Immigration, Integration and Mobility: New Agendas in Migration Studies

Essays 1998-2014

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CONTENTS

* PREFACE

INTRODUCTION

* 1. Immigration, migration and free movement in the making of Europe

PART ONE
APPLIED POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: THE PROBLEM OF MULTICULTURAL CITIZENSHIP

* 2. Multicultural citizenship in theory and practice: applied political philosophy in empirical analyses
* 3. Multicultural race relations in Britain: problems of interpretation and explanation

PART TWO
THE QUESTION OF INTEGRATION

* 4. Assimilation/Integration
* 5. Integration policy and integration research in Europe: a review and critique

PART THREE
HIGH SKILLED MIGRATION AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

* 6. The human face of global mobility: a research agenda (with Miriam Feldblum and Michael Peter Smith)
* 7. Social and spatial mobility (with Ettore Recchi)

PART FOUR
NEW MIGRATION AND MOBILITIES IN EUROPE

* 8. The new face of East-West migration in Europe
* 9. The fourth freedom: theories of migration and mobilities in ‘neoliberal’ Europe

CONCLUSION

* 10. Rebooting migration theory: Interdisciplinarity, globality and postdisciplinarity in migration studies

* Bibliography
THE IDEAS AND ARGUMENTATION in this book date back to the day in February 1989 when a death threat was pronounced on the British Commonwealth writer Salman Rushdie while I was working at a multi-ethnic inner city school in France; editing was nearing completion the day that European election results announced huge successes for the United Kingdom Independence Party and the French National Front in May 2014. Between these dates and events questions concerning Islam, multiculturalism, new migrations and free movement in an integrating Europe, have fallen and risen on the political agenda. But throughout there has been precious little clear conceptual or theoretical understanding in public debates—and also much academic scholarship—about the deep problems involved in our routine understandings of these subjects. Much public discussion is stuck with inappropriate conceptions of migration, integration and diversity, as well as naive sociologies of how economy and society in a regional and global society now work. To hear some politicians in Europe talk it is as if we are still living through a late 19th century period of nation-state building, anchored in romantic, homogeneous, ethnic conceptions of nationhood and citizenship. Yet many of these same conceptions are reproduced unquestioned by academic scholarship, in a sub-field of social science that has burgeoned dramatically over the past 25 years while often gaining little depth.

I have always tried to position my work at the edges of the field of ethnic and racial studies or migration studies: as a problematiser of paradigms, or conceptual trouble maker for those engaged in the honourable, but sometimes wrongheaded business of ‘normal science’ in this field—whether qualitative or quantitative. The essays collected in this book thus represent both my fascination and frustration with the massive growth of the field of migration studies, and our notions of immigration, integration and mobility as dominant concerns of our times. I still believe that re-examining these notions and the research that has been structured by them can key us into some of the most puzzling paradoxes of the modern nation-state, regional integration and globalisation. But as the feeble impact on everyday political debate of so much research shows, migration studies has been able to boom without necessarily accumulating wisdom. As I argue insistently in this book, the international migration studies we have inherited is a necessarily interdisciplinary field. Yet it is squeezed and debilitated by disciplinary divisions caused by reductive research assessment and impact factor pressures; even free of these, there is still precious little talk across disciplines or understanding across national political contexts.

Another migration studies is nevertheless possible. The essays in Immigration, Integration and Mobility seek to explore the fluid possibilities of a field which is uniquely well positioned to chart the landscape of a social science beyond container nation-state-societies; in which interdisciplinarity and multiple methods can be used to engineer a non-methodologically nationalist social science incorporating methods and conceptions, not only from sociology and political science, but just as much from geography and anthropology, as well as economics and demography. The search for policy relevant research also calls for engagement with normative political theory and ethics, which again may question the normal relations of knowledge between the state and social science. At the same time, we have to migrate with our methods and our minds to get out of nation-centred local perspectives, as much as the routine fallacies of disciplinary codes: learning how to be aware of commonalities as well as distinctions across countries, and how to juxtapose but not collapse regions of the world, as we search for the necessary comparative models of explanation and understanding.
It is easy to forget that migration studies as a field was very little developed when—after my year of teaching young *maghrèbin* students in a French collège—I was doing my PhD work at the European University Institute, Florence in the early 1990s. In Western Europe, research on immigration or ethnicity was mostly bounded by very national political concerns in local political contexts with little attempt at productive comparison. Debates in Britain, for example, were dominated by a ‘race relations’ paradigm, peculiar to its national politics, which had been ascendant since the 1960s. Migration was believed to have stopped in the 1970s; the narrative stressed the difficult emergence of a multi-racial society cast in the colours and cultures specific to Britain’s immigrant populations; and other European experiences with immigration were seen as backwards. Stepping outside of this frame, and influenced decisively by the ambitions of American comparative historical sociology and comparative politics, my earliest work thus sought to operationalise a better comparison between the political philosophies underpinning immigration and the idea of citizenship in two central European cases, Britain and France. It sought, in other words, to develop an analytical language, both explanatory and normative, to detox discussions from these ideological distortions and pervasive *langues de bois* (wooden languages).

The essays in this book reflect this starting point and where it led me, roaming recklessly across disciplines and national borders over the years. Developing on from the initial comparison of two classic immigration nations, it deals in turn with the return of ‘integration’ as the central conceptual logic of contemporary immigration in European nation-states; the rise of dramatic and diverse ‘new migrations’ across all of Europe from the 1990s on; the conceptual adaptations needed with the diversification of high end to middling skilled and professional migration in a global context; and the metamorphosis of migration in Europe as European integration created new kinds of meaning and potentialities for new mobilities in the continent. Accordingly, the essays reflect four central concerns, partly paralleled by the four part division of the book, which also shadow the chronological development of my post-PhD thinking from 1998 to 2014. They are bookended by my two most systematic programmatic recent statements about the field of study.

A first central concern is the interlacing of normative and explanatory issues in the study of immigration politics. In particular, I develop a distinctively European counterpoint to the liberal political theory developed by Will Kymlicka and others about North American issues, also insisting upon difficult methodological issues of interpretation and contextualisation often avoided by philosophers. The second insists upon the problem itself of comparison, across nation-state-societies whose ideological narratives and self-perceptions can never be entirely flattened into straight institutional comparison of law and policies, as so much research does. Straight comparisons are flawed by issues of power and asymmetry across cases, which requires sensitivity to interpretative comparatism (in the literary studies sense), as well as some emphasis on how knowledge and categories concerning migrants, culture, race and ethnicity have been internally constructed by policy intellectuals and academics differently in different countries. A third concern, then, is with category change, particularly as rising awareness of the effects of globalisation and the post-industrial shift lead to a new emphasis on (i.e.) ‘transnationalism’, ‘mobilities’ and ‘super-diversity’ in migration research, pointing to the expiry of exclusively nation-centred models of citizenship, integration, territory and container-like borders. Linked to this also are concerns with understanding the complex continuum of international migrations and mobilities between traditional low skill/labour migration and atypical
high-skilled and middling migrations. Fourthly and finally, all these essays display my concern with issues of empirical and normative operationalisation. I was raised as a philosopher and theorist, but I can never escape my deep dissatisfaction with both the ‘clean hands’ abstractness of political philosophy (even when applied), as much as the sweeping exaggerations of most macro-level ‘global’ social theory. Part of this is my solid rejection of post-humanist (post-modern) trends in critical theory. Migration studies, indeed, as a distinctively agent- (or) human- centred field of research, is uniquely well equipped—via its grounded narratives of the lives and experiences of real migrants—to temper the excesses of the armchair theorists and go well beyond generalisations based only on seminar room debate, discourse analysis or sweeping macro-structural data.

**Structure of the volume**

The structure of the proposed volume is built on four distinct parts in which two essays are chosen to represent and, as far as possible, exhaustively cover my views on each of these respective areas. The parts are prefaced and bookended by two of my most broad and encompassing views of the field. The essays have been thoroughly revised and updated, along with a systematically compiled bibliography that reflects the full range of migration studies and my reading during the past 25 years.

The introductory essay, *Immigration, migration and free movement in the making of Europe* (2008) represents my most encompassing synthetic view of the question of migration in Europe. With a historical sweep, it identifies the normality of migration and mobility in the history of Europe—that is, against the myth of nationalist immobility—and points out how migration in the post-1990 period has dramatically diversified in terms of classic non-European immigrations, new intra-European migrations (i.e., East-West movements), and new forms of internal European mobility linked to European integration.

Part One, APPLIED POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: THE PROBLEM OF MULTICULTURAL CITIZENSHIP, develops and extends the arguments of my PhD and first book (Favell 2008/2001). I have selected two pieces which best illustrate the problematique of applying political philosophy to the empirical and comparative institutional analysis of immigration policies/citizenship in Western Europe. The first, *Multicultural citizenship in theory and practice: applied political philosophy in empirical analyses* (1998), is a systematic exploration of the weaknesses of existing ‘applied’ political philosophy on these subjects, and a presentation of institutionalist tools that can be used to do a normative political analysis of citizenship and integration in France and Britain less distorted by North American concerns. The second, *Multicultural race relations in Britain: problems of interpretation and explanation* (1998), is concerned with how a classic distinction in the philosophy of social science—of explanation versus interpretation—could be applied to better understanding the socially conservative, classic liberal compromise of British ‘race relations’ based on ethnic diversity and religious tolerance.

Part Two, THE QUESTION OF INTEGRATION, reflects how, post-*Philosophies of Integration*, I developed a broader comparative view of the resurgent question of ‘integration’: the central conceptualisation adopted by European nation-states to discuss how they have responded to the challenges of immigration in the post-war period. Part of this, was the necessary discussion of how dominant European conceptions relate—albeit asymmetrically—to American debates on assimilation, which still largely structure scientific and policy related studies of immigrant
trajectories in the US. The first, *Assimilation/Integration* (2005), is a short, encyclopaedia-type essay on the complicated relation of concepts in this field. The second, *Integration policy and integration research in Europe: a review and critique* (2001), is a long and systematic discussion—drawing on a Bourdieusian style sociology of knowledge—of how integration research and integration policy has been shaped differently by normative and scientific research in distinct European contexts. It provided a model for the sophisticated version of comparatism I argue is necessary to get beyond both the methodological nationalism of most nation-centred policy research, as well as the distorting flattening produced by quantitative-only comparisons that take no heed of interpretative differences across countries.

In Part Three, **HIGH SKILLED MIGRATION AND SOCIAL MOBILITY**, I move into an agenda responding to the ascendency in the 1990s and early 2000s of large scale macro debates on globalisation, and the associated popularity of concepts such as ‘transnationalism’ and ‘mobilities’. Migration scholars often enthusiastically underlined the suggestion that the old nation-state was in decline, with international migrations the vanguard of new, non-spatial social formations, across borders, if not across the planet. While sympathetic to this search, my work in this area has always sought to question and delimit the extent of successful transnationalism or mobilities beyond the nation-state, often using a research strategy that focuses empirically on the most likely candidates for transnational lifestyles: high flying mobile ‘elites’. Empirical research, such as my second solo-authored book (Favell 2008a), indeed often reveals the fragile stability of such transnational forms of life, versus the ever present pressures of nation-centred social integration, for different categories of migrants and movers in Europe. The first essay, *The human face of global mobility: a research agenda* (2006), presents an agenda developed with Miriam Feldblum and Michael Peter Smith, from the research project based at UCLA and later book on *The Human Face of Global Mobility* (1996). We make a programmatic case for the closer look at so-called ‘elites’, and the delineation of distinct forms of middling migration, barriers to high skilled international migration, and the extension of varied forms such as the migration of students, nurses, service-sector engineers, and free moving professionals. In the second, *Social mobility and spatial mobility* (2011)—the first extension of my work in *Eurostars and Eurocities* presented here—I develop with my long time European research partner, Ettore Recchi, a mixed quantitative/qualitative strategy for exploring how new forms of spatial mobility in the continent might be related to classic concerns of social mobility and change in Europe.

Part Four, **NEW MIGRATION AND MOBILITIES IN EUROPE**, reflects further an agenda proposing systematic empirical sociological strategies for studying the bottom up impact of European integration on migration and mobility in the continent. With Guiraudon and others, I have argued elsewhere (Favell and Guiraudon 2009) that a true sociology of Europeanisation must be clearly distinguished from the top down legal/institutional/policy conceptions of Europeanisation dominated by political scientists. In the first essay here, *The new face of East-West migration in Europe* (2008), I offer a comparative framework for research on the new East-West migration in Europe after the enlargements of 2004/2008, a topic which has moved to the centre of the political agenda about the future of Europe. This agenda is shot through with misconceptions about ‘immigration’, ‘neo-liberalism’ and ‘free movement’ which I seek to diagnose in the second piece, *The fourth freedom: theories of migration and mobilities in “neo-liberal” Europe* (2014). I come back once again to Britain—which has been the most open economy to migration in Europe during the 1990s and 2000s—as a central
crucible for the future of immigrant and free movement driven diversity and growth in the future.

As a conclusion, I return to the concluding essay from Brettell and Hollifield’s (2007) handbook for the field. I point out the problematic cross-Atlantic and global asymmetries which dog this effort, the missing interdisciplinary dialogues, as well as the pervasive problem of methodological nationalism in the field. Seeking to ‘reboot’ the field, I argue for how migration studies may be able to develop a genuinely post-disciplinary, global agenda by focusing more on atypical forms of migration and mobility that indicate the limitations of the traditional nation-centred immigration paradigm.

Re-editing a series of past essays, there is an inevitable feeling of autobiography and introspection: a Krapp’s Last Tape (Samuel Beckett) for the field. Alternately put, as I have joked in keynote talks a couple of times, I feel that revisiting my old essays is a bit like embarking on a Greatest Hits tour as an ageing new wave band from the 1980s. I have, however, over the years been frequently asked when I would come back to my past contributions and reflect upon their relation to emerging and evolving debates that I have, perhaps, in part, influenced. I hope and trust that the intent and substance of these ten essays are still relevant, and that my updates, additions and new connections are pertinent. I am sure, though, that more reflection on the problems and possibilities of the field is still sorely needed.

I continue to owe great thanks to all the numerous colleagues and friends over the years who have helped my work. While repeating the specific thanks mentioned in my previous publications and in the footnotes here throughout, I would particularly like to thank the editors of this series Dario Castiglione and Alexandra Segerberg for the opportunity to publish in the ECPR series. I have also made the index as comprehensive as possible to indicate my full range of intellectual debts and influences, something that becomes obvious scrolling down the (very long) list. The book was compiled and edited while I was the 2014 Alliance Programme Visiting Professor of Sociology at Columbia University, New York; for this, my thanks to programme director, Alessia Lefèbure, Department chair, Yinon Cohen, and Victoria de Grazia, Chris Hill and Emmanuelle Saada, at the Blinken European Institute. Also, un grand merci to all my colleagues at the Centre d’études européennes (CEE) and the Department of Sociology, Sciences Po, Paris, for their continued support and encouragement for my work.