Introduction: migration and ethnic studies in Europe

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Over the past few decades, practically every country in the advanced world has witnessed a substantial increase in immigration (Castles & Miller 2009). Some countries such as Canada or the United States have hosted immigration for centuries, and their mental map and social fabric are consequently geared to accommodating newcomers. But even for those countries, the magnitude of the current flow of people crossing the border with or without valid documents was unexpected. The US had its version of the guest worker system in the Mexican Bracero Program of the 1940s, but the immigration of Latino workers for the agricultural industry is nothing when compared to what was in store. The previous immigration regime favoured immigrants from Europe, but the abolition of restrictions for immigrants from Africa, Asia or Latin America in 1965 opened the US to non-Europeans (Cornelius, Martin & Hollifield 1994). Immigration laws were tightened in the 1980s and 1990s in response to growing political pressure against what some regarded as unbridled immigration as well as mounting unemployment and rising public expenditures for documented and undocumented immigrants alike. Meanwhile, Los Angeles outnumbered America’s all-time city of immigration, New York. That being said — and contrary to the general political mood in the US — authorities still maintain that the city warmly welcomes immigrants. Even if immigrants are not always treated as welcome guests, still acknowledged are the contributions they have made to the metropolis’ flourishing, now and in the past.

On the other side of the Atlantic, similar developments have occurred, though under different circumstances. One striking difference is that Europe’s nations have never really considered themselves countries of immigration the way North America has. On the contrary, many, including Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal. Spain — sending countries in living memory — and even the Netherlands presented themselves as countries of emigration. International migration and the social problems it allegedly generates — and with which it usually
is amalgamated – have in recent years emerged as inevitable issues in the media and politics, especially after 9/11. Migration has been constructed as an international and domestic security issue linked to urban unsafety, international organised crime, terrorism, illegality, environmental issues and public health. This has aggravated the fear of an invasion of Europe by cohorts of poor people. Meanwhile, the issue of the co-existence between nationals and migrant communities has become increasingly interpreted in terms of social tensions and problems (criminality, drugs, unemployment, school drop-out, insecurity, etc.). In several European countries, political parties play on the fears of the electorate with regard to migration in order to gather electoral support. More precisely, since 9/11 and the Madrid bombings of 3/11, there has been real intellectual and political panic surrounding the issue of Islam in Europe and elsewhere.¹ To be fair, there is also a more positive approach to migration and multiculturalism. Some welcome immigration as an answer to the greying of the population. Others see it as a necessary condition for economic advancement in the framework of the Lisbon Agenda. The same holds for diversity. While many politicians and opinion leaders advance an assimilationist policy and thus aim at abolishing any form of ethnic diversity, urban sociologists, economic geographers and city planners are increasingly identifying diversity as key for economic growth (see for instance Florida 2000). Fractions of the general public also value diversity in their social practices and modes of consumption as illustrated by the success of ethnic food, fashion and world music, for example in most European cities.

Nevertheless, public and political debates about migration are hardly serene. In fact, since the early 1980s, migration has become the focal point for passionate debates and controversies on a regular basis.² In these circumstances, social scientists find themselves caught in a very difficult position, especially if they take seriously the point that their role is to elaborate knowledge free from passions and fears. Their work is, in effect, running the risk of unwillingly reinforcing the excessive dramatisation surrounding migratory phenomena. Even when they assign themselves the precise opposite goal, they are not always immune from distorted interpretations of their work within the public sphere.

This ambiguity did not, however, preclude social scientists from becoming very prolific. Proliferation of migration and ethnic studies in Western Europe is a relatively recent phenomenon. This branch of social scientific research took off in several European countries
in the early 1980s and a little earlier in countries such as the United Kingdom. In the first stages, the study of migration was largely reserved for demographers and political economists. Traditionally, it has been a key area of study for the discipline of demography. Political economy has quite logically developed an interest in this field. Until the oil crisis of 1973, the mere economic dimension of migration was actually assumed to be the most obvious and most natural dimension of the process. It was usually portrayed in terms of the movements of the labour force.

The aim of the introduction to this textbook is not to present a classic state of the art on migration and ethnic studies. This work has already been done several times and has given rise to many publications in different countries (see for instance Penninx, Berger & Kraal 2006). Instead of repeating what has already been achieved, it seems more fruitful in this context to articulate a number of marked features of the field of study. We will briefly reflect on European migration and ethnic studies and highlight a number of academic publications that were central to this development. In our view, two structural factors shape European migration and ethnic studies. Firstly, there is the structure of European academic research, both in terms of disciplinary and thematic profile and funding. Secondly, we turn our attention to the dominance of American perspectives in this field and the tendency of European researchers to take these perspectives for granted.

**European migration and ethnic studies in a wider scientific structure**

The first feature of European migration and ethnic studies is what may be called the problem of the epistemological break, according to Gaston Bachelard (1983) and Pierre Bourdieu (1973). More precisely, we should say that a major challenge in the study of migration and ethnic relations is the absence of any epistemological break, which is often a result of the aforementioned intellectual emergency and the social conditions of production of the social scientific work. As discussed above, the common sense, led by a biased media socialisation, conceives of immigration in terms of economic, social and political problems. These include insecurity and criminality, unemployment, poverty, urban decay, violence, religious and ethnic conflicts and the dilution of the nation. Since 1973, this mosaic of folk representation has been widely diffused in the public. Surprisingly, the social sciences as a whole and sociology, more specifically, did
not represent any exception. Sociologists have actually started categorising the social experience of migrant populations into distinctive domains, which they elaborated as specific social problems to be studied and resolved. In fact, we have observed how construction of the sociological perspectives on migration and ethnic relations in the early hours of the discipline simply mirrored the intuitive theories of migration among the wider public. This led to the development of a literature rife with binary perspectives, such as immigrants and housing, immigrants and school, immigrants and criminality, immigrants and security, immigrants and health, immigrants and culture, immigrants and the labour market. A great number of studies has been produced – and continues to be – in all these sub-fields of research. In the worst cases, they have been either flatly empiricist or simply unfruitful due to their redundancy. On the whole, one must reckon with this first major difficulty in order to account for the relative theoretical stagnation of the field. (For a more critical point of view, see Rath 2001.)

It’s as though migration and ethnic studies were meant to contribute to solving the social problems associated with a phenomenon still dominantly perceived as a threat to the social order (Sayad 1984). Insofar as it tends to answer a social demand more or less directly, the sociology of migration has been constrained. It has been forced to internalise the problematised and dramatised perception of the common sense – which is itself largely determined, as stated above, by a concern for social order. In this situation, it is quite difficult to establish a positive assessment in terms of the scientific value of the works produced. As noted by Michel Oriol:

> In their concern for solving concrete problems quickly, they [the researchers] can only raise the problems in terms comparable to those of the public opinion. It becomes therefore more difficult to break off with ideology in order to establish a properly scientific approach. (1981: 6)

The tight entanglement of social debates and policies helps explain the weaknesses of the sociology of migration processes and ethnic relations, as well as the predominance in the field of the flattest empiricism (Noiriel 1989).

Some claim that it is hard to talk of migration and ethnic studies as a firm, coherent theoretical corpus in Europe. In other words, this field of research would not have reached the status of a branch of
the social sciences in its own right. The study of migration and ethnic relations could hardly pretend to compete academically with more established branches of sociology, anthropology, political science and so forth because of its major theoretical weaknesses and fragmentation. Others believe that mainstream sociology is not theoretically stronger. As such, the problem would be related to the structure of social science research, which is fairly disciplinarily oriented, with disciplinary-based institutes, evaluations and funding. Meanwhile, migration and ethnic studies is thematically oriented and multi-disciplinary. For sociologists, this field is not sociological enough; for anthropologists, geographers and political scientists the same holds true. Consequently, scholars publish in specialised migration and ethnicity journals that attract fewer readers, reach lower citations and have less impact scores. The list goes on.

It is apparent that migration and ethnic studies was for a long time marginalised in academic circles and universities. As already underscored by Abdelmalek Sayad (1984) and Philippe Lorenzo (1989), it was an undervalued field of research. The field consequently remained unattractive for academic researchers until not so long ago. This is mainly the case in Continental Europe. In the US and, to a lesser extent, in the UK, things are different. In the New World, the professionalisation of sociology happened in the context of a country conceiving its history as one of immigration. It comes therefore as no surprise that this discipline has grown while maintaining immigration as a central concern. For instance, the research produced in this field has allowed the Chicago School to develop and to become a world-famous school of sociology. In many other European countries, the leading figures of social sciences were until rather recently not interested in these phenomena. When they did show an interest, they did it in a way that was once characterised by Lorenzo (1989) as marginal, periodical and brief.

As far as social sciences and the study of migration are concerned, researchers are all too often constrained by having to chase down funding and research contracts at various ministries and governmental agencies. The fact that immigration and integration have, in the course of the last twenty years, remained highly contentious and sensitive from an electoral point of view has had various consequences. Most often, elected politicians holding executive offices are particularly careful in selecting the research projects that may be immediately useful in terms of policymaking. Sometimes, an advantage is given to research projects that give academic alibis – often of a
quantitative nature – to policies already agreed upon. In other words, politicians in executive offices have a strong tendency to intrude upon the academic debate by imposing the ‘legitimate’ research problematics and themes without taking into account the researchers’ properly scientific concerns and agenda. One can observe how, in recent years, themes worth receiving subsidies were the control of asylum seekers and refugee flows, the control of external borders, criminality, migrant insecurity and employment and unemployment and, last but not least, Islamic terrorism issues.

The scarcity of sources of funding and the ‘contractualisation’ of research do not easily accommodate the theoretical concerns of the researchers. There is a power struggle between the politicians and policymakers in one camp and the academics in the other. The latter seem to be at the base end of it. However, the relative autonomisation of the academic field is still a precondition for an effective epistemological break in the course of a solid research process. Furthermore, it constitutes an important difference between non-academic expertise and scientific research.

Researching and teaching in this field have, for a long time, remained poorly valued on the whole. Nor have the pursuits been very rewarding in terms of academic prestige. Investing in these themes has not been the most direct way forward for those willing to join the elite of social science research. As a respondent of Lorenzo put it: ‘You don’t make a career in academia with immigration’ (Lorenzo 1989: 9). Sayad once asked the very uneasy question: ‘Is the science of the “poor”, of the “small people”, (socially) a poor science, a small one?’4 (1984: 20). There is no doubt about the answer: the sociology of immigration was a minor sociological subject matter.

Moreover, it seems that immigration and ethnic relations have almost exclusively been studied by researchers who were in one way or another complacent to the subject. A number of researchers in the field were either migrants themselves or of migrant descent. The same narrow relationship between personal experience and research experience was observable among native researchers. They often had a special relationship with immigrant population, either through marriage or friendship. In other cases, they had close links with the migrants’ countries of origin. It should be said that many of these researchers, both natives and migrants, occupied precarious and unstable positions within the academic world and were often badly dependent on external funding. One could contend that, on the social scale
of academic prestige, migration and ethnic studies is still too often in the hands of ‘second-class’ researchers. This latter statement is immune from any judgment of their scientific competence. It actually aims to emphasise how their social and national backgrounds, i.e. the weakness of their position in the academic field, do not generally qualify them for the most academically valued positions. Moreover, it is often expected that ethnic minority researchers should work on ethnic and migration issues, just as it is usually considered ‘natural’ that gender studies be foremost a matter for female researchers. This situation has significantly evolved over the course of the 1990s and 2000s. Although theoretical divergence within the European field on the relevance of ethnicity as a mobilising social and political force remains important, a form of decompartmentation and demarginalisation is undoubtedly at work. From either analytical angle, migration and ethnicity have become key issues in the social analysis of contemporary Europe.

In the course of the 1990s and the 2000s, European migration and ethnic studies has undergone a process of change, of demarginalisation and of professionalisation. There are many specialised academic journals ranked in the ISI Web of Knowledge (e.g. Ethnic and Rzional Studies, International Migration Review, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, Revue européenne des migrations internationales). There are many workshops, conferences and international networks dedicated to the study of migration and integration. There is a number of specialised research institutes at various universities and a growing number of Master’s and PhD programmes in fields related to migration and ethnic studies. Moreover, main funders have launched special programmes for research projects that revolve around migration and integration (e.g. the European Commission’s Seventh Framework Programme, the New Opportunities for Research Funding Co-operation in Europe network known as NORFACE, the Foundation for Population, Migration and Environment (PME/BMU) and various national research councils). In short, migration and ethnic studies is, more and more, gaining respect as a legitimate academic field worth an investment by students who hope to find a job in the domain.

**European social scientists’ fascination for the Americas**

The second feature of European migration and ethnic studies is the adoption – without sufficient care – of conceptual and theoretical ele-
ments developed in other social and national contexts. As observed by Oriol:

Sociology has experienced the same enthusiasm as the population in general for the Americas and sought its paradigms there, just as people have sought their fortune. (Oriol 1981: 24)

In fact, a wide number of theoretical constructions in the European sociology of migration has been imported from the US. The Chicago School and the structural-functionalism among other schools have provided European researchers with a huge stock of concepts. We can mention here a number of examples: assimilation, adaptation, marginality, inclusion, integration. The reason for these abundant theoretical imports seems to lie in the fascination for the US mentioned by Oriol, as well as the fact that the discipline of sociology in America was far more advanced in the study of migration than the European one when this theme became topical among European researchers. Acknowledging the richness and relevance of the American conceptual legacy cannot preclude expressing explicit reservations in terms of the very questionable way in which these concepts were used and applied by European researchers.

A major problem lies in the fact that divergence has been underestimated, in terms of the historical, social and economic background of Europe and the US. This divergence should have, at the very least, stimulated a careful transferring of concepts from one context to the other. Indeed, different historical and spatial contexts never correspond in every respect, and therefore it is somehow illusory to use theories and concepts developed for explaining and accounting for the situation in one context for the other. Before they can be introduced in a given context, theories and concepts external to a social formation should first undergo a critical and thorough examination. They must be deconstructed and reconstructed in order to be adapted satisfactorily to a new context. This work has not been sufficiently achieved in this field of study, especially when it comes to importing elements of the American intellectual tradition. Moreover, the intrinsic problems of these imported concepts and problematics were not definitively solved even in the American context. Therefore, by introducing them uncritically in Europe, theoretical difficulties have also been unwillingly taken on board. This factor may in itself account for the uneasy development of a European sociology of migration and ethnic relations.
These two problems of the theoretical and conceptual imports, especially from the US, may be illustrated briefly through the example of the late introduction and the development of concepts linked to ‘ethnicity’, ‘multiculturalism’ (Martiniello 1997) and ‘underclass’ in Continental Europe. It is unquestionable that these external elements of debate can potentially reinvigorate this field of research. However, these categories must be used carefully. Indeed, can we assert that the concept of ‘ethnicity’ refers to the same intellectual representation in a society that has always conceived of itself as an immigration country? This representation has been shaped for a long time by the powerful ideology of the ‘melting pot’. Countries with old and strong national and nationalist traditions have traditionally considered migrant populations as a temporary labour force. European researchers have often neglected this crucial question. Beyond that, sociological debates about ‘ethnicity’ in the US gave rise to the creation of competing schools of thought. Today, the advocates of the substantialist conception of ‘ethnicity’ seem to be mostly minorised because of the thorough criticism of their position in the early 1960s and, even more sharply, after the publication of the influential works of Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan (1972). Now, among European researchers manipulating the concept of ethnicity in migration and ethnic studies, some still adopt an ambiguous position concerning substantialism, which may bring the theoretical debate a few decades back.

Another example concerns ‘underclass’. The concept is highly contested in American academia, notably for having a strong moralistic content. By reintroducing it in French social sciences in the early 1990s, Didier Lapeyronnie imported the American controversy and, to a certain extent, the moralistic approach to the issue of social and economic exclusion in Europe. Importing a concept without referring to the context in which it was created or the controversies it has produced is problematic. We cannot assume a priori that underclass is a useful concept for Europe.

**European migration and ethnic studies**

The Europeanisation and the internationalisation of research through several networks and programmes, such as those in the European Union’s scientific research frameworks, can give a fresh new theoretical orientation to the discipline. It is indisputable that immense conceptual and methodological problems have yet to be solved (Lloyd
1995), and that there exist only very narrow margins for developing crucial scientific research activities such as data collection and standardisation on an international level. However, at present, there are wider opportunities being offered to European researchers, allowing them to meet on a more or less regular basis and to exchange ideas in collaborative research projects.

Cooperation needs to be structured. Research must, above all, focus on European issues. Relevant questions must be asked. For instance, how does one regulate supply- and demand-driven migration? What is the best way to integrate for immigrants who stay? How can institutional arrangements be adapted so that social cohesion does not vaporise? In an effort to answer such questions, the research network IMISCOE, which stands for International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion in Europe, implements a rigorously comparative multidisciplinary research programme with Europe as its central focus. This is a promising venture for designing truly transnational and transdisciplinary research projects in Europe, while also fostering cooperation with academics interested in the same issues worldwide.

To conclude, it seems indisputable that we need more profound reflection on the core features of European migration and ethnic studies. Such a reflection implies that students of migration and ethnic studies familiarise themselves with key texts in this field. For this volume, we collected a number of texts that we believe were crucial for the development of European research in our field. To first identify these texts, we consulted with several dozen key academics in migration and ethnic studies, asking them to ‘nominate’ Europe’s most classic publications. As could be predicted, we ended up with a very long list of titles and authors. Some names, however, were unanimously regarded as crucial in the development of European migration and ethnic studies.

We take sole responsibility for the next phase of the selection process during which we reduced the list to those comprising the chapters of this volume. We acknowledge that the selection process was, at the end of the day, arbitrary since other works could certainly have been chosen. Our selection, however, provides a compelling representation of European migration and ethnic studies. The chapters address the main issues dealt with over the years within different academic disciplines, different schools of thought and in a number of European countries. We chose to organise the chapters themati-
cally. Chapters 1 through 7 deal with the migration process and its related policies. Chapters 8 through 17 discuss modes of incorporation. Finally, chapters 18 through 25 bring together works dedicated to transversal conceptual issues. Although some formatting changes have been made, the substance of each chapter is a reproduction of the text as it appeared in its original publication. In each thematic section, the chapters appear in chronological order of their publication. We hope this organisation will help contextualise the works, giving readers a sense of when and how these specific topics and approaches in European migration and ethnic studies emerged.

Notes

2 See 2002’s special issue of the Journal of International Migration and Integration, 3 (3/4).
3 Free translation of: Par souci de résoudre vite des problèmes concrets, ils (les chercheurs) ne peuvent guère les poser que dans les termes où l’opinion publique les reconnaît. Il sera alors d’autant plus difficile de s’arracher à l’idéologie, pour essayer de fonder une démarche proprement scientifique... (Oriol 1981: 6).
5 Free translation of: La Sociologie a connu la même fascination que les peuples pour les Amériques et vint y chercher ses paradigmes tandis qu’ils y quêtaient fortune. (Oriol 1981: 24).

References


