



*Immigrant Nations*, by Paul Scheffer

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## *Immigrant Nations* by Paul Scheffer

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Throughout Western Europe immigration and settlement is frequently portrayed by politicians and the media to be problematic and it is certainly a lively issue for public debate and policy agenda. In this book, Scheffer calls for a new way of thinking about immigration and citizenship by both immigrants and the host societies.

An earlier article published by the author-cum-politician entitled *Multicultural Drama* ignited a controversial debate about integration and immigration in the Netherlands in 2000. *Immigrant Nations* was first published in Dutch in 2007. The English translation of the book was launched at the UK House of Lords in July 2011 where Scheffer participated in a contentious debate on immigration and the politics of multiculturalism. *Immigrant Nations* is split into nine chapters with an epilogue, 'After the Multicultural Drama', in which Scheffer provides some reflections and introspections on his understanding of the lives of immigrants since the publication of his article in 2000.

In *Immigrant Nations*, Scheffer argues that the conflict caused by migration process is not the result of the failure of integration but is part of a search for new ways of living together, and he calls for an intensive process of self-examination on all sides. Scheffer argues we

should move beyond multiculturalism and take a fresh look at the meaning of citizenship in a globalizing world.

In the first chapter, 'Suitcase in the Hall', the author provides particular details about the lives of immigrant people and the ensuing reaction to immigrants by established communities. In doing this, Scheffer has applied an essentialist perspective; this entails a generalisation that certain properties possessed by a group are universal and not dependent on context. The author contends that much of the difficulty in integration is due to significant differences between 'traditional' and Western societies. Scheffer does not define the components of a traditional society. The examples he cites are based on countries like Egypt, India, Iran, Morocco and Turkey. Societies such as the Amish and Quakers in US, as well as the Ultra-orthodox Jewish societies in the UK, are absent from the discussion.

The author argues the significant change in culture for immigrant's leads to great conflict and anguish for many families. For example, the author claims that immigrant parents have skewed relationship with teenagers, and that the traditional role expectations for women to be good housewives (thereby girls need not be educated) all provide many challenges for immigrants living in a secular society.

The second chapter, 'The World in a City', deliberates the benefits and limitations of segregated communities. While immigrants may benefit from informal support by the community, this results in cultural isolation from the host societies. Scheffer refers to these areas as ghettos and claims they are characterised by poverty and high levels of welfare dependants. The author argues that in these areas the family-school-work triangle no longer functions as social framework; the youth become unruly and operate within their

own subcultures. For the white middle classes, it is partly a fear of strangers and 'birds of a feather' mentality the author argues, which leads to 'white flight' and an increase in gated white communities.

In the same chapter (also later in the book in chapter nine) the author discusses the high level of unemployment among children of immigrants. In his discussion he acknowledges that studies on employment recruitment had showed that replacing an Arabic name with a European name makes a positive difference to the way a job application is processed. However, having stated the obvious discrimination, Scheffer claims it is natural for employers to make stereotypical generalisations about communities. Scheffer does not make any suggestions to address the discrimination, in public sector recruitment. Although the author calls for self-reflection, it does not seem to stretch to challenging institutional discrimination.

While the experiences of immigrants from various religions such as Sikhism, Hinduism, Judaism and Islam are mentioned in the book, Scheffer focuses his attention on the Muslim immigrant. In chapter eight, 'The Divided House of Islam', the author attempts to provide a historical account of Islam and imperialism. Scheffer argues that while colonial interference has been part of the decline of the Islamic world, the problem is inherent in the Islamic world itself, with its many contradictions.

The author claims the crisis in the Muslim world has developed into aggression against the West. The beliefs of Muslim immigrants are viewed as being in conflict with those held in secular environments. To illustrate the conflicting cultures, the author uses the example of views on homosexuality: Scheffer reports an Iman 'caused a huge stir when he delivered a sermon in which he said, "if this sickness spreads, everyone will be infected and that could lead to

us dying out” (p121). The religious conflict is not limited to views on sexuality but also on identity. Scheffer notes the problem of permanent settlement for Muslims who live in a secular environment were summed up by one member of Turkish Muslim background: ‘it means letting go of an essential part of yourself’ (p259); the implication here being that integration would mean you could no longer be a pure Muslim.

In the last chapter, ‘Land of Arrival’, the author argues for greater importance to be given to allegiance and citizenship ceremonies, as conducted in Canada. Here Scheffer provides a short discussion on the need for self-examination by established communities. In the sub-section, ‘Everything of Value Must Defend Itself’ Scheffer posits there are cracks within Western societal structures and that citizens have become more articulate, independent and less trusting of traditional authority. This, he argues, is reflected in the increase in violence against teachers, doctors and police officers. In the sub-section, ‘A Triptych of Integration’, Scheffer calls for all children to participate in citizenship, by participating in some form of community service. This he believes, perhaps idealistically, will lead young people to be responsible and socially integrated citizens.

While the book provides some basic information about migration and settlement experiences, there are significant weaknesses within the volume. Firstly, Scheffer’s utilisation of an essentialist perspective has failed to acknowledge the diverse backgrounds of immigrants and has treated all ‘immigrants’ as one homogenous group. This has made redundant the wide range of experiences encountered by immigrants. A glance at cities such as

Glasgow, London and Leicester would show there are neighbourhoods where many ethnicities live side by side. It is evident that immigrants work in mainstream jobs as cleaners, hotel staff, teacher, lawyers, and civil servants. The lives of immigrants are documented well by Simpson and Finney (2009) who challenge myths about race and segregation. It is unclear why Scheffer has not included a discussion on such experiences.

Scheffer has, unfortunately, attributed all the difficulties which immigrants may face to their culture. For instance, many Western parents also have problematic relationships with their teenagers. And arguably, there is even more pressures on women living in the West as many are expected to have careers, be good wives and mothers. Moreover, while the author has discussed the divisions within Islam, it is unclear why the divisions within Christianity and views of the Christian church on homosexuality have not been discussed. It would have been illuminating to have a discussion of both religions.

Although Scheffer claims to employ a balanced scholarly approach, there is consistent misuse of quotations, as these are not contextualised and most portray immigrants in a negative light. The book is also spattered by ad hoc comments made by acquaintances which the author has used to strengthen his argument, for example a 'journalist who offers a touching portrayal of the Muslim community in a Brussels district' (p55). In addition to this the author has sporadically included the opinion of tabloid columnists which are by their very nature subjective personal opinions. Fictitious accounts, such as Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* about the Bangladeshi community, have been cited to support particular arguments. The inclusion of journalists' accounts and works of fiction cannot be viewed as robust

evidence; use of empirical contextualised research would certainly have lent better credibility to the arguments.

The title of the book *Immigrant Nations* is itself questionable. The title is alarmist, implying that there are high levels of immigrants within Western nations. Yet across Europe the figures of non-EU immigrants barely account for ten per cent of any nation's population. Also, the title *Immigrant Nations* cannot be the preserve of Western nations as the book infers, for it is difficult to think of any country that is not an immigrant nation. Certainly, it would have been useful to have a historic and contemporary discussion on the integration process of European immigrants for instance in countries within the African continent.

I find it difficult to recommend *Immigrant Nations* to academic readers as there are too many assumptions contained within the book. While the book provides basic information for the novice reader with examples of migration, it is far from a scholarly work on immigration and settlement process. Moreover, the leanings of the book can be interpreted to be biased in favour of right wing sentiments and can therefore detract from a well informed and balanced debate on immigration.

## **Bibliography**

Finney, N., Simpson, L., (2009) 'Sleepwalking to segregation? Challenging myths about race and migration. Bristol, The Policy Press