



Meeting the Challenge of Cultural Diversity in Europe: Moving Beyond the Crisis

By Robin Wilson

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Reviewed by Füsün Özerdem
Associate Professor, Department of Political Science and
International Relations, Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University

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In this book, Robin Wilson proposes a shift from theoretical assimilationism and multiculturalism paradigm to 'intercultural integration'. The author proposes a comprehensive restructuring of the European Union and its identity in the context of a comprehensive theoretical discussion.

Over the past few years, much has been written about the refugee 'crisis' in Europe. In his book "Meeting the Challenge of Cultural Diversity in Europe: Moving Beyond the Crisis", Robin Wilson, an independent researcher and consultant to the Council of Europe, suggests that the most important challenge facing Europe today is to manage the relationship between existing Europeans and newcomers – or 'others' as they are currently stigmatised- more effectively. He argues that a new European understanding based on diversity, hospitality and morality should stem from this new wave of migration. Wilson explains how xenophobic populists associated the idea of 'crisis' with security issues as a consequence of the inconvenience of traditional theoretical and political models aimed at managing cultural diversity in Europe.

In the preface, the author states that his book is not only an 'unorthodox' work of social science, as it combines theoretical with practical, but also a heterodox study of Europe in terms of its subject matter. Intercultural integration, in his view, was "critically built on the foundation of the universal norms which the Council of Europe was established to promote". For this reason, the focus of the book is the Council of Europe rather than the European Union. For more than twenty years, the Council has seemed more concerned with the complex global challenges in managing cultural diversity than the EU itself.

In the introduction, titled "The Barbarian at the gate", Wilson calls into question the authenticity of both the exaggerated 'migrant' or 'refugee' crisis, and the less perceived crisis of terror, implying that Europeans now feel vulnerable to terrorist attacks from fundamentalist Islamists anywhere and anytime. In the global context, Wilson points out, the influx of refugees to Europe is minimal; moreover, a large number of displaced persons remain in their region of origin. Wilson acknowledges that international migration to Europe also has some critical dimensions, like the large number of drowning deaths in the cross-

ing route of the Mediterranean and the Aegean and the problematic Dublin regulation requiring asylum claims be made in the first country of arrival. He also mentions the reactions of migrants to this situation, ranging from forgiveness to resistance. It is indeed true that, considering Europe's long history of refugee movements, this should not be seen as an unprecedented crisis. Yet, what about the regularity of terrorist acts? According to Wilson, the number of such incidents is declining. The data he provides affirms that, contrary to expectations, tolerance towards immigrants, minorities and Muslims is increasing. Moreover, in his debate on 'moral panics', he points out that some EU member states react negatively to the influx of refugees by implementing security priority policies rather than a humanitarian response, especially in eastern Europe. Asylum-seekers, especially Muslims, are associated with the idea that terrorism is the source of security risks and instability; however, most of the perpetrators of terrorists attacks in Europe were citizens rather than refugees. As the author notes, a series of obstacles have been set up in Eastern Europe to prevent migrants from advancing north. Thus, what was once 'borderless Europe', has today become the 'Walls of Europe'.

Returning to the question of whether refugees are economic immigrants or not, the author brings forth the UNHCR data, showing that most of the migrants are profitably employed in their home countries and that the 'economic causes' of their immigration are rarely a priority; hence 'push' factors are more important than 'pull'. Nevertheless, the European border agency Frontex seems determined to protect the borders of the 'European Fortress'. Indeed, "in a context where push factors dominate rather than pull factors, irregular motion is often the paradoxical result of tighter controls".

In the second part of the book, Wilson expresses the concept of "The old order: how Europe used to manage cultural diversity" and suggests that before the emergence of the intercultural paradigm for the management of cultural diversity, two previous paradigms were dominant: assimilationism and multiculturalism. The first claimed that minorities, a supposedly homogeneous group, had to comply with the dominant 'national culture', while the latter claimed that the minorities, who were perceived as sub-assets, had their own 'culture' and were worthy of equal respect. However,

Wilson later argues that there was always another model - marginalisation or the exclusion of the "other". Assimilationism then can be either "revolutionary" or "reactionary", which are ambiguously associated with liberal nationalism and the right to national self-determination respectively (yet the latter is increasingly defined by minority separatism and resistance to the traditional nation-state).

Part three: "Morbid symptoms", aims to document the problematic events in both of these previous models, which occurs due to the failure of these social models to explain the process and in particular the 'violent inter-ethnic and anti-state explosions' as Wilson argues. The author places recent terrorist activities in the context of xenophobia and stereotyping. Stereotypes are often degrading, emotionally charged and independent of any personal experience, resistant to change, and hardly affected by rational arguments; thus they deny the natural complexity of individual identity. In this regard, both negative and positive stereotypes are characterised as excessive generalisations based on limited evidence.

In the fourth section, Wilson then asks, "What went wrong?". Here, he tries to identify the so-called flaws in the previous paradigms to grasp how they "consume their capacity to effectively manage diversity". What he calls "illiberal liberalism" is actually about defending assimilation. It continues to explain how imaginative homogeneous multicultural communities relate to misconceptions that limit the conception of multiculturalism.

Chapter 5: "In search of scapegoats: the crisis of European capitalism and its misrecognition" emphasises the importance of economic analysis. In this section, Wilson argues that the long-standing economic stagnation of the Eurozone and the constant depression of the southern circle is very much connected to the main concerns of his book, as these have created a fertile ground for increased social insecurity, increased populism and xenophobia.

In chapter six, "Europe's moral conscience: the Council of Europe takes the stage", the author compares the Council of Europe with the EU and suggests that the EU plays only a modest role in dealing with the increasing challenges of cultural diversity management. He argues that the EU's understanding of inte-

gration is simple and rather strange since it is grounded on the juxtaposition of majority-assimilationist views with minority-multiculturalist claims.

In the seventh chapter titled "The new paradigm: intercultural integration", Wilson advocates the need for 'radical remodelling' in very academic prose. Since both assimilation and multiculturalism are defined by the individual and ethnic societies vertical relationship with the state, Wilson points out, these fail to address the horizontal relations which are necessary for cultivating social relations among different individuals. Wilson thus emphasises the centrality of dialogue in the intercultural paradigm as it successfully captures the aforementioned horizontal relations. Moreover, Wilson states, the positive intercultural paradox suggests that the complexity and non-exclusive nature of identity mean overlapping identities, so that 'solidarity among foreigners' is possible in the name of a common humanity.

In chapter 8; "Cosmopolitanism: the class consciousness of frequent flyers?", Wilson argues that a new paradigm requires a new theory at the highest level of abstraction. This chapter looks less like a theoretical review from the main stand-point of the book; rather, it seems like an indication of the author's open passion for political philosophy.

Chapter 9: "Trying it out: The Intercultural Cities Programme" is going back to making more explanation about the intercultural, by exemplifying it through a program, in which Wilson is a consultant to administrators. The Council of Europe has more municipal dimensions than the EU. Interculturality, for example, has focused on cities that can be viewed as problematic, as new immigrants in Germany have settled in smaller communities, especially to avoid too much concentration in cities. Wilson emphasizes that intercultural cities (i.e. program members) benefit more from the commitment to create 'urban persuasion spaces' and can obtain 'the broader power of the agency claimed by the most dynamic cities in the world'. While explaining how interculturalism is implemented in this chapter, Wilson also reviews recent efforts to promote 'intercultural integration', especially in the cities of the Netherlands and Germany.

Chapter 10: "Europe facing the world: an ethos of hospitality". According to an Italian city (Reggio Emilia)

which is a member of the programme, “an aspiring intercultural city should have an international policy that seeks, at least in part, to promote a dynamic relationship with places of origin of major diaspora groups”. However, Wilson argues that the EU has promoted stabilisation over democracy. He also believes that diversity has the power of enrichment and when diversity is used to promote interaction, it could be seen as an advantage and source of innovation source, rather than a source of conflict.

The concluding chapter returns to the main point that interculturalism is a more appropriate paradigm compared to assimilationism or multiculturalism in managing an increasing demographic diversity in a globalised context. The new intercultural integration paradigm that has emerged over the past decade “not only provides a complete discursive reframing of the struggle but also opens the way for progress, many of which have already been tried and tested”.

To sum up, in this book, Wilson advocates a transition from the theoretical assimilation and multiculturalism paradigms to intercultural integration. He demonstrates how the Council of Europe’s ICC program can (as it already does) remedy the problem of cultural diversity in Europe.