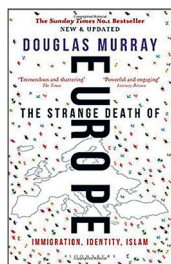


The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam Douglas Murray

Bloomsbury, 2018, PB, 384pp, £8.99,
978-1472958006



A BOOK FOR LIBERALS TO READ

Douglas Murray is a neoconservative journalist who writes for *The Spectator*. He used to run a think tank, the Centre for Social Cohesion,¹ which was later subsumed into another think tank, the Henry Jackson Society. Among other activities, these think tanks feed news stories to tabloid and broadsheet press, contributing to the almost daily anti-immigration headlines that we have had for the last 20 years. He has now written a book about immigration into Europe that has been a bestseller and has been well reviewed by such luminaries as Rabbi Dr Jonathan Sacks.²

Murray argues that a post-Christian Europe has lost its identity. The current liberal consensus depends on talk about rights, yet rights, he argues, cannot exist unless they are guaranteed by a God who recognises the sacredness of individual life. On its own, a rights-based ethic will simply fail; it needs a theological or philosophical underpinning. Dr Sacks agrees with this diagnosis, as does Dutch psychiatrist Dr Bert Nanninga.³ But the remedy they (and I) would propose, a return to belief in God, does not appeal to Murray. Murray's fear is that Europe will turn to Islam; this seems an unlikely proposition in the UK where Muslims currently form 4.8% of the population.⁴ The rest of the book, a criticism of what he sees as an excessively lax immigration policy in Europe, laced with stories from the work of his think tanks, is not designed to appeal to someone like myself. I am the child of a Polish-Jewish refugee, I was not born in the UK, I am a Catholic, and I worked with asylum seekers for many years.

He fails to start the book by explaining the crucial distinction between refugees (14 166

granted asylum in 2017),⁵ economic migrants (net migration of 248 000 in 2016),⁶ and migrants with 'irregular papers' (perhaps half a million in the UK). Readers interested in the problems of migration would be better to seek a standard textbook such as Collier⁷ than this highly partisan book. On the economic costs and benefits of migration he misrepresents a standard paper.⁸ During the period covered by the paper (1995–2011), established UK migrant populations made a net call on the exchequer, but this was a period of budget deficit and their net call was similar to the UK-born population. In the same period, more recent economic migrants from the EU made a positive economic contribution. On health tourism he is simply wrong: the best estimate of the cost is 0.3% of the NHS budget.⁹

His argument against easy migration is often conducted against a position almost nobody holds: the idea that there should be no borders. I certainly accept, as do almost all Britons, that nation states have the right to control migration. He is a great quoter of statistics to show that many Europeans are against migration and therefore governments should reduce migration; a very reasonable point. However, as he is well aware, governments find reducing migration much more difficult than it sounds. Two statistics he does not quote come from the annual Ipsos MORI survey of British (as opposed to European) attitudes to migration;¹⁰ they show that over the past decades Britons have come to have a more positive attitude to migration. Many GPs working in the NHS, knowing the great contributions of migrants, celebrated by the recent RCGP exhibition, 'Migrants Who Made the NHS',¹¹ will share this positive attitude.

Among his many concerns about Islam, Murray is particularly eloquent about the problem that it poses to the gay community and gay individuals; for Islam, homosexuality is immoral and many Muslims think it should be illegal.¹² This presents a real difficulty in our liberal society and one that has not been addressed. Nowhere, however, does he mention the cloud of suspicion and stigma under which Muslims in the UK have laboured since 9/11.

Who should read this book? Probably not those likely to already agree with its contents; they may find little new. For those who are going to disagree with it, those with little sympathy for Tommy Robinson, the EDL,

Pegida, or the AfD, it is worth reading to find out how others are thinking. For these others are, just like us, in turns compassionate, in turns hard-hearted, and as confused and contradictory as we are.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3399/bjgp18X700061>

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