Issue of Immigration and Refugees and Multiculturalism in Europe

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Europe's Difficult Challenge

OVER the course of 2015, a number events in Europe attracted considerable attention in Japan, but none more than the refugee issue. In September, a picture of the body of a drowned Syrian infant stunned the international community.[1]

People sensed the gravity of the situation as they watched the images of Syrian refugees fleeing to Germany and other countries in Europe on foot, often sleeping in the open. The Japanese media offered approving coverage of German Chancellor Angela Merkel's expressed willingness to accept larger numbers of refugees. In November, however, synchronized terrorist attacks took place in Paris. In the ensuing election, a French far-right party, opposed to accepting refugees, garnered many more votes than expected, greatly complicating the refugee issue.

Waves of Refugees

In the months prior to the coverage of the tragic death of the Syrian infant in September, the most compelling political question for the EU was how to respond to the Greek debt crisis. Even so, a poll of the German public opinion taken in February 2015 showed that respondents were more concerned about the refugee issue than the financial one. Since 2013, German society had already experienced a dramatic increase in applications for asylum by Syrian refugees, and facilities intended for the reception of refugees had been the target of repeated arson attacks.

According to an EU report, the number of asylum seekers was slightly less than 300,000 in 2010. In 2014, this more than doubled to 662,680. Since 2013, Germany stood out as the country offering asylum to the greatest number of refugees—as many as one-third of the EU total for 2014. This was not, however, the first time the EU member states had accepted such a large number of refugees. During the civil war in

the former Yugoslavia in 1992, more than 620,000 people sought asylum in 15 European countries.[2]

In 2015, however, the number of people seeking asylum in Germany alone exceeded one million.[3] Estimates suggest that the number may increase to 3 million over the next three years, an unprecedented number for Europe. There has been heated debate about whether a ceiling should be set, on how to prevent terrorism or crime associated with refugees, etc. These debates will need to be followed closely for new developments. Further, there is the pressing question of how these refugee populations can be integrated into European national societies.

While the number of immigrants and refugees accepted by European countries has risen and fallen with changes in the international situation, these are processes that have been in place since the end of World War II. This historical experience has led to emergence of multicultural societies, a relatively new reality for Europe.

Interactions with Other Cultures are a Daily Reality

In a survey conducted in 27 EU member states in 2007, two-thirds of respondents stated that they had daily contact and interaction with people whose cultural background differed from their own.[4] In countries such as the UK, Germany and France, nearly 20% of the overall population is from an immigrant background, and the percentage is even higher among the younger generations.[5] This means that both the benefits and challenges of multicultural societies are already woven into the fabric of European life. These realities provide a crucial background against which to consider the influx of refugees that Europe has been experiencing since 2015.

During the 1950s and 60s, Germany, France, the UK and a number of other European countries accepted a large number of immigrant workers in order to compensate for the labor shortage, giving rise to new immigrant communities. At the outset, these comprised primarily male laborers referred to as "guest workers." As the name indicates, these people were defined by their economic function rather than their nationality or cultural background. It was expected that most of them would eventually return to their home countries. In the 1970s, however, restrictions on immigrant labor were imposed, making reentry after a temporary return difficult. Already established workers responded by inviting their family members to settle in the host countries. A high percentage of such immigrant workers were Muslims. Over time, second- and third-generations members of these immigrants communities—people born in Europe—

began to account for higher percentage of these populations.

Further, in the 1980s, Muslims began to arrive as asylum seekers not only in Western Europe but also northern Europe. Initially, these people came from such countries as Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Lebanon; from the 90's, large numbers of refugees began arriving from former Yugoslavia and the states of the former Soviet Union.[6]

The Basic Law of Germany, a document of constitutional scope, stipulates the right of asylum, with a corresponding obligation to offer protection to people fleeing political persecution. Further, the geographical proximity of Germany has compelled it, along with a number of other European nations, to respond to the needs of refugees. European countries thus have a long history of accepting immigrants and refugees, whose second- and third-generation populations now constitute a significant part of their respective societies. Focusing on just Germany, several million ethnic Germans were driven from former territories after the end of WWII. Later, many residents of the former East Germany risked their lives to cross the Berlin Wall to get to the West. Given this history, the people of Germany have experienced the refugee issue as both hosts and asylum seekers.

Thus, the question of how to integrate immigrants and refugees into host societies has been a long-standing challenge for Europe. The process of social integration has differed from one country to another, shaped by historical experience. France, for example, has stressed the republican principle—the equality of all citizens—over cultural diversity and has adopted policies of assimilation, while in Germany immigrants are defined as foreigners under the principle that nationality is determined by family heritage (*jus sanguinis*). The UK, the Netherlands, and Scandinavian countries have tended to adopt multiculturalist policies. During the 1990s, however, under the watchword of "Unity in Diversity," the political integration of Europe began to develop alongside an awareness that Europe is a multicultural society marked by cultural diversity as a result of its historical experience of accepting immigrants and refugees.

The Search for Integration

Based on this awareness of a "multicultural Europe," vigorous debate has developed on how best to realize the social integration of immigrants in Europe. The sharpest focus has been on the pros and cons of multiculturalism. Here, it is important to clarify that the term "multiculturalism" has a dual meaning: 1) a society that is diverse, usually as a

result of immigration, 2) the policies required to manage such a society.[7]

By the late 1990s, not only liberal-left advocates of multiculturalism, but also conservatives and others critical of the idea, recognized that the large influx of immigrants had increased the diversity of European society, thereby changing it in important aspects. In other words, it was widely recognized that Europe had become a multicultural society. The debate now shifted to the question of what were the best policy responses to this reality.

At the same time, various far-right parties emerged and sought to negate this reality, advocating the expulsion of immigrants and refusal to accept more refugees. In this case, the two different aspects of the concept of multiculturalism—as the actual condition of society, and as the response to that—have been treated as one and the same thing. Such conflation, it has been noted, has greatly impeded the development of debate on how to encourage the social integration of immigrants.[8]

Here I'd like to outline the disputes in different European societies regarding multiculturalism, and thereby consider both what Europe has gained from becoming multicultural and what are the outstanding challenges.

Multiculturalism and Assimilationist Policies have both Given Rise to Fissures

In October 2010, German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated that the effort to realize a multicultural society had failed, stirring debate throughout Europe. Since 2000, Germany has instituted an integration policy for immigrants, recognizing dual citizenship, establishing a new legal framework for immigrants and providing them with German language education. This represented a major change from the past policy. Here again, it is important to heed the distinction just noted between multiculturalism or multicultural society as a description of the multicultural reality of everyday life, and multiculturalism as a policy objective.

It is clear Chancellor Merkel did not intend to deny the culturally diverse reality of German society, but to criticize the multicultural policies which had resulted in the isolation of culturally and ethnically unique communities within the larger society. She also criticized the fact that "multiculturalism" was being treated as a tool of ideological contention between the political right and left.

The German state, however, has never officially adopted a policy of multiculturalism.[9] Under the principle of *jus sanguinis*, the federal gov-

ernment has consistently viewed immigrants as foreigners who would eventually return to their homeland, and thus made little effort to integrate them into German society. On the other hand, Berlin, Frankfurt and other urban centers with large non-German populations began to introduce multiculturalist measures. Based on this experience, multiculturalism has been advocated as a critical counter-policy to the policies of the federal government.

In February 2011, British Prime Minister David Cameron also remarked that the national-level policy of multiculturalism had failed. Until the late 90s, under Conservative governments, a multiculturalist approach had been something called for only by the political left. After the establishment of a Labor government in 1997, however, government statements and policies came increasingly to reflect the influence of multiculturalism. In the meantime, riots and other incidents of unrest in urban immigrant communities led to policies designed to increase representation of minorities and their interests by incorporating organizations and leaders who would speak for those the interests into the political process. This policy approach, however, resulted in the exclusion of populations who did not belong to any defined group, as well as in conflict among groups representing different interests, thus leading to even deeper social division.[10]

On the other hand, the national integration model that France has applied to immigrants is based on the republican principle under which all people are accorded equal treatment as abstract "individuals," irrespective of ethnic, social background or other affiliations or attributes. This can also be thought of in terms of equality before the law, as a form of universalism. This assimilationist policy takes no special consideration for cultural diversity, and the idea that the non-religious nature of public space must be maintained is likewise based on this principle.[11] The French government thus in theory rejected a multiculturalist approach. In reality, however, it has chosen to treat North African immigrant populations, including their second- and third-generation members, as homogeneous communities rather than as French citizens. This has resulted in the fragmentation of society.[12]

While multiculturalist policies adopted in the UK and Germany gave rise to social division, the assimilationist approach in France has also produced much the same result.[13] Behind repeated statements rejecting multiculturalism lies a growing sense of crisis in Europe—that the cultural diversity produced by immigrant populations could have the effect of dividing as well as energizing national societies. Multiculturalist policies are seen as potentially exacerbating these negative outcomes.

Such social divisions have for some time been visible in various immigrant movements and their demands. Since the start of the 21st century, however, there has been an increasing focus on what is described as the problematic role of Islam. In earlier times, when foreign labor was in demand, the causes of protest were mostly workplace discrimination, forced repatriation, treatment by the police, etc., rather than questions related to culture or religion. Even today, it seems that immigrant movements and their demands are for the most part not related to specific questions of Islamic faith or practice, but to issues, such as employment, social equality.[14]

The Rise of Islamophobia

In 1989, several female public school students in France were suspended for wearing head scarves, a symbol of their Muslim faith. This incident divided French public opinion. Similar incidents occurred in other parts of Europe.

Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, European societies have tended to view Muslims with greater suspicion. What has come to be known as Islamophobia has given rise to mutual suspicion and fear, deepening the schisms within society. Against this social backdrop, in February 2004, a law prohibiting the wearing of all religious symbols in public schools, the so-called head-scarf ban, was passed in France.[15]

This incident shows how the head scarf is perceived as a symbol of immigrants, and is in turn closely associated with the riots that have taken place in the suburbs, and thus social unrest generally. The larger responsibility of French society in excluding immigrants, however, has not been questioned. Rather, a focus on the "religious issue" of Islam brings the risk that the political and economic aspects of the immigrant issue will be pushed to the background. Instead of pursuing the mutual interaction and transformation of cultures mediated by the shared objective of forming national citizens on the basis of the equality of individuals, immigrants and their demands have been seen as coming into conflict with this republican principle, further aggravating the exclusion of immigrants and social division.[16]

Germany also experienced a head scarf-related controversy in 1995, and then again in 2006. It was speculated at the time that the second- and third-generation immigrants, alienated within German society, might be seeking their identity in Islamic culture. Here again, in a manner resembling the discourse in France, the issue was debated in terms of the private versus public spheres, with the more essential issue,

namely, the relationship between young people's desire to wear head scarves and social fragmentation, given scant attention.[17]

In March 2004, terrorist attacks took place in Madrid followed, in July 2005, by attacks in London. In November 2004, the anti-Islam Dutch film director Theo Van Gogh was murdered and, around the same period, in October through November, there was rioting by young immigrants in the suburbs of Paris. In February 2006, controversy arose surrounding the depiction of the Prophet Muhammad in cartoons. These incidents, all discussed in the context of their relationship to Islam, sent shockwaves around the world.[18]

In March 2006, a junior high school (*Hauptschule*) in Berlin where more than 80 percent of the students were from immigrant backgrounds, experienced widespread violence among students and toward teachers, with the result that the teaching staff sought the closing of the school. This incident highlighted the problems of nonfunctioning schools within the education system and extremely low levels of academic achievement among immigrant students.[19]

What lies behind all these incident is the failure to integrate immigrants into society and their resulting exclusion—all problems of the growing social division of multicultural societies. This reality, however, has been obscured by the purported Muslim threat, further deepening divisions.

The statements by Chancellor Merkel and Prime Minister Cameron cited earlier may be based on the assessment that while multiculturalism policies may serve to further deepen social division, they cannot be a solution to this issue. Furthermore, in connection with the intake of refugees, public support for the National Front and other far-right groups is growing in France while incidents of arson directed at refugee reception facilities have becoming increasingly frequent in Germany. With growing hostility over refugee issues, even the core value of respect for diversity is under threat.

As distrust of multiculturalist policies grows, there is a search for an appropriate policy response, based on an acknowledgement of the reality of cultural diversity. Since 2000, Germany has stressed an integrationist policy for immigrants, emphasizing acquisition of the German language and acceptance of German values. In France, political leaders have stressed the importance of a common identity for all people living in France. While some criticize this trend as imposing European values on immigrants and refugees, it reflects the search for a common basis that will enable Europe to avoid fragmentation and become a culturally diverse yet integrated society.

The Experiment of Intercultural Dialogue

In this effort, the idea of "intercultural dialogue" is of note. This approach has been adopted by the EU and the Council of Europe in the wake of the 9.11 terror attacks as an alternative to both multiculturalism and assimilationism.

Intercultural dialogue in Europe is seen as replacing the concept of multiculturalism, which envisages a pluralistic society composed of different, independent and self-contained cultures. This new approach is further seen as supporting and strengthening the EU concept of unity in diversity. While the term "multi" suggests diversity without reference to the interconnections among the diverse elements, the term "inter" foregrounds such connections. Further, "dialogue" is something closely associated with the EU's founding principles of peace and solidarity.[20]

The EU designated 2008 the "European Year of Intercultural Dialogue" and introduced a number of projects under the aegis of the European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture.[21] Various programs have been implemented, mainly for young people, with the objective of making explicit the issues involved in intercultural dialogue. These have focused on cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, and on the idea of European citizenship based on shared EU values.

In addition to various cultural events and programs, opportunities to debate the meaning of intercultural dialogue have also been provided. In cooperation with Council of Europe, inter-cultural city programs—now involving 99 cities—are being implemented. In addition, more than 1000 civic groups have partnered with the organizers to carry out various programs. These undertakings have aroused interest in intercultural dialogue among the general public, resulting in support for their continuance.

The Declaration announced at the official opening of the "European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008" emphasizes the importance of "transitioning from a multi-cultural society divided by cultural groups to intercultural society where all communities are engaged in meaningful interaction."[22] This demonstrates the stress placed on intercultural dialogue as a means of encouraging social integration. The EU's approach seems to put greater emphasis on providing shared space for intercultural dialogue, rather than on debating specific issues in order to reach conclusions.[23]

The Council of Europe, an international organization founded in 1949, has been active in sociocultural field in Europe.[24] When the Third

Summit of the Heads of State and Government Summit was held in 2005, it affirmed that intercultural dialogue, including on religious matters, should be the means for promoting awareness, understanding, reconciliation and tolerance, as well as preventing conflicts and ensuring integration and the cohesion of society. Behind this affirmation was a recognition that conventional approaches would not be adequate for responding to the reality of the Europe's culturally diverse societies; that neither the multiculturalist approach that had been favored until recently nor a return to earlier assimilationist policies would work. In order to achieve a truly inclusive society, new approaches were necessary, and intercultural dialogue was considered to be one such approach.[25]

Dialogue on the Basis of Equality

Annual Integration Summits have been held in Germany since the first one in July 2006. Summit participants include Chancellor Merkel and representatives of the federal government, state governments, municipalities, immigrants associations, church and social groups. This is a ground-breaking undertaking in which all participate in the deliberations on an equal footing. At the same time, it has thus far proven impossible to unite Muslim groups due to differences of sectarian affiliation, approach, national origin, etc. There is as yet no umbrella organization or authority which can bring together the groups, with their different characters and scale in membership, and they often find themselves at odds.

Nevertheless, the fact that the chancellor and other leaders of German society are meeting with the representatives of immigrants in this way is in itself significant. The outcome of this endeavor is an awareness that the time when the immigrant issues could be the object of political debate without immigrants' representation has past; that immigrant communities must be directly addressed as an integral part of the deliberations.[26] Chancellor Merkel described this as "the beginning of intensive dialogue," and such intercultural dialogue is expected to play a major role in linking immigrants to the mainstream society, furthering the goal of social integration.

It has been suggested that an ideal policy would marry multiculturalism's embrace of actual diversity with assimilationism's resolve to treat everyone equally as citizens.[27] It may be said that intercultural dialogue can offer the real possibility of bridging these two approaches.

"Web of Relationality"

SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, the founder of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy, wrote as follows in his 2016 peace proposal:

> In order to construct societies that are resistant to xenophobia and incitement to hatred, people need to be exposed to and reminded of different perspectives. Face-to-face dialogue can play a crucial role in this.
>
> As … effort[s] to show the human face of refugees suggests, our awareness of people belonging to different religions or ethnicities can be transformed through direct contact and conversation with even one member of that group.
>
> Sharing time and space together in dialogue. . . The friendship and trust nurtured through the committed pursuit of this process can form the basis for a solidarity of ordinary citizens working to resolve global issues and bring into being a peaceful world.
>
> Buddhism views the world as a web of relationality in which nothing can be completely disassociated from anything else. Moment by moment, the world is formed and shaped through this mutual relatedness. When we understand this and can sense in the depths of our being the fact that we live—that our existence is made possible—within this web of relatedness, we see clearly that there is no happiness that only we enjoy, no suffering that afflicts only others.[28]

As Ikeda argues, this web of relationality is the foundation for the kind of intercultural dialogue that can bring people of different cultures together.

Underlying the criticism of multiculturalism as a policy approach—and the question posed by the influx of refugees in 2015—is a sense of crisis about the divisions being experienced by European society today. And it is respect for diversity, fostering of social cohesion, and achievement of equality and justice based on respect for human dignity that will make it possible to meet this challenge. How will the European experience and efforts to engage in intercultural dialogue contribute to the realization of these goals? This is a question that merits our continued attention.

Notes

[1] *Asahi Shimbun*, 9.4., 2015.

[2] European Asylum Support Office, *Annual Report on the Situation of Asylum in the European Union 2014*, 2015, pp.13–17.

[3] *Asahi Shimbun*, 1.11., 2016.

[4] European Commission, *Flash Eurobarometer 217*, Intercultural dialogue in Europe: Analytical Report, 2007, p. 4.

[5] Richard Alba and Nancy Foner, "Comparing Immigrant Integration in North America and Western Europe: How Much Do the Grand Narratives Tell Us?", *International Migration Review*, Vol.48, No.S1, 2014, S265.

[6] EUMC, *Perceptions of Discrimination and Islamophobia—Voices from Members of Muslim Communities in the European Union*, 2006, p. 12.

[7] Kenan Malik, The Failure of Multiculturalism: Community Versus Society in Europe, *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2005, p. 23, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/western-europe/failure-multiculturalism, 2015 (browsed on 2016.7.16).

[8] Kenan Malik, ibid.

[9] James Angelos, "What Integration Means For Germany's Guest Worker," *Foreign Affairs*, October 28 2011.

[10] Kenan Malik, op. cit., pp. 26–28.

[11] Takashi Miyajima, "Social integration of immigrants and the French equality," *UP*, Vol. 38, No.8, 2009, p. 58.

[12] Kenan Malik, op. cit., p. 32.

[13] Kenan Malik, ibid.

[14] Takashi Miyajima, op. cit., p. 57.

[15] Takashi Miyajima, "Immigration politics and the construction of the 'Islam problems': globalization and France," *The study of sociology*, No. 89, 2011, p. 14.

[16] Kenichi Ikeda, "History and features of the educational policy for immigrants in France," *Bulletin de l'Association japonaise de recherche sur l'éducation en France*, No. 27, 2015, p. 16.

[17] Junzo Kondo, *Germany as an Immigration Country*, Bokutaku-sha, 2007, pp. 285–297

[18] Hiroko Sato, "Immigration Test in Germany: Multiculturalism and Mainstream Culture," *Bulletin of the Institute of Human Rights Studies, Kansai University*, No. 55. 2007, p. 14.

[19] Junzo Kondo, op. cit., pp. 171–177.

[20] Sara Silvestri, "Islam and the EU: The merits and risks of Inter-Cultural Dialogue," *Policy Brief*, June 2007.

[21] European Commission, *Intercultural Dialogue: support through EU programmes*, 2008.

[22] Miho Nakamura, "Idea and Practice of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (2008): Case Study of Cultural Policy in EU," *Intercultural: Annual review of the Japan Society for Intercultural Studies*, No. 9, 2011, p. 78.

[23] Miho Nakamura, ibid., p. 81.

[24] Takeshi Yoshitani, "Pursuit of intercultural tolerance in Europe: responses to the situation of multicultural society," *Intercultural Education*, No. 15, 2001, pp. 14–15.

[25] Council of Europe, CM Documents: *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue*, 118th Session of the Committee of Ministers, Strasbourg, 7 May 2008.

[26] Junzo Kondo, op. cit., pp. 185–195.

[27] Kenan Malik, op. cit., p. 34.

[28] Daisaku, Ikeda, *Universal Respect for Human Dignity: The Great Path to Peace*, Soka Gakkai International, http://www.sgi.org/about-us/president-ikedas-proposals/peace-proposal-2016/index.html, 2016.

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