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On “The Paradox of Immigration Attitudes in Luxembourg”

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The Fetzer (2011) study set out to investigate the reasons for which Luxembourg is more welcoming of foreigners than its counterparts in Western Europe. But this begs the question: Why Luxembourg? Luxembourg is not the best example. In fact, it might be more of an exception than the norm. It is interesting why it was chosen as the least xenophobic country in Western Europe outside Scandinavia when Sweden is known to be the least xenophobic in Europe, especially that there is no rationale provided for the choice. Instead, Luxembourg is deliberately compared to outrageously xenophobic countries, especially towards Middle Eastern and Muslim populations, like the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and France. It is almost as if the author is determined to prove how utopian the country is. Yes, the author cites the fact that almost two-thirds of the labor force and a little over one-third of the whole population is foreign-born, but that is not a good enough reason for his choice. This is an exaggeration more befitting of mass media than research.

The study confirms both the identity-based and interest-based theories (Sides & Citrin, 2007). It emphasizes that people tend to shun what is different, and that is what the identity-based theory reinforces; it epitomizes that natives might reject those groups whom they believe pose a threat to their identity, be it ethnic, national, cultural, or otherwise. One of the hypotheses the author posits as to why the natives of Luxembourg embrace immigrants is that they are mostly Portuguese who subscribe to the same Catholic religion as themselves. Nothing is mentioned of refugees and/or immigrants who are culturally different. But what does the fact that

only culturally similar immigrants choose to flock to Luxembourg say about it? Why is it so off-limits to those who are culturally different? The author relays one of the immigrant-rights activists' comments where he boasts how the natives of the country are so tightknit that almost every person knows the other, which seems more like a society not exactly accessible to outsiders. Where is the pride in accepting people like yourself? You cannot call yourself less xenophobic and more tolerant as a result. The real test is whether you accept people who are different from your own; it is only when you allow people who look, act, and believe differently into your community that you can truly call yourself accepting and tolerant. I am also inclined to believe that religion is, indeed, a factor, but for the wrong reasons. Perhaps the more religious a country is, the more endemic in their beliefs tolerance is. They, therefore, are more accepting of cultural diversity, be it ethnic, racial, or religious. Racism and antagonizing immigrants—and human beings at large—would be against the tenets of their faith.

The study also hypothesizes that the economic equality among natives is another reason why the latter do not feel threatened by newcomers, especially when there is hardly any abject poverty or unemployment in the country. It made sense in the case of Luxembourg where there is no economic inequality and ethnic competition over scarce resources is non-existent. However, a previous study makes a distinction between actual and perceived competition (Coenders, Lubbers, & Scheepers, 2012). Most of the time, natives' feelings of insecurity stem from unfounded fears that the refugees were there to take away their jobs, especially if they were a cheaper labor, when in fact, they usually occupied the jobs the natives refused to take (Coenders, Lubbers, & Scheepers, 2012).

This is one of the few studies that underscores the colonial past of the country as a factor in the immigration equation as well. It proposes that the integration of immigrants into the fabric of the native society is best explained by the fact that Luxembourg did not colonize any other countries in the past and so there is no bad blood or resentment towards immigrants who

defeated and may have shed native blood in their war of decolonization. But the past does not usually seep into the future sentiment of natives. Sometimes it is the present that haunts our lives. Xenophobia could be one of the consequences of the media. When the media inaccurately depicts foreigners as terrorists or barbarians, for instance, the natives might not be as welcoming of those groups.

I was actually quite taken aback by Fetzer's final remark when he referred to some European countries and how they have an ethical obligation to host immigrants whose countries they colonized in the past and may have contributed to their poverty or instability. I find myself agreeing with that logic--when it is only fair for the culprits to pay for their crime--but still think of burden sharing and how even if the host country is not one that had previously colonized the homeland of the immigrants, for humanitarian reasons, we all have an obligation to support humankind with the resources we have.

The whole article prompted me to think about how it is that a population might warm up to the idea of nonnatives infiltrating its community. One theory I believe is being tested out there is visibility and this is where the role of the media comes in. It all started as part of the anti-Trump campaign when he instated some anti-immigrant policies. I remember then that Hollywood blockbusters started featuring hijabi girls for the first time in supporting and lead roles in movies and series. They were given a face and voice to show their humanity. They were featured as people, just like the natives. I think the rationale was to confront the public with their fears, which usually stem from not seeing or knowing the Muslim community, and to emphasize that they had more similarities than differences with the natives. I, too, believe that we fear newness; we fear what we are not familiar with because we do not know what to expect; it's human nature. And I believe that part of the answer is to eliminate that mystery shrouding immigrants. Do not hide or ignore them; show them. They need to be seen everywhere to

reinforce the idea that they are part of that community; it is only then that the natives will be used to them and not be shocked or antagonized when they cross paths with them in reality.

References

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