



IMMIGRATION, SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND CRIME A cross-national approach

Luigi M. Solivetti

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Immigration, Social Integration and Crime

The problem of social control has constituted the acid test for the entire issue of immigration and integration. But whilst recent studies show that in Western Europe the crime rate for non-nationals is three, four or more times higher than that of the country's 'own' citizens, academic interest in these statistics has been inhibited by the political difficulties they raise. *Immigration, Social Integration and Crime* addresses this issue directly. Providing a thorough analysis of immigration and crime rates in all of the main European countries, as well as examining the situation in the US, Luigi Solivetti concludes that the widespread notion that a large non-national population produces high crime rates must be rejected. Noting the undeniably substantial, but significantly variable contribution of non-nationals to crime statistics in Western Europe, he nevertheless goes on to analyse and explain the factors that influence the relationship between immigration and crime. It is the characteristics of the 'host' countries that is shown to be significantly associated with non-nationals' integration and, ultimately, their involvement in crime. In particular, Solivetti concludes, it is 'social capital' in the host societies – made up of features such as education, transparency, and openness – that plays a key role in non-nationals' integration chances, and so in their likelihood to commit crime. Supported by extensive empirical data and statistical analysis, *Immigration, Social Integration and Crime* provides an invaluable contribution to one of the most pressing social and political debates – in Europe, and elsewhere.

Luigi M. Solivetti is Professor of Sociology at the Faculty of Statistics of the Sapienza University of Rome. He has carried out research work in the fields of Social Control and Social Change, extensively publishing at the international level.

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The centuries-old issue of immigration has, for the past few decades, been revived as a growing and disturbing element in relation to questions of integration, crime and punishment. However, much as it may have figured in public discourses, usually as a symptom of increasing destabilization, but at times as, in itself, a direct cause of crime, rational and informed debate has been handicapped by the sheer difficulties of assembling, let alone analysing, adequate data on the interplay between immigration, crime and punishment. A particularly complex set of problems, both technically and conceptually, are involved in distinguishing between different groups of immigrants: non-nationals as distinct from those granted citizenship; those from within the European Union and those from without; and how to define and measure with some rigour trends across national boundaries even within Europe itself. In this path-breaking book, Luigi Solivetti tackles these problems not only systematically but in key respects for the first time. First published in Italy in 2004 by il Mulino, this edition has been updated and much expanded as well as lucidly translated.

In the context of globalization, a term which often obscures as much as it reveals, the twenty-first century had long been in prospect as an era of the mass movement of people, escaping as refugees from despotic regimes or from relative or – less often than is supposed – dire poverty for better civil protections and economic prospects in the developed world. Yet the presumption that immigration portends a rise in crime and growing social disruption is at best a distraction from constructing humane policies of asylum and resettlement; at worst a recipe for what Stan Cohen termed both moral panic (1972) and states of denial (2001). As Solivetti makes clear, the gains to the host society from immigration, and the crimes committed against the migrants in their society of origin, as well as in the process of migration, are viewed as far less compelling.

Despite the odds against it, this study provides grounds for cautious optimism. Solivetti analyses the fullest data set so far assembled on cross-national trends in Europe and the USA to demonstrate that the more welfare-oriented and socially protected the society, the more levels of crime and punishment

among non-national immigrants are modified. This conclusion complements the recent work of Nicola Lacey (2008) on political economy and punishment, and that of Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) on the links between egalitarian social and economic policies and relatively lower rates of virtually all social problems and punitive 'solutions'. This is not wishful thinking or partisan cherry-picking of the data, but close-grained social science. There is a clear narrative here which we ignore at our peril.

Luigi Solivetti is a social scientist whose work has spanned social anthropology – one of his major studies, *Equilibrio e Controllo in una Società Tradizionale* [*Balance and Control in a Traditional Society*] (Rome, Istituto Italo-Africano & L'Harmattan, 1996) was an ethnography of social control and community relations in northern Nigeria – sociology, criminology and social statistics. He thus brings to bear on the vexed topics of immigration, integration, crime and punishment an unusual sensitivity to and expertise in the human realities beneath the surface of demographic trends.

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Introduction

Here you are free and you have pride ...
Long as you stay on your own side!
Free to be anything you choose ...
Free to wait tables and shine shoes!

(R. Wise and J. Robbins,
West Side Story, 1961)

Literature, working on personal experience, sometimes rapidly grasps what the social sciences laboriously study. In his novel *The Road to Los Angeles*, the writer John Fante, familiar as he was with emigration from personal experience, regarded it from a viewpoint far removed from sentimentality or mawkishness. When Fante touches on the social problems revolving round emigration, his descriptions are as distasteful as they are illuminating. The novel's protagonist, Bandini, has known, like the author, the immigrant's sufferings, and cannot easily forget how at school his classmates called him *wop* and told him he should have stayed back home. And when he finds himself working in a revolting fish cannery, together with Asian immigrants only recently arrived, the first thing he does is to call the person working next to him *nigger*; and to explain just what he had in mind, he says to him: 'You are a damn foreigner ... I was born right here in good old California' (Fante 1985).

It would be just as well to begin by asking ourselves what chance there is for us to end up like the protagonist of Fante's novel. There's no lack of reasons for concern. In *good old Europe*, as Bandini would put it, there has been a significant influx of immigrants in recent years. Countries with a long tradition of emigration have found themselves insensibly turned, almost without them realizing it, into countries of immigration. Countries with a population conditioned, homogenized even, by centuries of living together, with common cultural and religious characteristics, or at least with differences polished by habit, have suddenly found themselves living cheek by jowl not with *one* foreigner, a figure that excites curiosity and in general benevolence (like Pocahontas), but with foreigners *en masse*. Many have had the unnerving sensation, a quite novel one for them, of finding themselves

the sole native occupants on board a bus or other means of transport whose passengers are all immigrants. Or they find themselves on a street frequented only by immigrants. The sense of disorientation, or even unease, that they usually derive from such an experience is not due merely to the mass character of the phenomenon, but also the consciousness that these people are not tourists: in other words, they are not in transit, but are here to stay.

This first impression, however, is likely to be accompanied with other considerations. We may begin by noting that this is a phenomenon that cannot be understood or defined within national frontiers. The dimension in which this phenomenon needs to be placed is transnational; and, for our purposes, it is that of Western Europe. Now, many in Europe itself consider the European Union merely a series of accords for the free circulation of goods and, subordinately, for alleviating the hassle that people had to go through whenever they crossed the frontiers. A fundamental policy of the European Union, however, consists also of the free movement of EU citizens: it consists in giving citizens of the individual countries the chance to seek better opportunities of work and life elsewhere within the wider frontiers of the European Union. The current presence in all EU countries of non-nationals, who are nonetheless citizens of the European Union, represents a phenomenon that presumably will not be reduced but on the contrary become increasingly significant, to the point of producing, in an admittedly distant future, situations in which the majority of some countries will consist of non-natives. Luxembourg, for example, seems already far advanced in this direction.

It should be noted, at the same time, that this policy of the free circulation of EU citizens has paradoxically coincided with the growth of immigration to the EU of those coming not from the EU itself but from countries very distant in terms of geography, culture, economic development, religion and so on. Indeed, immigration from non-EU and non-European countries has far outstripped – with one or two exceptions – immigration within the EU. If we look at the EU as a whole, EU non-nationals form only a third of all non-nationals; and of the remaining two-thirds roughly half consist of non-European non-nationals.

The combination of immigration from EU countries and that from non-EU and non-European countries has had the cumulative effect of Western Europe assuming a role in international migration of which few Europeans themselves are conscious. Western Europe has received, at least since the early 1990s, an annual influx of immigrants far outstripping that of the USA (see Chapter 3.3), i.e. that of the country that represents *par excellence*, in the public consciousness, the *land of immigration*.

Immigration to Western Europe, moreover, represents a far from transitory phenomenon: there are good reasons for assuming that it will be of long duration. For some of its underlying causes are becoming ever more pronounced, and ever more pressing.

In the first place, while the overall gap between the advanced economies as a whole and the backward economies as a whole has not grown any wider in recent years – indeed the rapid development of countries such as China, Malaysia and Brazil has reduced it – the gap between the two extremes represented by the richest countries and the poorest countries of the world has at the same time dramatically widened. Now, the countries of the EU represent the most affluent bloc in the world with an annual average income (GNP) of over \$30,000 per capita. And this bloc is geographically closest to the poorest bloc, situated in sub-Saharan Africa, with an annual average income of approximately \$500 per capita. The bloc of EU countries is also close to other poor and turbulent regions, such as the Middle East and North Africa, where, if we exclude the oil-producing countries and Israel, the GNP is in general of the order of \$1,500–3,000 per capita; and such as the former Communist countries of Eastern Europe. The latter present three negative conditions that have repercussions on the phenomenon of emigration: a level of average income that is low, at least in comparison with that of Western European countries; often a deterioration in living standards (lower income, greater economic inequalities, lower life expectancy) since the disintegration of the Soviet Union; and a breakdown of the internal equilibria that had also enforced rigid controls on internal and international emigration. We can therefore identify a situation characterized by an ever more pronounced *economic and social differentiation* between Western Europe on the one hand and the Third and former Second World, on the other. It should be noted that this differential is dissimilar from the one that led to the mass emigration of Western Europeans 50 or 100 years ago. Those emigrants went to America or to other European countries to earn more money, let's say twice what they could have obtained if they had stayed at home. But the emigrants from the so-called developing countries who seek their fortunes in Western Europe today are inspired by the not unrealistic hope of earning ten times what they could possibly obtain in their homelands. So we can safely predict that this *differential* will give rise to a growth in pressure on the phenomenon of migration to the countries of the EU. An improvement of the economic conditions now taking place in many developing countries will also contribute to this growth in pressure. For, paradoxical as it might seem, and contrary to what might be thought, extreme poverty is more an obstacle than an incentive to emigration. True, it is especially the inhabitants of the poor countries that tend to emigrate; but among these the poorest and the most ignorant are impeded by their very condition of indigence. Migrations, like revolutions, start when conditions begin to get better. A growth – albeit a relative growth – of the income and education for the masses in the developing countries will make emigration a more viable option; and the decrease in the cost of air travel will have the same effect.