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Entrance Strategies

The British Dream: Successes and Failures of Post-war Immigration

By David Goodhart

(Atlantic Books 416pp £20)

Exodus: Immigration and Multiculturalism in the 21st Century

By Paul Collier

(Allen Lane/The Penguin Press 320pp £20)

Population change is hard to glimpse over days, weeks or even years. As such, immigration and differences in group birth rates often exert a muted effect on policy. Yet perceptions of demographic change shift much more quickly and readily break the political surface. Since 2002, immigration has consistently ranked among the British public's leading concerns. Why? Mainly, both David Goodhart and Paul Collier argue, because immigration introduces cultural shifts that challenge the symbolic continuity of nations. Though both books criticise multiculturalism, one would expect a quieter tone from Collier than Goodhart. The latter, a former editor of *Prospect* and head of the think-tank Demos, is a well-known centre-left commentator on questions of immigration and national identity. His essay 'Too Diverse?' caused a storm of controversy in 2004 by arguing that increased diversity undercuts the cooperation needed for a strong welfare state. Collier, an impeccably liberal Oxford professor known for work on the political economy of development, has proposed, among other ideas, that material greed rather than ethnic attachments drive apparently ethnic civil wars. Given their backgrounds, it is astounding that the two arrive at the same terminus. In relation to his past work, Goodhart's book comes across as conciliatory and academic, while Collier's represents a radical break, stepping more brusquely onto sensitive ground.

The cultural cords – language or religion, for instance – that bind people together over time and place are selected by each generation. The symbolic menu is potentially infinite. Yet choices are constrained by the dishes chosen by previous generations. It would take a hard, multigenerational slog for an elite to convince British people to adopt Taoism or the German language as symbols of their national identity – it's much easier to stick with Christianity and English. Immigration of enough determined German Taoists, though, especially if they were resistant to English charms, could bring change. It's happened before. As Eugene Kulischer has shown, in AD 900 Berlin had no Germans, Moscow no Russians, Budapest no Hungarians, Madrid was Moorish and Constantinople had few Turks. More recently, Israel, Lebanon and Kosovo furnish examples of how migration can drive political change.

The collision between immigration and national identity is defining our epoch. This will only accelerate in the decades to come. The developing world produces 97 per cent of world population growth and is in the early to middle stages of its demographic transition. The rich world is ageing and

declining in native population. The demographic difference will peak in 2050 as economies converge: poverty and excess births in one region; wealth and birth dearth in another. Economic theory would suggest population should flow from the poor tropics to the temperate zones. Yet international migrants' total share of world population has been relatively constant at 2 to 3 per cent for decades. What's going on?

Collier explains that movement among rich countries has greatly declined. The numbers thus cloak a sharp upsurge in migration from the poor South to the rich North. Collier's *Exodus* is a crisply written book that presents a unified theory of migration. He claims the demand for migration from poor countries is potentially infinite. It's kept in check because most of the world's poor lack the funds and support to emigrate. As the developing world transitions to higher wage levels, a soaring groundswell of people will be able to move. As daring pioneers of an ethnic group settle abroad in diasporas, they offer the information and support that encourage more cautious people to depart. Like warmer temperatures releasing gases that trap warmth to cause a runaway greenhouse effect, larger diasporas lower barriers, bringing forth more emigration and an even larger diaspora: immigration becomes self-fulfilling and only border controls can stem it. Where there is no control, an entire population may leave, as was pretty much the case for Turkish Cypriots, most of whom wound up in Britain.

How wide should the doors of nations be? Most economists favour the free movement of labour. People, like coffee or bananas, should move to rich countries – at least until wages and productivity in rich and poor nations are aligned. In the West, those who suffer as a result can be compensated with a government cheque. But where an economist might consider humans only as interchangeable economic units, Collier is sensitive to cultural considerations. More immigration would raise world GDP and the income of each country. But it could also impose costs on the lower-status members of host societies and harm those left behind in poor ones.

A descendant of German immigrants to Britain who assimilated over generations, Collier doesn't shy away from controversy. First, he endorses the thesis of the Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam, which states that diversity makes it difficult to generate the solidarity required to support a welfare state. Secondly, he claims that many societies in the developing world, such as Somalia and Jamaica, are politically dysfunctional, which is why they are poor. This malaise is not due to genetics or race, but to the historical accidents that spawn bad governance. This breeds a culture of mistrust: obligations are to the clan rather than society. When immigrants from dysfunctional countries relocate to well-managed, high-trust Western ones, they bring their untrusting cultures with them. Host societies must transform immigrants by assimilating them into a high-trust culture. To the extent that such newcomers cling to their culture, they cause social problems and drift to the bottom of society. Larger diasporas protect their

members from the bracing winds of the high-trust mainstream while attracting further immigration from home. Western countries must therefore take steps to integrate diasporas while enacting immigration policies that favour immigrants from similar cultures who are more readily absorbed. Family reunification should be curbed and refugees offered temporary refuge rather than permanent settlement. In sum, Western states should select immigrants that provide maximum economic benefit at minimum social cost.

Collier offers a theory of limits but doesn't specify whether Britain has too much diversity. Goodhart is more prescriptive, claiming that immigration during the Blair years was too high for society to absorb. Survey evidence shows a striking decline in British support for higher taxes to fund welfare benefits, from 58 per cent in 1991 to 28 per cent in 2012. The culprit for Goodhart is growing diversity, which eroded the sense of common identity needed to underpin a large-scale sharing of wealth.

Goodhart adds that the white working class have been written out of the multicultural script while being battered by competition at the low end of the labour market. The surfeit of cheap, high-quality, motivated labour provided by immigration allows a short-termist middle class to reap the benefits while ignoring the large pool of deskilled or undermotivated native workers. Accordingly, Goodhart endorses the coalition government's attempt to reduce migration to the 'tens of thousands'. Where Collier soars the geothermals of theory, Goodhart ploughs along at ground level to tell a tale packed with interviews and reportage from real neighbourhoods. Much of *The British Dream* offers an unvarnished history of Britain's ethnic minorities, from the *Windrush* to the Ugandan Asians, Somalis and Poles. Caribbeans have a high rate of intermarriage and appear to be following the 'Irish' pattern of assimilation. Chinese, Indians and East African Asians perform above the national average, treading the Jewish path. At the other end, Bangladeshis, Somalis and Pakistanis are struggling, hamstrung by institutions such as cross-cousin marriage and patriarchy.

Collier and Goodhart agree that immigration is no longer a taboo subject in national politics, though there remains great resistance to discussing it in liberal circles. Goodhart senses a squeamishness about national identity within the cultural elite, which prefers the attractions of universalism. He quotes George Monbiot, for whom favouring the interests of British people over others is indistinguishable from racism. And on the other side of the floor we find Michael Portillo telling a development audience that funding moderately poor Britons ahead of the desperately poor of the global South is old-fashioned. Like Collier, Goodhart leans against the liberal grain, favouring a communitarian approach in which obligations to fellow nationals count for more than duties to strangers.

Collier names the nation as the highest level of community to command allegiance, but says little about national identity. Goodhart puts flesh on the bones. He begins with the civic nationalism of Gordon Brown, but contends that a focus on British values, rights and duties is too arid. Britain – or rather England – needs to affirm itself with an inspiring national story akin to the ‘civil religion’ of America. St George’s Day, the monarchy, citizenship ceremonies and even national service inject much-needed emotion into Britishness. Goodhart champions a more active, pseudo-French emphasis on mixing and integration, including redesigning school catchments, dispersing migrants in social housing and offering free English lessons. He calls for the pace of integration to be monitored – celebrating it when it occurs and focusing policy attention where it has not, as with many members of ‘stuck’ minority groups such as Kashmiris or Somalis.

Collier is correct that only extremists advocate zero or unconstrained immigration, and that most partisans in the debate tend to fall into one of the two camps. He’s right that neoclassical economics, with its culture-blind approach, has a tin ear when it comes to immigration policy. *Exodus* is not without its problems, however. As an economist who has studied migration, Collier has a solid grasp of its supply and demand. Things get more difficult as the book enters sociological terrain. There is little here from classic works on assimilation such as those of Milton Gordon, Richard Alba and Victor Nee. Why have the Jamaicans, whose home culture is ‘dysfunctional’ in trust terms, assimilated so rapidly in Britain? The Chinese, who come from a family-oriented, low-trust milieu, have also generally assimilated. High-trust Germans, on the other hand, defied assimilation in Brazil and Argentina. A more multifaceted approach to culture would strengthen Collier’s argument. Furthermore, the strongest ethnic divides are not necessarily between the most distant cultures, because these have no history of hate. Freud’s ‘narcissism of small differences’ better explains Hutu–Tutsi, German–Jewish or Serb–Croat conflict, for example. Would the English accept a potentially endless influx of clannish Germans more than Indians? Perhaps, but perhaps not.

These are controversial books on a defining issue of our age. Agree or disagree, both repay the reader’s effort.