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## Commentary

### **Considerations of Context in Response to ‘International Migrations: from economy to affinity’ by Hervé Le Bras**

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**Considerations of Context in Response to *International Migrations: from economy to affinity* by Hervé Le Bras**

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**Abstract**

*An outline of the key developments which provide a context for the presentation on International Migrations: from economy to affinity given by Hervé Le Bras.*

**Keywords:** immigration, assimilation, integration, diversity, division, global-local processes

I want to sketch here some of the key developments which provide a context for the keynote lecture delivered by Hervé Le Bras. I will focus on six themes/processes:

1. The transition from a predominantly industrial order across W. Europe to one based heavily around the production and consumption of services.
2. The growth of immigration from former colonial or neo-colonial dependencies between 1950 and 1990 and the development of internal migration within an expanding European Union since 2004.
3. Related issues concerning ‘integration’ (economic, political, cultural and social), social mobility, hybridity and super-diversity.
4. The related growth of global-local processes linked to the transnational flows of people, goods, information and images.
5. Ethnic and racial divisions in twenty-first century W. Europe.
6. The decline of remittances to migrants’ countries of origin.
7. The ageing of Europe and the implications for immigration.

### **1. Transition from a predominantly industrial order across W. Europe to one based heavily around the production and consumption of services**

By the First World War industrialisation was beginning to make a deep impact on W. European nation-states. Britain experienced the first ‘industrial revolution’ during the nineteenth century but Belgium quickly followed suit and during the early twentieth century Germany was beginning to overtake Britain industrially, particularly in the second wave of industrial production where chemical and electrical engineering was playing a decisive role. More globally, the USA had already supplanted Britain as the strongest industrial nation by 1914, while Japan was also emerging as an industrial force in the Pacific region.

Industrialisation continued apace in W. Europe between the two world wars and the rebuilding of the European economies after 1945 was again geared around industrial production and consumption. The main change between 1945 and 1989 was the ‘Cold War’ political division of Europe and the expansion of state socialism from the USSR across E. Europe but this was underpinned by an economic rivalry where opposing political regimes sought to foster industrial modes of production. Although the emerging European Common Market paid close attention to farming interests through the Common Agricultural Policy, the German and Italian ‘economic miracles’ of the 1950s and 1960s depended heavily on industrial development with W. Germany relying heavily on the export of industrial goods.

At the same time the service sector was beginning to make rapid strides with the growth of professional occupations, finance and banking, state-subsidised health and welfare systems, for example. Greater affluence and the expansion of leisure time for middle and working class families encouraged the rapid development of the travel and tourism industry from the 1960s onwards, aided by technological innovations such as the jet plane and the increase in car ownership.

## **2. Growth of immigration from former colonial or neo-colonial dependencies between 1950 and 1990 and the development of internal migration within an expanding European Union since 2004**

At the same time certain sectors of the economy, especially those involving low skilled and low paid jobs, were experiencing labour shortages. Although internal migration helped to ease this problem, especially from the agricultural sector, the recruitment of immigrant labour was also encouraged. A substantial migration to Britain and France from their (ex)colonies began during the 1950s while Germany recruited ‘guest workers’ from Yugoslavia and Turkey. These migrations led to permanent settlements where several generations now contribute to the multicultural diversity of the cities and towns where the first generation was primarily engaged in industrial production and the provision of ethnic services.

The collapse of the ‘Iron Curtain’ in 1989 encouraged a shift in migration patterns as people began to move from former socialist countries in central, eastern and south-eastern Europe to W. European nations, particularly Germany. The expansion of the European Union in 2004 encouraged this movement further and ‘internal migration’ has now replaced immigration from outside the EU as the major source of labour migration. Many of these migrants are again employed in low wage jobs across the urban industrial and service sectors but also in seasonal work on farms.

## **3. Related issues concerning ‘integration’ (economic, political, cultural and social), social mobility, hybridity and super-diversity**

These two different waves of migration – the 1950s and 1960s wave and the second wave after 1989 – have been caught up in a key political debate concerning the relationship between multicultural diversity and ‘integration’. This debate has been shaped by the development of European nation-states since the nineteenth century and the social and cultural allegiances to the nation, which were deeply influenced by the growth of the urban industrial society. Immigrants before the 1950s were under severe pressure to integrate through assimilation with the dominant cultural majorities created typically through standard national languages. Upward social mobility involved a process of

*embourgeoisement* where members of minorities in urban working class neighbourhoods moved into middle class areas and conformed as closely as they could to middle class lifestyles in those areas.

Since the 1950s this model of assimilation through upward mobility has been accompanied by: (i) a parallel process of ethnic mixing, hybridity and cultural pluralism of increasing complexity (super-diversity) intimately bound up with the migration flows outlined above; and (ii) the collapse of traditional urban, industrial working class communities and the expansion of ‘post-industrial’, more individualistic lifestyles.

#### **4. Growth of global-local processes linked to the transnational flows of people, goods, information and images**

The growth of the ‘post-industrial’ service sector has been encouraged by globalisation and the increasing flows of people, goods, information and images across national borders. New forms of inequality have been generated with the emergence of cosmopolitan elites employed by transnational corporations and those at the lower levels of society where globalisation and de-industrialisation has fragmented local communities. These new forms of inequality are most dramatically evident in heavily globalised cities across W. Europe such as London, Paris, Amsterdam, Frankfurt and Milan. Political and social tensions have not only broken out in these increasingly ‘post-industrial’ cities but also in decaying, de-industrialised urban areas in Europe’s former industrial heartlands or the deprived suburbs outside the prosperous metropolitan centres.

#### **5. Ethnic and racial divisions in twenty-first century W. Europe**

These complex processes provide the context for the statistical data deployed by Le Bras. In terms of social mobility the most extensive data available refers to the 1950s and 1960s first wave of migrants from former colonies, Turkey and Yugoslavia. In Britain at least, what we see is a large urban working class but also upward mobility through the growth of middle class families from the second and third generation. The global flow of information and images as well as transnational social networks has enabled these upwardly mobile families to maintain their distinctive ethnic and racial identities – to integrate without being

obliged to assimilate. These identities can be both local and global or ‘glocal’ and be expressed through ‘new ethnicities’ characterised by a high degree of cultural mixture (hybridity). Middle class families are moving into the ‘leafy, white suburbs’ and are leaving behind their more populous, poorer co-ethnics, who sometimes are the focus of political and media discourses concerning social ‘problems’ and a lack of ‘integration’, in particular.

## **6. Decline of remittances to migrants’ countries of origin**

While these general developments provide a context for the data deployed by Le Bras, his table on declining remittances illustrates more specifically the ways in which migrants are engaging with W. European societies. Despite sending money back to their countries of origin through transnational networks and global means of communication, the second and third generation are investing much more in the countries where they have settled. This investment involves expenditure on housing, education, transport, household goods and leisure, for example. Although many migrants and their offspring spend some of their leisure time visiting relatives in their countries of origin, they may combine it with tourist trips. Moreover, some middle class families are also limiting the number of times they make these visits and prefer to spend their holidays in Europe or other tourist destinations.

## **7. Ageing of Europe and the implications for immigration**

Le Bras’ data also reminds us about the inexorable increase in the proportion of those over sixty-five. The ‘greying of Europe’ has become a hot topic and raises the issue of how health and welfare systems will cope with this process. This issue is linked to immigration since the younger populations beyond Europe’s borders are an obvious source of potential recruitment. However, widespread opposition to immigration is a major obstacle to adopting policies based solely on supply and demand.