the point where, over a number of generations, the newcomers will be thoroughly assimilated into the host culture. For example, in the US, despite many languages being spoken, there is only one official language – English - in which all official business is conducted.

This process works on the newcomers through naturalisation and on their children through the education system. The model in the US works on the basis that the third generation of newcomers will have shed most of the vestiges of their cultural origins. It is successful where the host nation has a strong sense of identity and the confidence to project that identity onto those coming to live in the nation. Throughout its history, the US has been very successful in welcoming waves of immigration and assimilating those newcomers as American Citizens. This success has not been total, to which we shall return later.

The multi-cultural model works on a different premise to the mono-cultural model. The key presumption of the model is that newcomers are welcome to retain the cultural habits and *mores* of the country of origin, as long as they respect that right in everyone else. The model works through the toleration of everything except intolerance. It allows the newcomers to retain strong ties with their countries of origin and gives everyone the right not to assimilate into the host population.

This is a model that has worked well in Europe for some time until recently. It does present a linguistic challenge. For example, the EU has three official alphabets and 22 *communautaire* languages! It also runs the risk of the mis-interpretation of some acts that are important to one cultural tradition which are abhorrent to another cultural tradition. For example, in the UK the issue of ‘arranged marriage’ is viewed very differently by those British Subjects who retain close ties to the Indian Sub-Continent to those British Subjects who have a European background. The issue has not caused a great cultural divide – as long as the ‘arranged marriage’ is consensual – but it does provide a piece of grit in the smooth running of the system.

In recent years, the multi-cultural model has not been working too well. The right not to assimilate – widely seen across Europe – has led to what some observers see as the ‘ghettoisation of minorities’, where relatively small communities of newcomers co-exist with the host population, but who fail to integrate with the host population and manage to retain their original cultural identity and *mores* over a number of generations. In itself, this would not constitute a problem, but the ‘War on Terror’, which many young Muslims in Europe see as a ‘War on Islam’, has brought the divisiveness of this policy into sharp focus.

Perhaps this is seen most clearly in the *Banlieu* of France or the northern mill towns of England. The combination of the separation that the multi-cultural model allows, along with the strong identity of young Muslims, and the feeling of alienation from the mainstream of the host community has all added up to a very volatile social cocktail. We have to remember that the July Bombers in London were

relatively well educated, but disaffected, young British Muslims. It was after these bombings that the multi-cultural model was seriously called into question.

That the multi-cultural model has started to break down does not necessarily imply that the mono-cultural model will provide a useful alternative. One could argue that, although the mono-cultural model of the US has successfully integrated waves of immigrants from Europe, it has less successfully done so for newcomers from Asia and Africa. Indeed, one could argue that the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War Two stands as testimony to the failure of the mono-cultural model in the US. Alternatively, one might ask why there is such a disproportion of African-Americans in the US prison system. If the mono-cultural model were working effectively, then surely such disproportions would not occur?

The mono-cultural model, however, has yet to face its largest challenge – the influx of newcomers to the US from Central and South America. When such flows were relatively modest, the host nation could readily absorb the newcomers into its existing structures. As the flows have grown, the newcomers are starting to become as numerous as the indigenous population. At some point in the future, the newcomers will dominate the indigenous population numerically. It is at this point that the weakness of the mono-cultural model shows through.

For example, according to the US Census Bureau, by 2020, the majority of residents in California will have Spanish as their first language. What would happen if, after that point, the residents of California decided that the official language of California would be Spanish? In a mono-cultural model, the English speaking residents of California would either have to be absorbed into the Spanish diaspora, or move to another ‘English’ part of the US. Hopefully, common sense would prevail before this extreme possibility materialises, but the point is well made.

If it is the case that the flows of people will continue into the future, that they are going to include a significant proportion of humanity, and if it is the case that the traditional models of dealing with the flow of people are breaking down, then what hope is there for the future?

Before we disappear in a cloud of despair, we need to note that the world that we have just described is disappearing also. The discussion about the flow of people is all about where lines are drawn on maps. For example, in Britain of the Dark Ages, someone from Manchester would be seen as a ‘foreigner’ in London. In the Sixteenth Century, someone from Scotland would be seen as a ‘foreigner’ in London. In the twentieth century, someone from Poland would be seen as a ‘foreigner’ in London. Today, none of these are ‘foreigners’ in London because all of them have the right to live in London, and none of them are classed as ‘immigrants’. As Globalisation collapses geography, our sense of who and what are ‘foreign’ is collapsing as well.

One aspect of this is the diminution of the nation-state in importance. The lines drawn on maps today are far less important than they were a generation ago. This process is likely to continue into the future, particularly as global companies see their human resource as an asset that can be deployed at will where it is needed in the world. In doing so, a new form of accommodating our differences is likely to emerge, thus rendering both the mono-cultural and the multi-cultural models obsolete. Perhaps the ultimate point is for us all to be 'Citizens of the World'. That point, however, does seem a bit remote when viewed from today!

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