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**Book Review: *Meeting the Challenge of Cultural Diversity in Europe: Moving Beyond the Crisis*, by Robin Wilson.**

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*In this book, **Robin Wilson** advocates moving from a theoretical paradigm of assimilationism and multiculturalism to ‘intercultural integration’. The author proposes an overarching refoundation of European unity and identity and engages in a wide-ranging theoretical discussion. However, **Alan B Anderson** finds that this book does not ultimately detail the dimensions and full impact of the new migration in Europe, nor all the challenges of settling, much less integrating, large numbers of new migrants.*

***Meeting the Challenge of Cultural Diversity in Europe: Moving Beyond the Crisis*, by Robin Wilson. Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2018.**

During the past several years, much has been written about the presumed refugee ‘crisis’ in Europe (Anderson, 2017). Most recently, Robin Wilson, an independent researcher and adviser to the Council of Europe, has emphasised in his book, *Meeting the Challenge of Cultural Diversity in Europe: Moving Beyond the Crisis*, that the more important challenge facing Europe is managing

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more effectively the relationship between existing Europeans and currently stigmatised ‘Others’ – the new arrivals. He advocates a re-conception of Europe based upon the very diversity which has resulted from this new migration, and upon an ethos of hospitality. Addressing the ‘moral panic’ over migrants and concomitant security issues, Wilson attempts to explain why conventional theoretical and political models aimed at managing cultural diversity in Europe have become inappropriate if not obsolete, while xenophobic populists are increasingly promoting the idea of a ‘crisis’ together with security issues. Rather, he promotes what he suggests is a new theoretical paradigm – ‘intercultural integration’, in the process drawing on ‘cosmopolitanism’ and other theoretical approaches in the social sciences. As he explains in the preface:

I have had the privilege of observing, and in a small way contributing to, the emergence of a new paradigm for the management of cultural diversity as it has developed as a process of theory-building and empirical experimentation around the work of the Council of Europe since 2002....High-level officials of the Council of Europe, as well as external advisers (including myself)...have had to grapple with what the member states of the organisation came to recognise as troubling empirical phenomena, which their old paradigms for the management of cultural diversity no longer seemed capable of appropriating. Faced with this challenge, they have worked to articulate a new paradigm of intercultural integration, which has been trialled on the ground through the Intercultural Cities (ICC) programme...

(Wilson vi–vii)

Yet this explanation rather begs the question of exactly how novel the notion of ‘intercultural integration’ is; moreover, one may well question the use of the term ‘management’ of cultural diversity.

In the preface, the author suggests that this book is ‘an unorthodox work of social science’, bringing together the theoretical and the practical and that this is a ‘heterodox book in terms of its subject matter – Europe’. Intercultural integration is, in his view, ‘critically built on the foundation of the universal norms which the Council of Europe was established to promote’. The book’s focus is, therefore, on the Council of Europe rather than the European Union; the Council has over two decades been more concerned than the EU with the complex global challenge of managing cultural diversity. He sees the more effective management of cultural diversity as hopeful in the face of negativism preferred by contemporary populism.

In the introductory chapter: ‘The Barbarian at the gate’, Wilson questions whether there is truly an exaggerated ‘migrant crisis’ or ‘refugee crisis’ in Europe, much less a perceived ‘terrorist crisis’ (‘a sense that Europeans are everywhere and at any time vulnerable to murderous attack, presumptively by Islamists’). He suggests that within a global context, the refugee influx into Europe is actually minimal; moreover, the vast number of displaced persons remain in the general original region. Wilson recognises that there have been critical dimensions of international migration into Europe, such as in large numbers of drowning deaths in attempted crossings of the Mediterranean and Aegean, the problematic Dublin regulation requiring that asylum is sought in the first country of arrival and the differential response to migrants ranging from magnanimity to resistance. Europe has indeed had a long history of refugee movements, so this is hardly an unprecedented crisis. But what, then, of the terrorist acts which have regularly been committed? Wilson provides data to suggest that such incidents have actually been lessening, moreover have actually had the effect of increasing rather than diminishing tolerance toward migrants, minorities and Muslims. Nonetheless, in his discussion of ‘moral panics’, he points out that some EU member states have reacted negatively to the influx of refugees, deploying a securitarian rather than humanitarian response, especially in eastern Europe. Asylum seekers, particularly Muslims, have tended to be equated with terrorism, security risks and instability; yet most perpetrators have actually been citizens rather than refugees. Too often, asylum seekers have been viewed as bogus refugees (this reminds us of the oft-cited need to reclassify refugees as ‘economic migrants’ – but what refugees coming from poorer countries to more developed countries are not aware of economic benefits?).

As the author points out, the most important obligation of *non-refoulement* prohibits states from returning refugees to territories where their lives or freedom would be threatened (according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) definition). Walls have been constructed – literally – on borders between EU and other states, depriving blocked and detained asylum seekers of their liberty without an assessment of their asylum claims before being inappropriately expelled (according to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR)). In eastern Europe a succession of barriers was erected to block the northward progress of migrants. Thus a ‘Europe without borders’ has been turned into a ‘Europe of walls’. Nonetheless, in Germany, a *Willkommenskultur* allowed the entry of a vast numbers of migrants who were fortunate to have made it that far, in recognition of the state’s responsibility to refugees, and perhaps not least as a

result of *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* – a ‘working off the past’, i.e. making up for past national guilt (Neiman 2019) – which Wilson does not mention.

Returning to the question of whether migrants are not as much refugees as economic migrants, the author cites UNHCR data which suggest that in fact a large proportion of migrants were gainfully employed back in their original countries, moreover ‘economic reasons’ for their migration were seldom prioritised; so ‘push’ factors were more significant than ‘pull’. Yet the European border agency Frontex seems intent on guarding European borders, encapsulating ‘Fortress Europe’. Even unaccompanied children have not been considered as objects of compassion; rather ‘European leaders continue to believe that by building fences and punishing those who still try to cross them, they will deter others from fleeing for their lives’. In fact, ‘irregular movement – in a context where push rather than pull factors predominate – is often the paradoxical result of tighter controls’. The UNHCR (2016) elaborated a ‘revitalised asylum system’ in the EU.

Much political preoccupation has been devoted to securing the state. Thus, as Wilson explains, the externalisation of the refugee ‘Other’ has been matched in Europe by attempts to reinforce the state apparatus – entailing a ‘securitisation’ process involving ‘fortification of the ramparts of the state’ at the expense of the privacy of the individual citizen. But in the struggle to remove stigmatisation of migrants, it is essential, the author suggests, to analyse and understand ‘radicalisation’ within the context of pluralism. He suggests that there has been a ‘fundamental misrecognition of the real challenge confronting Europe....to manage, within Europe vis-à-vis the newcomers it attracts, the relationship between Europe’s perceived (white, Christian) indigenous “Self” and the stigmatised “Others” (refugees and Muslims)...in the discourse of moral panics’.

In the second chapter: ‘The old order: how Europe used to manage cultural diversity’, Wilson suggests that ‘before the emergence of the intercultural paradigm for the management of cultural diversity, two prior paradigms dominated: assimilationism and multiculturalism’...The former ‘conceived states as if homogeneous and assumed members of putative minorities should conform to the prevailing “national culture”, whereas the latter argued that minorities, conceived as sub-state entities, had their own “cultures” and these were worthy of equal respect’. However, he then suggests that there has always been another model – marginalisation or even exclusion of the ‘Other’. Assimilationism may be ‘revolutionary’ or ‘reactionary’ (represented in France’s ‘thick’ conceptualisation of national identity and *laïcité*), which he then confusingly associates even with

liberal nationalism and the right to national self-determination (yet the latter has increasingly come to be identified with minority separatism and resistance to the conventional nation-state). Contrasting assimilationism with multiculturalism, the author suggests that ‘it might be assumed, because multiculturalism assigns a positive connotation to cultural diversity, whereas assimilationism is at best blind to it, that therefore individuals from minority backgrounds would feel more identification with the state in multiculturalist regimes – on the contrary’. Admittedly, in his view, multiculturalism could be viewed as a reaction to assimilationism, rather than as a competing alternative. He briefly mentions the rise of multiculturalism in Britain and the Netherlands, but – strangely – not in Canada (where it became an official national policy in 1971). He explains, ‘If multiculturalism avoided the issue of integration by putting the onus on the state to engage in a “politics of recognition” vis-à-vis variously culturally defined “communities”, assimilationism evacuated the “host” community of any responsibility to integrate into a taken-for-granted national society. But paradoxically, both assimilationism and multiculturalism have shared a “national paradigm” – “culture” turns out to be culture in the national image’.

This does not seem to be as paradoxical as oversimplified. Surely the discussion here would have benefitted from a clearer distinction between assimilation and integration, conceptualisation of minority cultures within national settings (contrasting traditional and even newly recreated nation-states with diverse and complex, primarily immigrant-origin countries), ‘national minorities’ with newer immigrant communities and, indeed, the very idea of state ‘management’ of minorities. Wilson’s description of assimilationism seems rather pejorative – and misleading. Assimilation as a longstanding sociological concept has tended to be, in North American usage, rather deterministic; yet as a concept its usage by nationalistic – in fact nativist – political agendas should be contrasted with analyses of ethnic identity change (particularly within immigrant ethnic minorities – which, of course, has been the subject of much legitimate sociological research). Moreover, the author’s critical discussion of multiculturalism comes across as rather narrow. After all, multiculturalism could be viewed as socio-demographic fact (equated with ethnic diversity or ethnocultural pluralism), or as an ideology (aimed at recognition and appreciation of diversity), or as a political agenda (i.e. in the sense in which it apparently is considered in this book) – although such a political policy has more often been praised internationally than criticised, despite its shortcomings and flaws (which could perhaps simply be seen as inevitable challenges).

The third chapter: “‘Morbid symptoms’: the failure of prior social models’, purports to document troubling events which, the author claims, have thrown both of these models into crisis insofar as neither model has been able to explain, much less assuage ‘violent interethnic and anti-state eruptions’. The author places recent terrorist activities within a context of xenophobia and stereotyping. Stereotypes are usually derogatory, emotionally charged and independent of any personal experience, so resistant to change and hardly affected by rational argument; stereotypes thus deny the inherent complexity of individual identity. Negative or positive, stereotypes are characterised as overgeneralisations based on limited evidence. In the ensuing discussion, Wilson delves into Weberian and Freudian theory.

In the fourth chapter Wilson asks, ‘What went wrong?’. Here he attempts to identify the supposed flaws in these prior paradigms in order to comprehend ‘how they came to exhaust their capacity to manage diversity effectively’. What he calls ‘illiberal liberalism’ is associated with the defence of assimilation. He continues to explain how ‘imagined homogeneous communities of multiculturalism’ relate to misconceptions limiting the purview of multiculturalism. He even suggests that the identitarian movement of the far right in Germany ‘explains itself in terms indistinguishable from multiculturalism’. Moreover, he suggests that assimilationism and multiculturalism are not necessarily counterposed approaches to dealing with cultural diversity. Emphasising the personal complexity of identification, which presumably is not sufficiently taken into consideration in multiculturalism, he nonetheless admits that ethnopolitical entrepreneurs are able to mobilise conscious and unconscious support in the creation of ethnic boundaries. In concluding, he notes that both assimilationism and multiculturalism have taken for granted the nation-state as the ‘monopoly power-holder’ and ‘national container’.

Chapter 5: ‘In search of scapegoats: the crisis of European capitalism and its misrecognition’ stresses the importance of economic analysis. The prolonged economic stagnation of the Eurozone and the sustained depression of the southern periphery, the author argues, ‘is highly germane to the concern of this book: the consequent heightened social insecurity has provided fertile ground for rising populism and xenophobia’. In its annual report for 2016, the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (2017) (an arm of the Council of Europe) warned of ‘years of economic and social policies driven by an austerity agenda which has left many Europeans in a state of fear and anxiety, easily exploited by nationalistic, xenophobic populist movements

promoting a political climate in which foreigners are portrayed as a threat to one's own identity, culture and economic prosperity'. In the author's opinion, Europe needs to reinvest in universal norms which seem to have atrophied since the war, and right-wing, populist parties which have risen since the 1980s have effectively pressured centrist parties on immigration and security issues. Populism, defined as an exclusionary form of identity politics, has represented Islam as the 'demonised Other' needing to be expunged from traditionally homogenous societies.

In Chapter 6: 'Europe's moral conscience: the Council of Europe takes the stage', the author contrasts the Council of Europe with the EU, suggesting that the EU has played only a modest role in addressing the rising challenge of managing cultural diversity. He suggests that the EU's 'conception of integration was simply, and rather awkwardly, to put majority-assimilationist and minority-multiculturalist claims side by side'. On the other hand, the Council of Europe (2008) more substantially took on the challenge of rethinking the management of cultural diversity through its White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue and its successive ICC programme. That a commitment to universal norms seems to be atrophying in Europe is exemplified by popular acceptance of authoritarianism (for example in France and in the United States since the election of President Trump).

In the seventh chapter: 'The new paradigm: intercultural integration', Wilson argues (in rather obtuse academic prose) the need for a 'radical reframing': 'Assimilation and multiculturalism...were defined by the vertical relationship of the individual and ethnic "community" respectively to the state, failing thereby to address the need for horizontal relationships among diverse individual selves and others for social cohesion to be realised – hence the centrality of dialogue to the intercultural paradigm'. He continues, 'The positive interculturalist paradox is that the complexity and non-exclusive nature of identity...means overlapping identities, and so a "solidarity among strangers" (to borrow from Habermas) in the name of a common humanity, are possible'. Complexity indeed! Even what may be considered 'minorities' and 'majorities' has become complicated by historic minorities having relatively recently (since the 1990s) found themselves to be recreated nations – hence the Council's criticism of overemphasising the majority/minority dichotomy, despite its Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (Council of Europe, 1995). In sweeping terms Wilson has written: 'If multiculturalism overtook assimilationism because the latter could not deal with the

pluralisation of society in western Europe and North America after the Second World War, interculturalism has transcended multiculturalism in the era of “super-diversity” arising from globalisation and individualisation’. Then again resorting to rather abstract psychological language, he writes that assimilationism involved the subordination of the ‘Other’ in the ‘Self’, whereas multiculturalism was unconcerned about the relationship of the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’; the new paradigm of intercultural integration could be described as the inclusion of the ‘Other’ within the ‘Self’. He seems to think that the *Willkommenskultur* that emerged in Germany on a wave of sympathy may be short-lived. ‘Islamist and white-nationalist violence...both have their roots in narcissistic intolerance of a “demonised enemy”’. The author explains that ‘the widespread backlash against multiculturalism and associated “new assimilationism” has been evidenced in the toughening of naturalisation requirements across Europe...the construction of mental walls between the “Self” and the “Other”, making it harder for individuals to make the transition from the latter to the former category’. Wilson launches into an extensive critique of Kymlicka’s (2003, 2010, 2016) (among others) defence of liberal multiculturalism: he suggests that Kymlicka fails to understand that individuals may not necessarily identify with particular minorities. He counters Kymlicka’s assertion that there is a distinction between the ‘societal cultures’ of national minorities and the ‘loose associations’ of voluntary migrants. He points out that Kymlicka’s conception of multiculturalism treats the purported cultural ‘community’ as the political unit and it fails to recognise the constitutive character of equal rights-bearing individuals in a pluralist, democratic society. Finally, he disparages Kymlicka for downplaying the White Paper as a report which, in criticising multiculturalism, tends to legitimise populism. Needless to say, it would take much space to respond to such a list – which does not validate his many points.

In Chapter 8: ‘Cosmopolitanism: the class consciousness of frequent flyers?’ Wilson suggests that ‘a new paradigm requires new theory at the highest level of abstraction’. Indeed, this is what this chapter attempts to accomplish, delving into Kant, Marx, ‘metacognition’, Habermas, and more contemporary writers including Held, Beck, and many others. Yet this chapter seems like a digression from the main point of the book; rather it seems indicative of the author’s obvious penchant for political philosophy. Again, just how novel this paradigm is may be questionable.

The next chapter, ‘Trying it out: the Intercultural Cities programme’, returns to explaining more about this programme for which Wilson has been an adviser to the director (he conducted a



qualitative evaluation of the programme in 2013), as an exemplification of ‘interculturalism’. The Council of Europe has had more of a municipal dimension than the EU. Interculturalism has focused on cities, which in itself could be seen as problematic, as new migrants, for example in Germany, have been settled in smaller communities specifically to avoid too much concentration in cities. Wilson emphasises that intercultural cities (i.e. members of the programme) have reaped wider benefits from a commitment to creating ‘urban spaces of conviviality’ and can ‘tap the broader power of agency which the world’s most dynamic cities are asserting’. In describing how interculturalism is put into practice, he reviews recent efforts to promote ‘intercultural integration’, particularly in Dutch and German cities. Then he answers the question as to how well the ICC programme has worked. He explains the use of the Migrant Integration Policy Index by the ICC network and specifically the Migration Policy Group (2017). As an example, he describes the Intercultural Integration Plan of the Ukrainian city of Melitopol, conducted in 2015–20. This ambitious plan promotes cross-cultural awareness, education and intercultural communication, social activities, economic and informational support of intercultural development, intercultural planning and creative management of urban space, a welcome policy of the city and cultural and spiritual practices, as well as tourism and regional studies. What makes all of this especially interesting is that this city has been close to the fighting in the separatist region of south-eastern Ukraine (which he fails to mention). The chapter concludes with what the author calls a ‘balanced assessment’, referring to the tension felt in participating cities over increasing populist authoritarianism which could threaten the progress of intercultural integration.

This, then, leads into the tenth chapter: ‘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...to promote a dynamic relationship with places of origin of major diaspora groups’, whereas Wilson suggests that the EU has favoured stabilisation over democracy. In contrast to populist negativity directed toward migrants, the OECD has emphasised that successful integration of migrants improves economic and fiscal benefits as well as social cohesion. Increasing numbers of migrants have presented challenges, to be sure, but also opportunities. He adds that European competitive economic ambitions have also been countered by American nativism. Wilson recognises that there are very real costs associated with refugee integration – which he exemplifies in Germany, Norway, and Sweden. Then in summarising, he agrees that intercultural policies try to promote diversity as an

asset, a resource, and source of enrichment; they accommodate diversity by promoting interaction, and most importantly, move away from viewing diversity as a source of conflict, distrust, insecurity, disunity. Rather, diversity should be viewed as an advantage and an opportunity for innovation.

The concluding chapter, 'Beyond an enduring crisis', returns to the main point that interculturalism is preferable to assimilationism or multiculturalism in managing growing demographic diversity in a globalised context. The new paradigm of intercultural integration which has emerged over the past decade 'provides not only for a complete discursive reframing of the challenge but also the opening up of avenues for progress, many already tried and tested'. Wilson emphatically expresses his belief that a cosmopolitan Europe is needed now more than ever. A reinvigorated, more social Europe which could engender more of a feeling of belonging among the excluded and marginalised will require a marked transformation of the economic governance of the EU. In his view, Europe desperately needs a constitutional refoundation; such a 'refoundation' of Europe implies that the concept of European citizenship be given more substance in accordance with the Maastricht treaty. And ideally, he suggests, such a refoundation would merge the EU and the Council of Europe. Yet 'Europe's turn toward xenophobia – fear of the alien – prevents just such a realignment, by condemning it to remain in a defensive, inertial state'. What Wilson calls 'a realistic utopia' would promote a pan-European identity and citizenship over national governments emphasising national identity; a cosmopolitan European identity and governance should supersede national identities and governments. He agrees that the only real way to move beyond the crisis is a politics of hope and unity instead of a politics of despair and resentment.

In sum, in this book, Wilson advocates moving from a theoretical paradigm of assimilationism and multiculturalism to 'intercultural integration'. He suggests how the ICC programme of the Council of Europe could meet (and has already met) the challenge of cultural diversity in Europe. He criticises populism as xenophobic and certainly not in the long-term best interests of Europeans, and effectively downplays the populist propensity to view the latest migrant influx as a 'crisis' and promote 'moral panics' over refugees, particularly Muslims. The author passionately (and quite convincingly) proposes an overarching refoundation of European unity and identity to replace or diminish national self-interest; he even recommends the merging of the EU and Council of Europe,

despite the EU preoccupation with a securitarian rather than humanitarian response to refugees. And the author engages in a wide-ranging theoretical discussion, delving into political philosophy. However, this book does *not* detail the dimensions and full impact of the new migration in Europe, nor all the challenges of settling, much less integrating large numbers of new migrants. The author presents an oversimplified, selective view of both assimilation and multiculturalism, emphasising just their use in political agendas, without an adequate explanation of at least multiculturalism as state policy, and does not really explain how multiculturalism could pertain to integration. He repeatedly portrays ‘intercultural integration’ as a new paradigm, when this is hardly a novel concept. Moreover, he does not provide a thorough critique (or even a summary) of the challenges of the ICC programme (while he has been responsible for evaluating the programme for the Council of Europe). And lastly, what, exactly, is meant by ‘management’ of cultural diversity?

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