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Public culture in societies of immigration

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1. The role of public culture

In October 2000 a German politician, Friedrich Merz, the leader of the parliamentary faction of the Christian-Democratic party CDU, launched a debate on the need for immigrants to integrate into the *Leitkultur*, a term which is now translated as ‘defining culture’. In the controversy that followed, the president of the Jewish community in Germany asked whether the outbreaks of racist violence in the Eastern provinces should be seen as part of this defining culture that immigrants would have to accept. In its party manifesto on immigration policy the CDU has replaced the original formula “a German defining culture” with an apparently less nationalistic one: “a defining culture in Germany”.

The idea I want to develop in this paper is that public culture in societies of immigration must be self-transformative. In a way this is the very opposite of a defining culture that sets the terms of integration, although both share the assumption that democratic societies exposed to immigration need a common cultural framework that is supported by their political institutions. So it may be useful to start with a brief look at how the CDU defines the defining culture. The manifesto lists three elements: constitutional principles and values, the German language and the Christian-occidental community of values. The first two items will also figure in my own list. In these regards the dispute is not about whether to include, but how to interpret these elements. It is the last item that reveals the intention of the political campaign. Immigrants can endorse constitutional principles and they can make efforts to learn the language of the receiving country. However, a Christian-occidental culture can be neither chosen nor learned. Combining the markers of religion (Christian) and geographic origin (occidental) creates a boundary between the natives and certain groups of immigrants that is meant to exclude the latter. Ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe or migrants from other EU member states already belong to this Christian-occidental community, the two million immigrants from Turkey don’t. The authors of the CDU manifesto seem to be fully aware of this. They even felt the need for some fine-tuning, in order not to exclude the wrong groups: thus, ironically, Judaism is listed among the sources of *Christian-occidental culture*.¹

Before I turn to my own list of elements of public culture, I will try to explain my use of this concept and why I think it is relevant for integration in societies of immigration. George Bernhard Shaw famously quipped about England and America being two nations separated by

^{*} A first version of this text was given as a lecture at the conference: Globalisation in the Local Community, 27-29 November 2000 at Malmö Högskola, International Migration and Ethnic Relations. Later versions were presented at seminars in Stockholm and Copenhagen and at the conference “Beyond Assimilation and Separation: Migrant Categories, Groups and Collective Identities, organized by the Institut für Interkulturelle und Internationale Studien, University of Bremen. Special thanks to Bernhard Perchinig and Thomas Faist for helpful comments.

¹ The full quote is: “Integration requires therefore, besides learning the German language, to take a clear decision in favour of our political and constitutional order and to insert oneself into our social and cultural ways of life. This means to accept the value order of our Christian-occidental culture in Germany, which has been shaped by Christianity, Judaism, the philosophy of antiquity, humanism, Roman law and enlightenment.” (my translation)

the same language. Since English has become the global language of academic discourse the scope of misunderstanding in transatlantic debates due to different uses of the same term has become much broader. The way American and European legal and political theorists use the term 'public' is a good example. In Europe, the dominant interpretation links 'public' to publicity, i.e. to communication that is open in the sense of being addressed to an unspecified or unlimited audience. In economic theory the main characteristic of public goods like clean air or city parks is that nobody can be excluded from enjoying them. Jürgen Habermas' theory of the public sphere (Öffentlichkeit) builds on this interpretation.² In this framework, public culture refers to the symbols, norms and values, world-views and styles of communication shared by persons and groups who interact in the public sphere. In the US, however, the term 'public' more often refers to the political sphere only. It signifies the *res publica*, the public interest or the common good of the political community. Thus, for John Rawls the public culture of a democratic society "comprises the political institutions of a constitutional regime and the public traditions of their interpretation, as well as historic texts and documents that are common knowledge." He distinguishes this public political culture from the "background culture" of civil society.³ The point of this distinction in Rawls' theory is that comprehensive religious and moral doctrines belong to the background culture, but not to the public culture. The latter contains only those norms and values that all citizens can share as equal and free members of the political community irrespective of their religious and moral views. On Rawlsian grounds the CDU defining culture would be classified as non-public precisely because it is not a suitable basis for the political commitment a democratic society can expect from all its various groups, be they natives or immigrants.

The way I want to use the term public culture coincides neither with the Habermasian nor the Rawlsian interpretation. The former is too wide for my purpose while the latter is too narrow. I refer to public culture as those aspects of a society's culture that are shaped by its public political institutions. Different from Rawls I want to start from a descriptive notion of public culture that looks first at those areas where all democratic states try to assert control over cultural developments in society. In a second step we can then address the question what *ought* to be the content of this culture in a democratic and liberal society of immigration. One advantage of this two-step procedure is that our normative considerations will remain much closer to real-world contexts. We will be less tempted to abstract from structural features of contemporary societies that are part of what Rawls calls the circumstances of justice. Secondly, we are also less likely to overlook those cultural activities of state institutions that do not establish formally neutral legal rules but promote a particular cultural identity within a society that is itself culturally heterogeneous. That is, our attention will be drawn to aspects of state-backed cultural hegemony and domination that are ignored in Rawls' theory but might support claims for cultural minority rights.

In order to distinguish a public culture from the Habermasian notion of public sphere, it is important to emphasize that state institutions are not the sole force shaping the culture of a civil society. They compete in this respect with the institutions of economic markets and kinship systems. On the one hand, the contemporary market economy creates volatile and highly diversified patterns of life style and consumer culture. On the other hand, primary socialization in the family reproduces the more stable cultural milieus of class, regional, ethnic and religious

² see Habermas (1962).

³ Rawls (1993: 13-14).

communities.⁴ While consumer culture is no longer confined within national border and becomes increasingly global, the intergenerational reproduction of distinct cultural communities and milieus makes all modern societies internally multicultural. In this context of heterogeneity the specific role of the modern state is to create a public culture that is roughly coextensive with the political community.⁵ Such a public culture fulfills four fundamental tasks: it provides, first, a standardized idiom of communication; second, a repertoire of collective memories and identity; third, a set of explicit and implicit norms and values regulating political conflict and decisions; and, finally, a set of implicit norms and styles of behaviour that are broadly shared across different communities within society. In a shorthand way we can identify these four aspects as linguistic, historical, political and civil culture.

Many authors would label the phenomena I have just described as elements of *national* culture. I hesitate to use this term because it signals a degree of homogeneity and comprehensiveness that often cannot be achieved and in most cases is undesirable to aim for. First, a national culture in the singular is obviously inappropriate for *multinational* states that are composed of several autonomous political communities. Yet it is also questionable in *multiethnic* societies where heterogeneity resulting from immigration cannot be easily reconciled with a nationalist view of collective identity. Secondly, a national culture is generally regarded as providing an overarching identity that includes but also dominates other particular identities. It is, in Will Kymlicka's words, a societal culture "which provides its members with meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities, including social, educational, religious, recreational, and economic life, encompassing both public and private spheres. These cultures tend to be territorially concentrated, and based on a shared language."⁶ As I have already pointed out, I regard the public culture of contemporary democracies as incomplete and constantly competing with other centrifugal forces in civil society that pull towards more global or more local cultural styles.

What is the significance of a public culture so defined for societies of immigration? I suggest that the integration of immigrants depends crucially on four conditions: economic opportunities, legal equality, cultural toleration and recognition, and an inclusive public culture. Economic opportunities for immigrants must allow for upward social mobility within and between generations. Legal equality can be achieved through combining extensive rights for settled non-citizens with guaranteed access to formal citizenship through naturalization or at birth. Toleration and recognition refer to the distinct ethnic, linguistic and religious communities formed by immigrants; they ought to enjoy equal liberties to use their languages and practice their religion, some public recognition and some special exemptions from general rules.⁷ In contrast with such legal accommodation of cultural minorities the fourth condition of integration refers to the public culture of the wider society. My conjecture is that even taken together the first three conditions are not sufficient for integration. The public culture must reflect the fact of immigration and transform itself in response to it.

My focus on this fourth requirement should, however, not in any way signal a lesser importance of the other three conditions. I have a particular reason for choosing this focus. I am a citizen of Austria where the first and second conditions of integration are seriously underdeveloped. There

⁴ I regard civil society as an intermediary sphere of voluntary associations that emerges from a rough equilibrium in an institutional triangle formed by markets, state and kinship (Bauböck 1996, 2000).

⁵ see Gellner (1983).

⁶ Kymlicka (1995: 67). For a critique of Kymlicka's concept of societal culture see Carens (2000: 64-77).

⁷ for a classification of cultural minority rights see Levy (2000: chapter 5)

is still a lot of legal discrimination against non-EU migrants in this country and surveys show that their social mobility is significantly lower than, for example, in neighbouring Germany.⁸ I wrote this paper in November 2000 while holding a guest professorship in Sweden. My impression from the literature is that, compared to other European countries, the Swedish record is rather good on the legal equality and cultural recognition dimensions, and probably not much worse than that of many other countries when it comes to economic opportunity. However, I have a suspicion, nourished only by anecdotal evidence, that this good record has not overcome a strong sense of exclusion among immigrant communities in this country. Like other small European nations Sweden seems to find it easier to tolerate the presence of immigrants as long as they remain culturally distinct foreigners. It is much more difficult to learn to regard unassimilated others as true Swedes, that is, as ordinary members of the globalizing society which Sweden has become. If I am right, this may signal a deficiency in the public culture. One reason why this should raise concerns is that it creates a potential for nationalist populist parties and racist movements to stir up anti-immigrant sentiments in the population, a potential that has recently become manifest in neighbouring Denmark and Norway. The dilemma is that this potential cannot be substantially reduced through integration policies on any of the other three dimensions. On the contrary, opportunities, equal rights and cultural recognition for immigrants may be exploited rhetorically to fuel resentment among the native population against minority privileges. This can only be prevented through a changing perception of the collective We. And the primary responsibility for transforming the public culture to make it more inclusive lies with a country's political institutions.

I will now turn to my list of elements of public culture. For lack of time I will only be able to discuss the first two items: language and history. I will discuss them separately, asking each time what might be the task of political institutions in democratic societies experiencing continuous and large-scale immigration. I have to leave it to your imagination how the answers that I will suggest might apply to a transformation of the political and civil culture.

2. Language

First and most obviously, democratic community requires the capacity of all citizens to communicate. State bureaucracies need standardized languages for internal coordination and for the services they provide to the general public. Citizens need skills in these languages in order to effectively communicate with state institutions and in order to participate effectively in political debates. These arguments can be added to Ernest Gellner's well-known theory that linguistic homogenization within a state territory is required by the industrial division of labour, a theory which may be somewhat less relevant for a postindustrial economy. These political and economic reasons lead to a simple conclusion: While the modern liberal state is by and large neutral in religious matters, it is structurally incapable of being similarly neutral with regard to linguistic difference. This fact of linguistic establishment must be taken into account in normative considerations about language policy in multicultural societies.

On the one hand, a state-backed dominance of specific languages within a national territory is not necessarily oppressive in the same way that state support for certain religious doctrines would be. People who speak a common language remain free to state any moral conviction they have and to disagree profoundly in their views. In fact, they can only disagree if they can communicate their

⁸ see Fassmann et al. (1999).

disagreements in a common language. Because a certain amount of linguistic homogeneity within society is a functional precondition for democracy, state institutions have not merely a negative duty to allow the free use of minority languages in civil society, but also a positive duty to enable all citizens to participate in a common public culture, for example by establishing public schools where these languages can be learned.

On the other hand, this argument does not require the establishment of a single national language. In liberal states official multilingualism can be sustained in two ways that are normally combined: as regional monolingualism and as statewide multilingualism. In multilingual federations like Belgium, Switzerland or Canada provincial governments establish their own languages that dominate the regional public culture. In order to integrate such monolingual provinces into a democratic federation, the federal institutions must to a certain extent be multilingual so that they can communicate with citizens in several officially recognized languages. Federal integration will also be promoted through multilingual education that encourages citizens to learn at least one language spoken in other parts of the federation. This shows another relevant difference between language and religion: In contrast with monotheistic religions, language communities are not mutually exclusive. Learning second and third languages requires efforts, but besides its positive impact on political integration it also yields benefits for individuals by offering them additional opportunities and enhancing their mobility.

Such policies of official multilingualism are not about minority rights. They are ways of shaping a common multilingual public culture that reflects the composite character of a federal polity. I don't think that similar policies would be required or even appropriate in response to the fact of immigration. Territorial linguistic establishment is connected to claims of political autonomy and self-government. Immigrant communities normally do not raise demands for this type of recognition and they would be ill advised to do so. These communities are generally concentrated in major cities, but dispersed throughout the country so that they do not form a regional majority within a stretch of territory where they could become autonomous. And even where sufficient numbers concentrate in a sufficiently large territory, it is not self-evident that this would back claims to autonomy and linguistic establishment. Immigration would turn into invasion if outsiders, after being admitted, could simply claim for themselves any part of the territory where they form a numerical majority. Multinationalism and immigration give rise to different recognition claims.⁹ Confusing them plays into the hands of those forces who are interested in portraying immigration as invasion.

How should societies of immigration then respond to linguistic diversity resulting from recent immigration? I suggest that public policy ought to be guided by four principles: linguistic freedom, assimilation, accommodation and recognition.

Liberal democracies must guarantee not only the right of immigrants to use their own languages in the private contexts of family, neighbourhood or ethnic association, but also in the public sphere of civil society where other people will be exposed to these immigrant languages. A liberal state has no business regulating the language of shop signs, advertising, private print or audiovisual media. Private schools may be regulated in various ways, but there should be no discrimination if immigrants want to set up one where their languages will be the medium of instruction. Even if the state does not actively intervene to promote minority languages, the free

⁹ see Kymlicka (1995, chapter 2; 1998, chapter 2).

exercise of linguistic liberties will profoundly transform the public face of civil society. Regions with high concentrations of immigrants such as South California or South Florida have become visibly and audibly multilingual through processes that involve hardly any state-sponsored multiculturalism.

The second task is to promote the acquisition of dominant languages, not only through public education for the children of immigrants, but also for newcomers. I have provocatively called this a principle of assimilation because it in fact endorses a public policy that speeds up a process of language shift that normally occurs between the second and third generation. The main justification for this is that immigrants need skills in the dominant language for both their economic and political integration. Providing these skills is a genuinely public task because in most cases the need to earn a living prevents immigrants from investing time and money into language acquisition. Assigning responsibility for language programmes to public institutions is also important to prevent a policy that blames the immigrants for their failure to integrate. A number of European states today require language skills as a key condition for naturalization without supporting or creating easily accessible language courses. Linguistic assimilation programmes are still compatible with linguistic liberty as long as immigrants remain free to retain and promote their original languages.

Third, although in the long run communicative capacities among all members of a society of immigration can be most efficiently achieved through assimilation into one or a few official languages, in the short run accommodation of linguistic difference is often more appropriate. Learning a new language takes a long time and full fluency is usually only achieved by a next generation already born in the country. Therefore communication between immigrants and private and public institutions of the receiving society can be severely hampered if services are provided exclusively in the established languages. This is particularly important in institutional environments that are experienced as stressful, such as hospitals, police interrogations or courtrooms. In such institutions, immigrants may have a moral right to not only to use their native languages but also to be understood when they speak them.¹⁰ More generally, public policy in countries of immigration should accommodate immigrant languages by providing a broad range of translation and interpreter services, bilingual forms and ballots, information sheets and public broadcasting in immigrant languages.

The second and third tasks, as I have described them, focus only on the communicative value of languages. However, languages also have what we can call identity value. The first language we learn as small children is very different from second and third languages we acquire later on as foreign idioms. It is significant for who we are as persons and – according to some linguistic theories – it may even shape our perception of the world. “Mother tongues” are also markers of collective identity not just for groups that claim territorial autonomy, but also for ethnic minorities who live dispersed among a majority population. This identity value of immigrant languages justifies some recognition rights, for example offering optional courses in immigrant languages in public schools for children of the second or third generation.¹¹ Such programmes are generally not needed for bridging communication gaps in the wider society, but they enable children to communicate better with their parents and grandparents, to maintain links with relatives in the country of origin and to insert themselves into the ethnic communities in the

¹⁰ see Patten (2000).

¹¹ Programmes in immigrant languages in public radio or TV combine a communicative and an identity value.

surrounding society. From the perspective of public policy this is a way of recognizing immigrants as linguistic minorities. The essential difference with linguistic establishment is that the programme is designed to serve the needs of the minority and does not necessarily involve the linguistic majority. And the principle of linguistic freedom demands that even for the minority participation should be optional rather than mandatory.

All the public policies I have listed are rather common in democratic societies of immigration. On the one hand, changing the public culture so that linguistic difference is taken into account does not require radical steps that would lead to splitting society into a myriad of autonomous groups. On the other hand, taking the four principles I have suggested seriously will have the effect of transforming monolingual public cultures into more and more multilingual ones. Even the countervailing principle of assimilation will not prevent this change as long as new immigrants keep arriving and reinvigorate the already established minority language communities.

3. History

History is the second element of public culture that I want to consider. This will probably raise suspicions among historians in the audience. In the 19th century history became important not only as an academic discipline but also as the handmaiden of nationalism. National historiography is not necessarily ideological in the sense of distorting the facts. Writing history from the perspective of a nation in its present composition and territorial boundaries already excludes many other possible historical narratives about the same events and reinforces the belief that nations are subjects of history rather than its contingent products. Today serious historians are reluctant to write national histories. Much contemporary historiography is global, regional or local in scope rather than national. It should still be possible to write the history of states, the evolution of their system of government, the expansion or shrinking of their territory without necessary portraying it at the same time as the history of a nation, that is, of a people sharing an ancient origin, a common culture and a strong sense of identity.

Democracy needs, however, also a sense of historical continuity that refers to the political community rather than merely to the territory or the institutions of government. A democratic polity is always an intergenerational community. Membership is acquired at birth either through descent from citizen parents or through birthplace. A polity is thus not a voluntary association of persons who have chosen to belong to this state rather than to another one. It is also not a spatial aggregation of individuals who merely happen to reside in the same territory at the same time. Democratic decision-making needs a stable framework that is meant to last over generations.¹² This framework includes stable territorial borders and a stable constitution. Democracy can only survive if minorities whose interests are overruled in a present decision have fair opportunities to revise these decisions and win the next time. This reason for democratic loyalty would be subverted if each new generation or maybe even each new election changed the borders and the basic rules for lawmaking. Minorities would defect by seceding and majorities would manipulate the constitution to turn temporary minorities into permanent ones. If citizens of a democracy do not imagine that they share a common future submitting to political authority would become irrational or based on naked coercion. It is, however, impossible to imagine a common future without also sharing the past.

¹² see Bauböck (1998)

To test this hypothesis we may consider three different situations. Imagine first a democratic regime that has been stable and whose basic institutions have enjoyed broad popular support over several generations. This very fact generates a sense of inherited achievements that may need to be reformed but should not be completely undone. Second, imagine a democratic regime that has been born out of a revolution or the military defeat of an authoritarian *ancien régime*. This foundational event creates a shared history. It will be constantly referred to when exploring the options for the future. The writings and speeches of “founding fathers” (or mothers) will figure prominently in the collective historical memory. Where the previous regime was particularly atrocious “never again” will become a national motto. This slogan is not only a call for preventing a return of the old regime, but even more an urge to remember its evils and a pedagogic device for teaching the basic values of the democratic constitution to new generations. Third, imagine the most unlikely case: a foundation *ex nihilo*, a settler regime established in an uninhabited territory or, closer to historical reality, a settler regime that has decimated and pushed into the hinterlands the aboriginal population. Even in this context, a democratic regime will generate historical narratives that tell the stories and invoke the heritage of Pilgrim Fathers or British convicts being deported to Australia. And, one should add, if it is a really democratic regime, it will not only remember the oppression from which the first settlers fled, but also the oppression they exercised over the indigenous peoples whose lands they occupied and cultivated.

Finally, I want to suggest that the imagination of a shared history is not merely an element of a background culture in civil society, but also of the public culture as I have tried to define it. Historical memories will have a special place in the families who trace back their origins to revolutionary heroes, writers of the constitution or victims of the previous regime. Certain associations in civil society and political parties will defend a particular interpretation of the nation’s history. But these activities are not sufficient to create a collectively shared memory. Only state institutions can ensure that a historical narrative becomes hegemonic in society. They do so through references to an official history in national symbols like flags, anthems or national holidays, in political speeches and in school curricula. Hegemony does not mean that everybody shares a deep conviction about, or emotional affiliation to, these historical narratives. Citizens need not take them all that seriously as long as they take them for granted.

My claim that democratic regimes have to imagine a shared history raises a formidable challenge for societies of immigration. It seems to exclude immigrants from the public culture almost by definition. How could newcomers, who arrive with a memory of the history of their own countries of origin, see themselves, and be seen by native citizens, to share the past of the receiving country? Different from settlers and colonists they do not initiate a new history in the places where they enter. And the more diverse the origins of immigration are, the less likely is it that their historical baggage will somehow become part of the mainstream public culture. This seems to leave them no other options than either permanent segregation within the polity or full assimilation, including this time dissimulation from their origins. If they or the receiving society choose the first option, immigrants and their descendants will remain foreigners even after becoming citizens. They will cultivate their own historical memories and tell their children stories about what happened back home a long time ago. And the native population will continue to regard them as people from a different country even when they have been born in the same hospitals as their own children. Divided histories will divide the citizens of native and migrant origin. This is just as bad for democratic integration as when the native population itself is divided by the memories of unreconciled factions of a past civil war.

If the second option is chosen, immigrants will have to forget where they came from. In the US Hispanic children will learn in school that their ancestors sailed across the Atlantic on a boat called Mayflower, in France Algerian children will learn that their forefathers stormed the Bastille, in Germany Turkish children will learn to be ashamed of the Holocaust rather than of the genocide of Armenians. Although an assimilationist conception of public culture need not deny the fact of immigration as such, it denies that the historical content of the public culture is affected by this fact. This kind of integration through assimilation may have worked in some countries for some time. However, it is unlikely to work under conditions of full liberties of speech and association, which allow immigrants to make their own voices heard. And it is also undesirable because excluding the memories of immigrants distorts and history impoverishes the public culture. In the US the big immigration from around 1900 was rather successfully assimilated during the period between the 1920s and the 1950s. But we should not forget that there were two preconditions that today cannot or should not be brought about: an immigration stop in the aftermath of World War I and an aggressive Americanization policy that in fact denied immigrants basic cultural freedom.

So how can a society of immigration escape this unpalatable choice? I believe there is a third option. First, the rules of membership themselves must be changed in response to immigration.¹³ In countries of immigration, acquisition of citizenship at birth must not be exclusively based on descent, or else several generations of immigrant descent may remain formally excluded from the polity. Alongside introducing some form of *ius soli* the second significant element of reform is to turn naturalization from a discretionary decision of authorities into an entitlement of applicants without demanding that they have to renounce their previous citizenship. This change of rules does not undermine the intergenerational continuity of the polity. It would not promote an image of the polity as a voluntary association because the children of immigrants would acquire citizenship automatically at birth. And because first generation immigrants would still have to apply for naturalization rather than being automatically turned into citizen without their consent, the polity would still remain a community membership in which implies certain commitments and is therefore distinct from a mere aggregation of residents. The important effect of such a reform of citizenship law is that the mechanisms that ensure historical continuity of the population base of a democratic community no longer define immigrants as outsiders. By giving them a right of access to citizenship, they are already included in the imagined community even before they choose to join it formally.

Reforming citizenship in this way will have important long-term effects on popular conceptions of collective identity. Maybe a generation from now, there will be a lot of research on how the German citizenship reform of 1999 has transformed ethnic conceptions of nationhood. However, this is merely a precondition for a change of historical consciousness and, given the largely formal character of citizenship in many western democracies, the desired effects cannot be taken for granted. The historical dimension of public culture should also be reshaped directly and in the short run.

The third option would then consist in the task of weaving the histories of immigrant communities into the larger tapestry of a shared public history in such a way that they remain visible as strands of different colour. How can this be achieved without multiplying the colours to

¹³ see Bauböck (1994).

the point where they merely yield an overall impression of a bland gray and without selecting some colours arbitrarily, which would mean that excluded groups cannot recognize the tapestry as also telling their own stories?

Identity politics may be opposed by arguing that a proliferation of recognition claims will diminish the value of recognition towards zero. This is an objection not to be lightly dismissed. Its basic steps are the following ones:

(1) Once a state gives special recognition to a particular group it creates an incentive for other groups to discover their particular oppression and collective identity and to construct their claims in the language of victimhood.

(2) Because of the basic democratic commitment to equal respect and concern for all citizens all such claims must be treated equally, so if one group is recognized, all must get similar recognition. After recognizing national minorities one must recognize immigrant ethnic groups, then all hybrids and dissenters should be recognized as groups that are victimized because they do not fit into group patterns and finally, the native majority will of course complain that they are the victims of reverse discrimination. This process of proliferation is greatly accelerated by the fact that recognition groups are not mutually exclusive because they intersect. Gender, class, sexual orientation, age, physical or mental handicap, etc. can all serve as grounds for recognition claims.

(3) Special recognition is a socially scarce or “positional” good.¹⁴ Once everybody gets it, it is no longer special and thereby loses its value. So after giving special recognition to all who might claim it, we end up in a situation where all are equal and nobody is specially recognized. The detour we have taken may, however, be quite costly in terms of social cohesion.

At an abstract level this argument is hard to beat. But it loses much of its bite once we start to look at claims for the public recognition of histories in a historical perspective. It will then turn out that recognition claims are different in kind: migrants generally do not aspire to the same kind as indigenous minorities. And including immigrant groups in the public history of the receiving society does not involve compiling the official histories of all countries of origin. A public history is a narrative about how a *particular* society has changed over time. Writing the history of immigration is the key to incorporating the history of immigrant groups. How then could such a history be selective but still representative?

My first suggestion is that new light could be thrown on historical encounters between sending and receiving countries. Let me mention my own country Austria as an example. The two largest national origin groups of immigrants, Serbs and Turks, figure prominently in the Austrian collective memory. Serbia was the historical enemy of the late Habsburg monarchy and the killing of the designated successor to the Austro-Hungarian throne by a Serb nationalist in Sarajevo was the pretext for Emperor Franz Josef to start the First World War. When I went to school, the Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683 was reported as major turning point in European history and a defining moment for Austria’s national identity. Although it was a Polish king who saved us from Kara Mustafa’s troops, it was in our territory that the survival of Christian-occidental culture was decided. Today in public discourses the historical connection between our past and current immigration is mainly exploited by right wing populist rhetoric. However, the enemies of past wars do share a common history that can be reinterpreted as a reason for unity in the present. The best example is the original plan of the founders of the European Economic

¹⁴ see Hirsch (1977).

Communities to create an economic as well as a political union that would weld together nations that had been at war with each other for so many centuries. There is no need for historical revisionism to achieve this end. All that it is required is an ethical interpretation of historical enmity as constituting itself a reason for reconciliation and future cooperation. The presence of an immigrant population whose historical narratives tell the other side of the story should be an incentive to explore how the shared history could be written in such a way that it creates prospects for a shared future.

My second point is that migration often flows in riverbeds carved out by already established historical links. It is simply not true that most migrants are rational economic opportunity seekers that choose their destination by calculating wage differentials, unemployment rates or currency exchange rates. Or, to put it more precisely, only short-term migrants calculate in this way. Long-term immigrants are rational enough to include in their calculations costs of settlement, benefits of cultural skills that may help them in particular places but may be worthless in others, and foreign policy relations that will make it more difficult for the receiving country to deport them back home. This is one reason why migrants from former colonies so often choose the former colonial power as a destination. In contrast with a past connection through war, colonial ties are causally relevant for creating postcolonial migration flows. There are many other ways how states are involved in creating the particular type of migration that they receive. Recruiting guestworkers is only the most obvious one. As Saskia Sassen has pointed out, direct capital investment may also lead to migration flows in the opposite direction.¹⁵ All these well-known findings of migration research are so many arguments for regarding immigration as a legacy of the receiving society's own past, or as a result of its attempts to shape its own future, rather than as a historical accident to which it was involuntarily exposed.

Thirdly, even where no historical connections of the first or second type can be uncovered, large-scale immigration itself opens a new page in history. An exchange of populations is the most important mechanism for connecting previously unconnected histories. This has probably been true ever since the early days of humanity. Once migrants settle and start to intermarry with the local population, their own biographies and memories create new angles for interpreting and linking the histories of the countries from which they have come and of those where they take up residence. This dynamic is very strong in modern mobile market economies and liberal democracies that defend the freedom of marital as well as cultural choices. In such a context the segregationist or assimilationist options do not emerge naturally but have to be imposed. This does not require racial segregation laws or the suppression of minority languages. It is quite enough to create a national public culture in which these two options seem the only feasible ones.

I would like to add a caveat to this point. Nothing I have said about the need to integrate the histories of immigrants into a public culture is meant to deny the liberty and opportunity for migrants to build a minority identity that focuses specifically on their origins and to retain thus a sense of their own history as a separate one. Not all migrants are involved in homeland politics or conceive of themselves as members of diaspora communities, but quite a number of them do.¹⁶ The reasons for this orientation towards national projects outside the society of residence are many and most of them should be fully respected. They include, for example, the histories of political refugees who have suffered persecution and whose main goal is to overthrow a

¹⁵ see Sassen (1988).

¹⁶ see Cohen (1997).

repressive regime in their home country; of stateless nations like Kurds or Palestinians for whom mobilizing their diaspora is a way to stake their claims in the international arena; of religious communities whose doctrines refer to holy places and lands and for whom living in a country where their religion is in the minority implies special burdens and duties. What I have said about language is just as true for history: The need for constructing a shared public culture is not incompatible with the freedom for immigrants to organize themselves as distinct minorities.

5. Conclusions

I have initially stated the main idea of this paper as that of a self-transformative public culture. Let me conclude by explaining how the various suggestions I have made could be summarized under such a heading. Consider first, the proposals for reforming citizenship laws. They entail that the polity is constantly transformed in its population base in such a way that neither territory nor descent finally determine who belongs to it. State authorities, who represent the present citizens, also no longer exercise control over new admissions through discretionary naturalization. The political community opens up its membership for those who live permanently in the territory while retaining the connection with those who have emigrated. Yet it still asserts the consensual character of belonging by leaving it to the individuals concerned to apply for admission or to sever the ties through expatriation. The self-transformation is thus not an abandoning of the allocation of membership to the contingent forces that determine migration flows, but a self-assertion as a democratic community that embraces the dual principles of inclusion and consent.

Similar considerations apply to the linguistic and historical dimensions of public culture. Public history becomes self-transformative if it is no longer written as that of a particular nation. National identity is constructed by excluding or assimilating groups whose collective memories relate them to other places and polities. The alternative perspective is that ongoing immigration uncovers, or newly establishes, historical links that require a constant rewriting of the past.

In contrast with integrating the history of immigrants into shared public narratives, linguistic accommodation appears to be additive rather than transformative. Certainly, immigration changes also the vocabulary of the dominant languages. *Döner* has become a German word. However, it would be naïve to regard the adoption of ethnic food or music by the native population as a sign of cultural openness. The true test is still the amount of public support for the use of immigrant languages in institutions like schools, hospitals or courts. Linguistic public culture is then self-transformative not in the sense of constantly remixing native and imported languages. Neither is it a mission of public policy to protect immigrant languages against extinction. The task is rather to facilitate communication in a multilingual polity and to respect chosen linguistic identities.

One of the major problems in liberal democracy is the tension between its two defining elements. Political liberalism defends the rights of individuals and minorities against the danger of majority tyranny, but democratic institutions and decisions can only be sustained if they enjoy broad popular support. Constitutionalism and the rule of law have thus been described as self-imposed constraints on democracy through which majorities tie their own hands for the sake of equal liberties of all. Because democratic majorities consist of changing groups of individuals who benefit from these liberties it is rational for them to endorse such constraints. The specific problem of securing rights for cultural minorities is that majorities have no self-interested reason in tying their hands in this way because they know that they will never themselves be in the

position of the minority. For this reason, describing the rights of immigrants as a constraint on the interests of democratic majorities may be correct for the purposes of moral theory but offers little guidance for how to win majority support for this task. The idea that the changing public culture of a society of immigration is the result of self-transformation offers a more attractive interpretation. It rejects the construction of native majorities and immigrant minorities as permanently separate groups. Instead it promotes the image of a heterogeneous public¹⁷ with a shared interest both in representing and in integrating its diverse groups.

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¹⁷ see Young (1990).

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