

The Anguish and the *Angst*

Immigration and the Western world

by Derek Turner

The debate about immigration in the Western world is heavily charged with emotion and full of complex moral significances. The very concept of immigration carries with it a heavy load of subjective emotional baggage, positive or negative or a mixture of both, depending on one's point of view.

For the immigrant himself, there is virtually no moral aspect to immigration. The concept of immigration has only positive emotional undertones for immigrants themselves. It evokes vaguely-realized but brightly colored notions of new beginnings, compensation for mistakes made, escape from old oppressions and — not least — the sheer, reckless joy of restlessness. The act of emigration from one's ancestral homeland and subsequent arrival in somebody else's is both an act of faith and an exhilarating adventure.

I speak from experience, as a former immigrant myself. After I came to London from Dublin to live nearly ten years ago, I would quite often get momentary bursts of enthusiasm, irrational seconds of excitement whenever I saw something particularly emblematic of my adoptive city. On my first night in London, I remember walking through Camden Town in the rain, with an enormous thunderstorm overhead, full of the double excitement of the storm and the new yet familiar streets, whose names I had heard in a hundred stories. And there were other occasions when something was somehow encapsulated for me — I remember walking

along the road from my bedsit in Maida Vale on Remembrance Sunday 1988, a beautiful autumnal day, with yellow leaves falling in the crisp sunshine and a red Flanders poppy in the buttonhole of my coat — and the sweep of Hampstead Heath in the failing light of a drizzling evening after a long day's tramp, with the old-fashioned lamp posts gleaming through the wet, reminiscent dusk, like the lamp post in the forest in Narnia.

I think of all these experiences and many others, and can remember how an immigrant can feel about an adopted country, and what it is to try to embrace a new culture. This is a much more profound feeling than the pleasure of being abroad on holiday — I spent several holidays in England as a boy but never felt the inchoate excitement and sense of intimate involvement that I did (and do) as an immigrant. I can imagine that similar feelings of liberation must have been embedded in the hearts of the first European settlers in North America, where every man could (in theory) be a king, and the horizons were limitless. I feel I have some comprehension of the feelings of the well-meaning, hard-working, willing-to-assimilate newcomer, and understand the rationale of the immigrant, and why he does not think of the possible moral implications of the act of immigration, or how it might impinge on the indigenous inhabitants. He leaves it to others to worry about the ethics of immigration.

And there are very many moral implications to immigration from the point of view of the recipient nation, which must undergo the rapid and sometimes even violent changes that can be brought about by immigration. It should be remembered that this era of immigration is unlike any other, insofar as the numbers are extremely large, and nobody is being expected

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to assimilate into their host culture any longer (unless one is going to an Islamic country). A further point should also be made — that there are great differences between large and small-scale immigration. The consequences, real or imagined, are very different according to the magnitude of the immigration — and, of course, much morality is based on a fear of the possible consequences.

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When immigration is small in scale, when it is made up of genuine refugees, when the newcomers are grateful and eager to “fit in” and when the host culture is sure of itself, the problem is relatively small, usually becoming a matter of simple charity rather than culture or politics. Where could be the harm, most people reason, and with considerable justice, in accepting a small number of refugees or workers — especially if they are educated or healthy people whose presence may actually quicken the cultural or economic life of the host nation? Few Britons could find it in their hearts to object to the trickle of pleasant and industrious West Indians who came to Britain from 1950 on, to work on building sites, drive buses and empty hospital bedpans. Who then could have foreseen modern-day Brixton, Peckham, Elephant and Castle, Ladbroke Grove or Hackney?

We can all imagine ourselves in the situation of refugees. We all know that life is short and precarious. We have all experienced homesickness and loneliness. We all detest injustice, and can understand why anyone might fly from it. We even feel guilty about economic inequality, even when there is no actual

repression. Among the powerful images conjured up when we think of immigrants are all the sad-eyed, brown children we have seen staring gravely into the television cameras, with their wasted limbs and the flies crawling in and out of their nostrils. Although our first reaction may be repulsion, we also feel duty-bound to offer succor. One look into those brown eyes and we are unmanned, like Samson under Delilah's scissors. What Jean Raspail called the “stampeding lambs” of the Third World bowl us over. We think the Third World is all like Upper Volta, and feel generic compassion for people we shall never meet, and who would feel nothing for us if we did meet them. A blend of charitable pity and racial guilt for our prosperity (and, increasingly, for what our forefathers allegedly did)

means that we make allowances for all the immigrants who come to our countries — so long as there are not too many of them, and so long as they do not directly affect us — that is, move in next door. It is no accident that the most vociferous “anti-racists” come from comfortable backgrounds, which means that they can patronize the immigrants from a safe distance.

When there are not too many immigrants, members of the host nation can comprehend the immigrants as individuals, and chivalrous instincts can come into play. But when the immigrant numbers become numerically significant, very different feelings are aroused. It then becomes a matter of two colliding moralities — the morality of the animal kingdom, which wills us to hold our ground, versus the “higher” morality, the will to be “good,” the moral system we all ingested in Sunday school or college. The desire to live and multiply is in direct contradiction to the desire not to be “racist” or “bigoted.” Although the race-guilt and pity are still present in conditions of large-scale immigration, they are much diluted by other motivations, which hark back to the prehistoric past, and belong more

to the realms of group psychology than politics.

When an immigration wave passes a certain, ill-defined numerical point, the immigrants start to lose their separate humanity in the nativist mind, and become part of a phenomenon. They are no longer individuals who may be assessed on their own merits. We enter the territory explored by Elias Cannetti, where mob rule replaces human understanding. Immigration becomes a question of species versus species, rather than humans meeting humans. The moral feelings that are felt by people reacting to individuals become the instinctual feelings held by a crowd. Let the few tolerated or even welcomed foreigners swell a thousand- or ten thousand-fold, and they become a rival gang, an army, a fifth column, a swarm, a tidal wave about to break over our heads. We may not mind having a bee in the same room as ourselves, but if there are a hundred bees it becomes a very different matter. The sheer number of “them” reminds us of the relative defenselessness of “ourselves,” of our society’s fragility, and of our own mortality.

In areas undergoing heavy immigration, our “family” is suddenly confronted with a lot of possible rivals, who are less “entitled” than we to our nation’s riches because they do not have any “property rights.” Our “family” has always lived here, and what we have, we hold. The sense of aggrievement felt by the indigenous about incomers in large numbers is augmented when incomers batten on the social welfare system, as they often do - but even then, criticism is muted, both because the facts are not widely enough known and because of the *ersatz* morality of “political correctness” — that burden of guilt that so many Europeans and Americans carry around like a little black cloud. True morality, which demands self-reliance and self-respect, would not permit of trying to bilk the taxpayer.

The quantity of immigrants is the single most important cause of inter-ethnic tension, and the

single biggest destroyer of true morality. Who could blame the (extinct) Tasmanian aborigines for showing such hostility to the first Europeans? Who could blame the Estonians for getting so annoyed about the Russian settlers who are now something like a third of the population of Estonia? Who could blame the French for getting upset about the 5,000,000 Muslims now residing in France? It

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is never immoral to seek to retain one’s own independence and identity. Those who say that it is simply do not realize the importance of culture — except, of course, when it comes to Third World peoples, when culture is suddenly of the greatest importance.

Furthermore, once immigrants become a “swarm,” and their numbers become viable for self-sufficiency, they are more likely to become inward-looking and more confident — even to the point of arrogance. This can be easily seen in those countries of the Western world where radical Muslims have settled in appreciable numbers, or where aggressive multiculturalism holds sway. It is easier to retreat into one’s ancestral culture than to take a step into the blue and attempt to join the mainstream. And once immigrants recede into their own group, and away from a common national culture, their differentiating characteristics are noticed and acted upon more often, by themselves and others. New layers of misunderstanding are built up; soon the ghettos become permanent fixtures, and a new social schism is opened. Sometimes the alienation is so severe that the immigrants become *de facto* foes of the host society, sworn, like the radical Muslims, to rebuild society in their own image. Their drive for equality has become a drive for super-

equality, and their feelings of moral duty have become feelings of moral superiority.

Despite these obvious contradictions and flyings in the face of reason, political and religious enthusiasts of a certain type seem to be able to discern in the faces of Third World immigrants “noble savages,” even little brown Christs. The Pecksniffs who pontificate in pulpits about “all the little children” and the Gracchites who massage “ethnic” voters' egos seem to obtain moral satisfaction by striking “anti-racist” attitudes. But the part-mawkish, part-splenetic posturing of the political Left is not genuine morality, merely a display of a lack of cultural self-confidence. It is in fact an ignominious surrender to the prevailing orthodoxy and an appeasement of the new masters. To them, the highest form of morality lies in spurning one's own people in favor of everybody — anybody — else. The warriors who stood up so doughtily for the rights of women and the preservation of the environment, and against cruelty to animals and the arms race are strangely quiet when it comes to female genital mutilation, *halal* slaughter and Third World dictators (particularly if the dictator is left wing).

Finally, it is instructive to note that our agonising about immigration is not universal. In

the Third World, people take a rather more practical rather than a romantic view of immigration. Indeed, there are Third World politicians who believe that immigration into Western countries can be used as a weapon. In May this year, the Malaysian Prime Minister, Dato Seri Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad, said: “We have the ultimate weapon...if we are not allowed a good life in our countries, if we are going to be global citizens, then we should migrate North in our millions, legally and illegally. Masses of Asians and Africans should inundate Europe and America...we will make all nations in the world rainbow nations.”

The prospect of this *Camp of the Saints* scenario may well have the reverse effect — of showing the beleaguered nations of the West that our conventional morality and wisdom about immigration are not enough. **TSC**