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## EUROPE AND THE NEW MIGRATION AS AN AGENT OF CULTURAL CHANGE: BETWEEN SECURITY AND IDENTITY

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**Abstract:** *This article examines contemporary migration in Europe as a major agent of cultural change, situated at the intersection of security concerns and identity transformations. Drawing on historical perspectives, sociological and cultural theories, and recent empirical data, the study explores how intensified migratory flows reshape European societies by challenging traditional notions of national identity, social cohesion, and security. The analysis combines theoretical approaches to cultural identity—such as hybridity and fluidity—with concrete case studies, including Germany's post-2015 integration policies and Hungary's restrictive migration stance, in order to illustrate divergent national responses within the European Union. Additionally, the article addresses the role of European migration and asylum policies, urban multicultural dynamics, and cultural practices—particularly art and hybrid cultural forms—in facilitating or hindering integration. By critically assessing both real and perceived security risks associated with migration, the paper argues that migration should be understood not merely as a security challenge, but as a complex socio-cultural process with the potential to redefine European identity. The study concludes that sustainable migration governance requires a balanced approach that integrates security measures with inclusive cultural and social policies, emphasizing dialogue, human rights, and intercultural cohesion.*

**Keywords:** *migration, cultural change, European identity, security, integration policies, multiculturalism*

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### INTRODUCTION

Europe is currently facing one of the most complex and dynamic socio-cultural transformations in its recent history, with migration representing a key driver of this change. In recent decades, the intensification of migratory flows, caused by geopolitical, economic, demographic, and climatic factors, has confronted the continent with multiple challenges related to security, identity, and social



cohesion. At the same time, this migration crisis becomes an opportunity for the reconfiguration of European culture, for the redefinition of traditional concepts of national and community identity, as well as for the reconstruction of policies that respond both to protection needs and to those of inclusion.

Migration in Europe is not a new phenomenon, but one with deep roots that has influenced the formation and development of European civilization for centuries. However, the current complexity of this phenomenon, combined with its speed and scale, as well as the global political context marked by tensions and crises, requires a detailed and nuanced reexamination. Beyond demographic and economic considerations, migration must also be understood as a cultural process, in which the movement of people inevitably generates a circulation and transformation of values, practices, and identities.

The objective of this essay is to develop an in-depth analysis of how contemporary migration acts as an agent of cultural change in Europe, by investigating the interactions between migration, security, and identity. We will explore the theoretical foundations of these interrelations, illustrate them with concrete case studies at both European and national levels, and evaluate the impact of current policies in this field. In addition, we will address the perceived and real risks associated with migration, as well as the cultural integration strategies that can lead to sustainable social cohesion.

## **1. THE HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT OF MIGRATION IN EUROPE**

Migration to Europe has a millennia-old tradition. Since Antiquity, various populations have moved across European territory, shaping the culture and demographics of the regions. The Roman Empire, the great migrations of Germanic and Slavic peoples during the Middle Ages, and the spread of Islamic culture in the Iberian Peninsula were all migratory phenomena that irreversibly transformed the continent. (Baudel, 1982, 102-110)

In the modern era, especially in the post-war period, Europe became the main destination for economic migrants from former colonies, as well as for political refugees. A defining moment was the massive migration of the 1960s and 1970s, when Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and other countries invited workers from Turkey, the Maghreb, and South Asia to support economic reconstruction. (Castles & Miller, 1988, 54-60)

This first stage of migration generated diverse integration models, ranging from the French model based on assimilation to the British model of tolerated multiculturalism. However, the subsequent waves, especially those of the 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium, were marked by a greater influx of refugees from conflict zones such as the Balkans, the Middle East, and Africa, raising new questions regarding the capacity of European societies to absorb these populations. (Koser, 2016, 45-50)

### *1.1. THE 2015 MIGRATION CRISIS AND ITS EFFECTS*

A major turning point was the year 2015, when the Syrian refugee crisis reached unprecedented levels. In that year, over 1 million people attempted to enter the European Union, primarily through Greece and Italy. The civil war in Syria, instability in Iraq and Afghanistan, and conflicts in North Africa fueled this massive migration.

The reaction of European states was divided: Germany and Sweden adopted relatively open policies, while countries such as Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic raised barriers and restricted access, invoking national security and the protection of cultural identity. This political conflict triggered a crisis of European solidarity and reignited the debate on national sovereignty versus European cooperation.

These developments were accompanied by an intensification of nationalist and populist political discourses, which exploited fears related to security, identity, and the loss of control over borders. (Mudde, 2019, 89-95) At the same time, civil society and NGOs developed numerous support initiatives for migrants, promoting an alternative perspective on migration.

### *1.2. RECENT STATISTICS AND TRENDS*

According to Eurostat, between 2015 and 2024, the European Union recorded over 5 million migrants related to economic, family, and humanitarian reasons. Of these, approximately 2 million were granted international protection status, while the rest were registered as economic or family migrants.

In addition, intra-EU migrants (mobile workers) have become an important force in the European labor market, contributing to addressing the demographic deficit in several states.

A relevant trend is the diversification of migrants' countries of origin, as they now come not only from geographically close countries but also from more distant regions, which complicates the processes of cultural integration and adaptation.

## **2. THEORIES AND PERSPECTIVES ON MIGRATION AND CULTURAL CHANGE**

In order to fully understand the role of migration in cultural change, it is necessary to analyze the fundamental theoretical concepts that shape this topic.

### *2.1. CULTURAL IDENTITY: FLUIDITY AND HYBRIDITY*

The concept of cultural identity has evolved in recent decades from an essentialist, fixed view to a fluid and dynamic one. Stuart Hall, one of the most influential contemporary theorists, argues that identity is a “continuous production” in which individuals constantly negotiate meanings and affiliations. (Hall, 1990, 222-237)

Migration, by moving individuals from one cultural context to another, stimulates this process of identity renegotiation. This gives rise to the concept of hybrid identity, in which elements from both the culture of origin and that of the host country coexist and mutually influence each other. (Bhabha, 1994, 38-42)

### *2.2. MIGRATION AS A CULTURAL AND SOCIAL PHENOMENON*

Migration is not only a demographic process but also a form of intense cultural exchange. Migrants bring with them languages, customs, religions, and cultural practices which, in contact with host societies, generate changes. These changes can take the form of synthesis as well as cultural conflict. (Vertovec, 2007)

Research in urban studies highlights the role of cities as “laboratories” of cultural diversity, where new forms of multicultural urban identity emerge, alongside tensions. Sandercock refers to “mongrel cities,” places where cultural mixing becomes a source of innovation but also of social challenges. (Sandercock, 2003, 110-130)

### *2.3. CULTURAL POLICIES AND INTEGRATION*

The development of cultural policies aimed at integrating migrants is essential for managing these changes. These policies vary between models that promote assimilation, multiculturalism, interculturalism, or even segregation.

For example, France favors the assimilation model, where migrants are encouraged to adopt republican values and norms; Canada and the Netherlands promote active multiculturalism,

encouraging the preservation of cultural diversity; while Sweden follows an intercultural model, which emphasizes dialogue and social inclusion. (Favell, 1988, 120-145)

### **3. CASE STUDY: GERMANY AND MIGRATION POLICY AFTER 2015**

#### *3.1 CONTEXT AND POLITICAL DECISIONS*

Germany represents a striking example of how migration can become a catalyst for cultural change and, at the same time, a challenge for security and identity. In 2015, Chancellor Angela Merkel adopted an open policy toward Syrian refugees and those from other conflict zones, famously declaring: "Wir schaffen das" (We can do this).

This decision had a major impact, with Germany receiving over 1 million asylum seekers in the following years. The policy was internationally praised as a model of humanity but also sparked internal and external controversies.

#### *3.2 SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPACT*

The massive influx of migrants led to significant changes in the social and cultural structure of some German cities, especially Berlin, Frankfurt, and Hamburg. In these cities, diverse communities developed, with markets, restaurants, and cultural events reflecting increased pluralism.

However, tensions also arose related to integration, discrimination, as well as hate-motivated attacks against migrants. Organizations such as Pro Asyl reported increases in xenophobic incidents during these years.

#### *3.3 POLITICAL AND LEGISLATIVE RESPONSES*

The German government initiated multiple programs for the integration of migrants: intensive German language courses, education and vocational training programs, as well as policies promoting intercultural dialogue.

At the same time, security was a central point in the political debate, with a focus on preventing radicalization and combating terrorism. The asylum law was amended to allow accelerated procedures and strict border control measures.

### **4. CASE STUDY: HUNGARY AND THE RESTRICTIVE APPROACH**

#### *4.1 ANTI-MIGRATION POLICY*

Hungary, led by Viktor Orbán, adopted a firm anti-migration stance after 2015, viewing migration as an existential threat to national identity and security. The government built fences at the borders, implemented policies to reject migrants, and organized public campaigns against them.

Orbán stated in a speech: "Europe must remain European; it must not become a continent of Islam." This rhetoric fueled populist and Eurosceptic currents.

#### *4.2 IMPACT ON RELATIONS WITH THE EU AND SOCIETY*

This stance generated tensions with the European Union, which criticized the violation of refugees' rights and the lack of solidarity. Romania, Slovakia, and Poland adopted similar positions, forming a hard line in Central Europe.

Within Hungarian society, the anti-migration discourse polarized public opinion, increasing xenophobia but also fostering solidarity among some civic groups with migrants and refugees.

## 5. EUROPEAN POLICIES ON MIGRATION AND SECURITY

### 5.1 THE COMMON EUROPEAN ASYLUM SYSTEM

The European Union has attempted to build a common framework for managing migration and asylum through the Migration and Asylum Pact adopted in 2020. This pact provides for the fair sharing of responsibilities among member states, border control measures, accelerated procedures, and relocation mechanisms.

### 5.2 CHALLENGES AND CRITICISM

Critics of the Pact argue that the proposed solutions do not sufficiently consider migrants' rights and that responsibilities continue to be disproportionately borne by countries on the eastern and southern borders, such as Greece, Italy, and Spain.

There are also security concerns, especially in the context of risks related to radicalization and organized crime, which require enhanced cooperation among European security services.

## 6. MIGRATION AND IDENTITY CHANGE: CONCRETE EXAMPLES

### 6.1 LONDON – A GLOBAL CITY, A FLUID IDENTITY

London is a model of a cosmopolitan city, with over 300 languages spoken and an ethnically and culturally diverse population. This diversity has led to a redefinition of London identity, which is often described as "a dynamic cultural mosaic."

Although the city promotes multiculturalism, there are also interethnic and social conflicts, such as the tensions in neighborhoods like Tower Hamlets or Brixton, where diversity has sometimes been accompanied by segregation. (Wacquant, 2009)

### 6.2 PARIS AND THE ISSUES OF THE BANLIEUES

In France, the Parisian suburbs (banlieues) are places where migration and cultural identity often confront poverty, exclusion, and marginalization. The banlieues have become a symbol of integration failure, often serving as the scene of social riots and interethnic tensions. (Hargreaves, 2007)

This phenomenon reflects the contradiction between the French model of assimilation and the complex social realities of cultural diversity.

## 7. SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS IN OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

### 7.1 SWEDEN: A MODEL OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Sweden has been, throughout the 2000s, a model for liberal policies on welcoming and integrating migrants, focusing on social inclusion and equal opportunities.

Between 2010 and 2016, Sweden received a large number of Syrian and Afghan refugees, implementing comprehensive social programs: from Swedish language courses to support in accessing housing and education.

However, as the number of migrants increased, problems arose related to segregation, high unemployment among immigrants, and rising crime in certain neighborhoods. These difficulties have fueled a heated national debate about the limits of an open integration policy.

### *7.2 ITALY AND SPAIN: ENTRY POINTS AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES*

Italy and Spain are key countries in receiving migrants from North Africa and the Middle East, often serving as entry points to the European continent.

In Italy, managing migration is complicated by limited infrastructure capacity and internal political conflicts regarding asylum. In southern cities such as Lampedusa or Sicily, the migration phenomenon intersects with local economic challenges and complex dynamics of solidarity and rejection.

Spain, especially in the Andalusia region, has become an important transit and reception point, and in recent years has invested in local integration policies, focusing on education and employment.

These countries have developed networks of NGOs and international cooperation to support migrants, but they also face issues of social exclusion and community tensions.

## **8. THE ROLE OF ART AND CULTURE in IN MIGRANT INTEGRATION**

### *8.1 ART AS A SPACE FOR INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE*

Art has become a fundamental tool in the process of integration and cultural exchange. Film festivals, exhibitions, theatrical performances, and community projects highlight migrants' stories and facilitate intercultural dialogue.

For example, the “MigrArte” Festival in Barcelona promotes migrant artists and encourages reflection on identity in multicultural societies.

### *8.2 HYBRID CULTURAL FORMS AND NEW IDENTITIES*

Young people from the diaspora create hybrid cultural forms—music, literature, dance—that combine their original traditions with European influences. Rap music in native languages, bilingual films, and street art are examples of expressions that reconstruct identity and enable dialogue with the host society. (Canclini, 1995)

These artistic practices are not only forms of self-expression but also means of inclusion and resistance against discrimination. (Floya, 2020)

## **9. ANALYSIS OF SECURITY RISKS RELATD TO MIGRATION**

“Eurocepticism and nationalism emerge as intertwined reactions to the perceived loss of sovereignty and cultural identity, generating internal pressures that challenge the cohesion of the European project.” (Petrila & Brie, 2023, 173)

“Nationalist rhetoric gains strength in contexts where citizens feel that national sovereignty is threatened, turning Eurocepticism into a symbolic shield against perceived external pressures.” (Petrila & Brie, 2023, 176)

### *9.1 REAL DANGERS AND DISTORTED PERCEPTIONS*

Migration can generate certain security risks, such as the infiltration of terrorist groups, human trafficking, or organized crime.

However, numerous studies show that the majority of migrants are not involved in such activities, and perceptions of insecurity are often exaggerated and politically exploited.

### *9.2 MEASURES AND BEST PRACTICES IN RISK MANAGEMENT*

Risk management involves strong international cooperation, efficient information exchange, and integrated policies aimed at preventing social exclusion, the main vulnerability factor.

Examples of best practices include deradicalization programs in cities like Brussels and Amsterdam, which involve local communities and social services in a coordinated effort.

## 10. ADDITIONAL THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

### 10.1 THE HUMAN SECURITY THEORY

The concept of human security, developed by the UN, expands the notion of security beyond the military dimension to include economic, social, and cultural aspects.

Within this framework, migration is seen as an expression of vulnerability and the need to protect fundamental rights, with security balanced by respect for diversity and inclusion. (Buzan, 1983)

### 10.2 SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

The social psychologist Henri Tajfel highlighted how group membership influences perceptions and attitudes towards “others.” (Tajfel, 1989)

In Europe, identity tensions related to migration can be understood through the “ingroup-outgroup” dynamic, which explains both the defensive reactions of majority societies and the strategies migrants adopt for adaptation and identity negotiation.

## CONCLUSION

The new migration in Europe is a complex and multidimensional process that directly influences the cultural, social, and security dynamics of the continent. It represents both a challenge and an opportunity, and the European response must be holistic, inclusive, and adapted to contemporary realities.

Managing migration through a security-focused lens should not overshadow the need to promote fundamental rights, intercultural dialogue, and social solidarity. Art and culture play a crucial role in building a pluralistic European identity, where diversity is seen as a resource rather than a threat.

Policies must reflect the complexity of the phenomenon, and societies must learn to live together in diversity, thus strengthening security through cohesion and mutual trust.



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