

Identity and migration

by Francis Fukuyama

Modern liberal societies have weak collective identities. Postmodern elites, especially in Europe, feel that they have evolved beyond identities defined by religion and nation. But if our societies cannot assert positive liberal values, they may be challenged by migrants who are more sure of who they are

*Francis Fukuyama is professor of international political economy at Johns Hopkins School of International Studies. This piece is adapted from an article first published in *Journal of Democracy* 17:2 (2006) © National Endowment for Democracy and the Johns Hopkins University Press*

Modern identity politics springs from a hole in the political theory underlying liberal democracy. That hole is liberalism's silence about the place and significance of groups. The line of modern political theory that begins with Machiavelli and continues through Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and the American founding fathers understands the issue of political freedom as one that pits the state against individuals rather than groups. Hobbes and Locke, for example, argue that human beings possess natural rights as individuals in the state of nature--rights that can only be secured through a social contract that prevents one individual's pursuit of self-interest from harming others.

Modern liberalism arose in good measure in reaction to the wars of religion that raged in Europe following the Reformation. Liberalism established the principle of religious toleration--the idea that religious goals could not be pursued in the public sphere in a way that restricted the religious freedom of other sects or churches. (As we will see below, the actual separation of church and state was never fully achieved in many modern European democracies.) But while modern liberalism clearly established the principle that state power should not be used to impose religious belief on individuals, it left unanswered the question of whether individual freedom could conflict with the rights of people to uphold a particular religious tradition. Freedom, understood not as the freedom of individuals but of cultural or religious or ethnic groups to protect their group identities, was not seen as a central issue by the American founders, perhaps because the new settlers were relatively homogeneous. In the words of John Jay (in the second "Federalist Paper"): "A people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles."

In the west, identity politics began in earnest with the Reformation. Martin Luther argued that salvation could be achieved only through an inner state of faith, and attacked the Catholic emphasis on works--that is, exterior conformity to a set of social rules. The Reformation thus identified true religiosity as an individual's subjective state, dissociating inner identity from outer practice.

The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor has written helpfully about the subsequent historical development of identity politics. Rousseau, in the *Second Discourse* and the *Promenades*, argued that there was a big disjuncture between our outer selves, which were the accretion of social customs and habits, and our true inner natures. Happiness lay in the recovery of inner authenticity. This idea was developed by Johann Gottfried von Herder, who argued that inner authenticity lay not just in individuals but in peoples, in the recovery of what we today call folk culture. In Taylor's words, "This is the powerful ideal

that has come down to us. It accords moral importance to a kind of contact with myself, with my own inner nature, which it sees as in danger of being lost... through the pressures toward social conformity."

The disjuncture between one's inner and outer selves comes not merely out of the realm of ideas, but from the social reality of modern market democracies. After the American and French revolutions, the ideal of *la carrière ouverte aux talents* was increasingly put into practice as traditional barriers to social mobility were removed. One's social status was now achieved rather than ascribed; it was the product of one's talents, work and effort rather than an accident of birth. One's life story was the search for fulfilment of an inner plan, rather than conformity to the expectations of one's parents, kin, village or priest.

Taylor points out that modern identity is inherently political, because it demands recognition. The idea that modern politics is based on the principle of universal recognition comes from Hegel. Increasingly, however, it appears that universal recognition based on a shared individual humanity is not enough, particularly on the part of groups that have been discriminated against in the past. Hence modern identity politics revolves around demands for recognition of group identities--that is, public affirmations of the equal dignity of formerly marginalised groups, from the Québécois to African-Americans to women to indigenous peoples to homosexuals.

It is no accident that Charles Taylor is Canadian, since contemporary multiculturalism and identity politics were in many ways born in Canada, with the demands of the francophone community for recognition of its rights. Law 101 of 1977 violates the liberal principle of equal individual rights: French speakers enjoy linguistic rights not shared by English speakers. Quebec was recognised as a "distinct society" in 1995, and as a "nation" in 2006.

Multiculturalism--under- stood not just as tolerance of cultural diversity but as the demand for legal recognition of the rights of racial, religious or cultural groups--has now become established in virtually all modern liberal democracies. US politics over the past generation has been consumed with controversies over affirmative action for African-Americans, bilingualism and gay marriage, driven by formerly marginalised groups that demand recognition not just of their rights as individuals but of their rights as members of groups. And the US's Lockean tradition of individual rights has meant that these efforts to assert group rights have been tremendously controversial--more so than in modern Europe.

The radical Islamist ideology that has motivated terror attacks over the past decade must be seen in large measure as a manifestation of modern identity politics rather than of traditional Muslim culture. As such, it is familiar to us from earlier political movements. The fact that it is modern does not make it less dangerous, but it helps to clarify the problem and its possible solutions.

The argument that contemporary radical Islamism is a form of identity politics has been made most forcefully by the French scholar Olivier Roy in his 2004 book *Globalised Islam*. According to Roy, the root of radical Islamism is not cultural--that is, it is not a by-product of something inherent in Islam or the culture that this religion has produced. Rather, he argues, radical Islamism has emerged because Islam has become "deterritorialised" in such a way as to throw open the whole question of Muslim identity.

The question of identity does not come up at all in traditional Muslim societies, as it did not in traditional Christian societies. In a traditional Muslim society, an individual's identity is given by that person's parents and social environment; everything--from one's tribe and kin to the local imam to the political structure of the state--anchors one's identity in a particular branch of Islamic faith. It is not a matter of choice. Like Judaism, Islam is a highly legalistic religion, meaning that religious belief consists of conformity to a set of externally determined social rules. These rules are highly localised in accordance with the traditions, customs, saints and practices of specific places. Traditional religiosity is not universalistic, despite Islam's doctrinal universalism.

According to Roy, identity becomes problematic precisely when Muslims leave traditional Muslim societies by, for example, emigrating to western Europe. One's identity as a Muslim is no longer supported by the outside society; indeed, there is strong pressure to conform to the west's prevailing cultural norms. The question of authenticity arises in a way that it never did in the traditional society, since there is now a gap between one's inner identity as a Muslim and one's behaviour

vis-à-vis the surrounding society. This explains the constant questioning of imams on Islamic websites about what is haram (prohibited) or halal (permitted). But in Saudi Arabia, the question of whether it is haram to shake hands with a female professor, for example, never comes up because such a social category hardly exists.

Radical Islamism and jihadism arise in response to the resulting quest for identity. Those ideologies can answer the question of "Who am I?" posed by a young Muslim in Holland or France: you are a member of a global umma defined by adherence to a universal Islamic doctrine that has been stripped of all of its local customs, saints, traditions and the like. Muslim identity thus becomes a matter of inner belief rather than outward conformity to social practice. Roy points out that this constitutes the "Protestantisation" of Muslim belief, where salvation lies in a subjective state that is at odds with one's outward behaviour. Thus could Mohammed Atta and several of the other 9/11 conspirators allegedly drink alcohol and visit a strip club in the days before the attacks.

Understanding radical Islamism as a form of identity politics also explains why second and third-generation European Muslims have turned to it. First-generation immigrants have usually not made a psychological break with the culture of their land of birth and carry traditional practices with them to their new homes. Their children, by contrast, are often contemptuous of their parents' religiosity, and yet have not become integrated into the culture of the new society. Stuck between two cultures with which they cannot identify, they find a strong appeal in the universalist ideology of contemporary jihadism.

Olivier Roy overstates the case for viewing radical Islamism as a primarily European phenomenon; there are many other sources for radical ideologies coming out of the middle east. Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan have all exported radical Islamist ideology, and Iraq may do so in the future. But even in Muslim countries, Roy's analysis remains valid because it is the importing of modernity into those societies that produces the crisis of identity and radicalisation. Globalisation, driven by technology and economic opening, has blurred the boundaries between the developed world and traditional Muslim societies. It is not an accident that so many of the perpetrators of recent terrorist plots and incidents were either European Muslims radicalised in Europe or came from privileged sectors of Muslim societies with opportunities for contact with the west. Mohammed Atta and the other organisers of the 9/11 attacks fall into this category, as do Mohammed Bouyeri (the murderer of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh), the 11th March Madrid bombers, the 7th July London bombers and the British Muslims accused of plotting to blow up an aircraft last summer. It should also be noted that al Qaeda leaders Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri are both educated men, with plenty of knowledge of and access to the modern world.

If contemporary radical Islamism is understood as a product of identity politics and hence a modern phenomenon, then two implications follow. First, we have seen this problem before in the extremist politics of the 20th century, among the young people who became anarchists, Bolsheviks, fascists or members of the Baader-Meinhof gang. As Fritz Stern, Ernest Gellner and others have shown, modernisation and the transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* constitute an intensely alienating process that has been negatively experienced by countless individuals in different societies. It is now the turn of young Muslims to experience this. Whether there is anything specific to the Muslim religion that encourages this radicalisation is an open question. Since 11th September, a small industry has sprung up trying to show how violence and even suicide bombing have deep Koranic or historical roots. It is important to remember, however, that at many periods in history Muslim societies have been more tolerant than their Christian counterparts. The Jewish philosopher Maimonides was born in Muslim Córdoba, which was a diverse centre of culture and learning; Baghdad for many generations hosted one of the world's largest Jewish communities. It makes no more sense to see today's radical Islamism as an inevitable outgrowth of Islam than to see fascism as the culmination of centuries of European Christianity.

Second, the problem of jihadist terrorism will not be solved by bringing modernisation and democracy to the middle east. The Bush administration's view that terrorism is driven by a lack of democracy overlooks the fact that so many terrorists were radicalised in democratic European countries. Modernisation and democracy are good things in their own right, but in the Muslim world they are likely to increase, not dampen, the terror problem in the short run.

Modern liberal societies in Europe and North America tend to have weak identities; many celebrate their own pluralism and multiculturalism, arguing in effect that their identity is to have no identity. Yet the fact is that national identity still exists in

all contemporary liberal democracies. The nature of national identity, however, is somewhat different in North America than it is in Europe, which helps to explain why the integration of Muslims is so difficult in countries like the Netherlands, France and Germany.

According to the late Seymour Martin Lipset, American identity was always political in nature and was powerfully influenced by the fact that the US was born from a revolution against state authority. The American creed was based on five basic values: equality (understood as equality of opportunity rather than outcome), liberty (or anti-statism), individualism (in the sense that individuals could determine their own social station), populism and laissez-faire. Because these qualities were both political and civic, they were in theory accessible to all Americans (after the abolition of slavery) and have remained remarkably durable over the republic's history. Robert Bellah once described the US as having a "civil religion," but it is a church that is open to newcomers.

In addition to these aspects of political culture, American identity is also rooted in distinct ethnic traditions, in particular what Samuel Huntington calls the dominant "Anglo-Protestant" culture. Lipset agreed that the sectarian Protestant traditions of America's British settlers were very important in the shaping of American culture. The famous Protestant work ethic, the American proclivity for voluntary association and the moralism of American politics are all by-products of this Anglo-Protestant heritage.

But while key aspects of American culture are rooted in European cultural traditions, by the beginning of the 21st century they had become decoupled from their ethnic origins and were practised by a host of new Americans. Americans work harder than Europeans, and tend to believe--like Weber's early Protestants--that dignity lies in morally redeeming work rather than in the solidarity of a welfare state.

There are, of course, many aspects of contemporary American culture that are not so pleasant. The culture of entitlement, consumerism, Hollywood's emphasis on sex and violence, and the underclass gang culture that the US has re-exported to Central America are all distinctively American characteristics that some immigrants come to share. Lipset argued that American exceptionalism was a double-edged sword: the same anti-statist individualism that made Americans entrepreneurial also led them to disobey the law to a higher degree than Europeans.

In Europe after the second world war there was a strong commitment to creating a "post-national" European identity. But despite the progress that has been made in forging a strong EU, European identity remains something that comes from the head rather than the heart. While there is a thin layer of mobile, cosmopolitan Europeans, few think of themselves as generic Europeans or swell with pride at the playing of the European anthem. With the defeat of the European constitution in referendums in France and the Netherlands in 2005, ordinary citizens were once again telling elites that they were not ready to give up on the nation state and sovereignty.

But many Europeans also feel ambivalent about national identity. The formative experience for contemporary European political consciousness is the two world wars, which Europeans tend to blame on nationalism. Yet Europe's old national identities continue to linger. People still have a strong sense of what it means to be British or French or Dutch or Italian, even if it is not politically correct to affirm these identities too strongly. And national identities in Europe, compared to those in the Americas, remain more ethnically based. So while all European countries have the same commitment to formal, political citizenship equality as the US, it is harder to turn that into felt equality of citizenship because of the continuing force of ethnic allegiance.

The Dutch, for example, are famous for their pluralism and tolerance. Yet in the privacy of their own homes, the Dutch remain quite socially conservative. Dutch society has been multicultural without being assimilative, something that fits well into a consociational society that was traditionally organised into separate Protestant, Catholic and socialist "pillars." Similarly, most other European countries tend to conceive of multiculturalism as a framework for the coexistence of separate cultures rather than a transitional mechanism for integrating newcomers into a dominant culture (what Amartya Sen has called "plural monoculturalism"). Many Europeans express scepticism about whether Muslim immigrants want to integrate, yet those who do want to are not always eagerly welcomed, even if they have acquired the language and cultural knowledge of

the host society.

It is important not to overstate the differences between the US and Europe in this regard. Europeans argue, with some justice, that they face a harder problem in integrating their immigrants--the majority of whom are now Muslim--than does the US. Europe's Muslim immigrants tend to come from quite traditional societies, while the vast bulk of newcomers to the US are Hispanic and share the Christian heritage of the dominant culture. (Numbers also matter: in the US there are 2-3m Muslims in a country numbering nearly 300m; were this Muslim population proportionally the same size as in France, there would be over 20m.)

Whatever its exact causes, Europe's failure to better integrate its Muslims is a ticking time bomb that has already contributed to terrorism. It is bound to provoke a sharper backlash from populist groups, and may even threaten European democracy itself. Resolution of this problem will require a two-pronged approach, involving changes in behaviour by immigrant minorities and their descendants as well as by members of the dominant national communities.

The first prong of the solution is to recognise that the old multicultural model has not been a big success in countries such as the Netherlands and Britain, and that it needs to be replaced by more energetic efforts to integrate non-western populations into a common liberal culture. The old multicultural model was based on group recognition and group rights. Out of a misplaced sense of respect for cultural differences--and in some cases out of imperial guilt--it ceded too much authority to cultural communities to define rules of behaviour for their own members. Liberalism cannot ultimately be based on group rights, because not all groups uphold liberal values. The civilisation of the European Enlightenment, of which contemporary liberal democracy is the heir, cannot be culturally neutral, since liberal societies have their own values regarding the equal worth and dignity of individuals. Cultures that do not accept these premises do not deserve equal protection in a liberal democracy. Members of immigrant communities and their offspring deserve to be treated equally as individuals, not as members of cultural communities. There is no reason for a Muslim girl to be treated differently under the law from a Christian or Jewish one, whatever the feelings of her relatives.

Multiculturalism, as it was originally conceived in Canada, the US and Europe, was in some sense a "game at the end of history." That is, cultural diversity was seen as a kind of ornament to liberal pluralism that would provide ethnic food, colourful dress and traces of distinctive historical traditions to societies often seen as numbingly conformist and homogeneous. Cultural diversity was something to be practised largely in the private sphere, where it would not lead to any serious violations of individual rights or otherwise challenge the essentially liberal social order. Where it did intrude into the public sphere, as in the case of language policy in Quebec, the deviation from liberal principle was seen by the dominant community more as an irritant than as a fundamental threat to liberal democracy itself.

By contrast, some contemporary Muslim communities are making demands for group rights that simply cannot be squared with liberal principles of individual equality. These demands include special exemptions from the family law that applies to everyone else in the society, the right to exclude non-Muslims from certain types of public events, or the right to challenge free speech in the name of religious offence (as with the Danish cartoons incident). In some more extreme cases, Muslim communities have even expressed ambitions to challenge the secular character of the political order as a whole. These types of group rights clearly intrude on the rights of other individuals in the society and push cultural autonomy well beyond the private sphere.

Asking Muslims to give up group rights is much more difficult in Europe than in the US, however, because many European countries have corporatist traditions that continue to respect communal rights and fail decisively to separate church and state. The existence of state-funded Christian and Jewish schools in many European countries makes it hard to argue in principle against state-supported religious education for Muslims. In Germany, the state collects taxes on behalf of the Protestant and Catholic churches and distributes revenues to church-related schools. (This was a legacy of Bismarck's Kulturkampf against the Catholic church.) Even France, with its strong republican tradition, has not been consistent on this issue. After the French revolution's anti-clerical campaign, Napoleon restored the role of religion in education and used a corporatist approach to manage church-state relations. The state's relationship with France's Jewish community, for example, is managed by the *Ministre des Cultes* through the *Consistoire Israélite*, which served as the model for Nicolas Sarkozy's recent efforts to create

an authoritative Muslim interlocutor to speak for (and to control) the French Muslim community. Even the 1905 law enshrining the principle of *laïcité* had exceptions, as in Alsace, where the state still supports church-related schools.

These islands of corporatism where European states continue to officially recognise communal rights were not controversial prior to the arrival of large Muslim communities. Most European societies had become thoroughly secular, so these religious holdovers seemed quite harmless. But they set important precedents for the Muslim communities, and they are obstacles to the maintenance of a wall of separation between religion and state. If Europe is to establish the liberal principle of a pluralism based on individuals rather than groups, then it must address these corporatist institutions inherited from the past.

The other prong of the solution to the problem of Muslim integration concerns the expectations and behaviour of the majority communities in Europe. National identity continues to be understood and experienced in ways that sometimes make it a barrier for newcomers who do not share the ethnicity and religious background of the native-born. National identity has always been socially constructed; it revolves around history, symbols, heroes and the stories that a community tells about itself. This sense of attachment to a place and a history should not be rubbed out, but it should be made as open as possible to new citizens. In some countries, notably Germany, 20th-century history has made it awkward to discuss national identity, but this is a dialogue that needs to be reopened in the light of Europe's new diversity--for if existing citizens do not sufficiently value their national citizenship, then European countries can scarcely expect newcomers to value it either.

And that dialogue is being reopened. A few years ago, Germany's Christian Democrats gingerly floated the idea of *Leitkultur*--the notion that German citizenship entails certain obligations to observe standards of tolerance and equal respect. The term *Leitkultur*--which can be translated as a "guiding" or "reference culture"--was invented in 1998 by Bassam Tibi, a German academic of Syrian origin, precisely as a non-ethnic, universalist conception of citizenship that would open up national identity to non-ethnic Germans. Despite these origins, the idea was immediately denounced by the left as racist and a throwback to Germany's unhappy past, and the Christian Democrats quickly distanced themselves from it. But in the past few years, even Germany has had a much more robust public debate about national identity and mass immigration. During last year's successful soccer World Cup, the widespread expression of moderate national feeling became completely normal, and was even welcomed by Germany's neighbours.

Despite its very different starting point, America may have something to teach Europeans here as they attempt to construct post-ethnic forms of national citizenship and belonging. American life is full of quasi-religious ceremonies and rituals meant to celebrate the country's democratic political institutions: flag-raising ceremonies, the naturalisation oath, Thanksgiving and the 4th of July. Europeans, by contrast, have largely deritualised their political lives. Europeans tend to be cynical or dismissive of American displays of patriotism. But such ceremonies are important in the assimilation of new immigrants.

And Europe does have its own precedents for creating national identities that are less based on ethnicity or religion. The most celebrated case is French republicanism, which in its classic form refused to recognise separate communal identities and used state power to homogenise French society. With the growth of terrorism and urban unrest, an intense discussion has been under way in France about why this form of integration has failed. Part of the reason may be that the French themselves gave up the old concept of citizenship in favour of a version of multiculturalism. The headscarf ban of 2004 was the reassertion of an older concept of republicanism.

Britain has recently been borrowing from both American and French traditions as it seeks to raise the visibility of national citizenship. The Labour government has introduced citizenship ceremonies for new citizens as well as compulsory citizenship and language tests. It has also started citizenship classes in schools for all young citizens. Britain has experienced a sharp rise in immigration in recent years, much of it from the new member states of the EU such as Poland, and--in imitation of the US--the government sees immigration as a key part of its relative economic dynamism. Immigrants are welcome so long as they work rather than draw welfare and, thanks to US-style flexible labour markets, there are plenty of low-skill jobs to take. But in much of the rest of Europe, a combination of inflexible work rules and generous benefits means that immigrants come in search not of work but of welfare. Many Europeans claim that the less generous welfare state in the US robs the poor of dignity. But the opposite is true: dignity comes through work and the contributions one makes through one's labour to the larger society. In several Muslim communities in Europe, as much as half the population subsists on welfare, directly

contributing to the sense of alienation and hopelessness.

So the European experience is not homogeneous. But in most countries, the debate about identity and migration is opening up--albeit driven in part by terror attacks and the rise of the populist right.

The dilemma of immigration and identity ultimately converges with the larger problem of the valuelessness of postmodernity. The rise of relativism has made it harder for postmodern people to assert positive values and therefore the kinds of shared beliefs that they demand of migrants as a condition for citizenship. Postmodern elites, particularly those in Europe, feel that they have evolved beyond identities defined by religion and nation and have arrived at a superior place. But aside from their celebration of endless diversity and tolerance, postmodern people find it difficult to agree on the substance of the good life to which they aspire in common.

Immigration forces upon us in a particularly acute way discussion of the question "Who are we?", posed by Samuel Huntington. If postmodern societies are to move towards a more serious discussion of identity, they will need to uncover those positive virtues that define what it means to be a member of the wider society. If they do not, they may be overwhelmed by people who are more sure about who they are.

Identity and migration

http://www.prospect-magazine.co.uk/article_details.php?id=8239

Prospect Magazine

<http://www.prospect-magazine.co.uk>