The Limits of the Liberal State: Migration, Identity and Belonging in Europe

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What are the contemporary ‘limits of the liberal state’ with respect to immigration, citizenship and the rights of ethnic and religious minorities in contemporary Europe? The papers in this special issue of the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies examine how recent developments in Europe raise new questions regarding the relationship between liberalism, migration, identity and belonging. In this introduction, we identify three major themes that run through the papers in the issue—the use of liberal norms by states for exclusionary purposes; the possibility of the emergence of ‘illiberal liberalism’; and the extent to which identity politics and policy-making may be increasingly transcending and transforming the limits of the liberal democratic state in Europe. After briefly presenting these three themes, we summarise the arguments of the individual authors and suggest possible directions for future research.

Keywords: Liberalism; Migration; Citizenship; Boundaries; Integration; Europe

Contemporary developments in Europe raise complex and challenging questions regarding the ‘limits of the liberal state’ with respect to immigration, citizenship and the rights of ethnic and religious minorities. Whereas it has regularly been assumed that liberal norms and identities foster greater inclusion, openness and pluralism with respect to migration policies and minority rights, a number of events suggest the
need to re-evaluate such assumptions. What are we to make, for example, of the
decision of French authorities to deny a Moroccan woman’s naturalisation
application because she wore the *niqab*?¹ In its ruling upholding immigration and
social service officials’ initial 2005 decision, the *Conseil d’État* stated that the
applicant’s decision to wear the *niqab* constituted ‘a radical practice of her religion
(and) behaviour in society incompatible with the essential values of the French
community, notably the principle of equality between the sexes’ (Crumley 2008). The
proliferation of similar bans on religious attire in public spaces, restrictions on
speech, mandatory integration courses, citizenship tests and controls on the
admission of spouses through amendments to family reunification policies—all
defended on the grounds that they further liberal ends—suggest the need for a closer
interrogation of the relationship between liberalism, migration, identity and
belonging in contemporary Europe.

The papers brought together in this special issue of *JEMS* take up this central task
of exploring and untangling the boundaries of identity and belonging in the liberal
state in Europe. The authors in this issue employ a mix of empirical, normative and
legal analyses to make sense of the changing landscape of migration and integration
policy. In so doing, they contribute to an emerging area of debate and research on
changing migration and incorporation policies in European states (Guild *et al.* 2009;
Joppke 2007a; Schmidtke and Özürümé 2008). Collectively, the papers raise a
number of challenging questions for further exploration. When, for example, does
the deployment of ‘liberal norms’ become an illiberal practice? What are (and should
be) the symbolic boundaries of identity, belonging, membership and community in
liberal democratic states? Has liberalism replaced nationalism as the ideology of
belonging in Europe, and how do and *should* states respond to ideas, practices or
politics that can be interpreted as ‘illiberal’? Moreover, does it indeed make sense to
even discuss such issues with reference to individual states—or do the boundaries
and limits of contemporary identity politics, as well as state policy-making, now both
transcend, quite literally, the physical and policy-making limits of the liberal state?

As a prelude to the analyses in the individual papers that follow, we briefly discuss
here some of these key themes, situating them in broader scholarly debates. We focus
on discussions regarding the ‘exclusionary’ nature of liberal norms, the question of
when liberalism becomes illiberal and the changing nature of boundaries in liberal
states. We then turn to a short summary of the individual papers before making a few
concluding remarks.

**Liberal Norms as Exclusionary?**

The migration studies literature has traditionally conceptualised liberal norms as key
factors in producing open migration policies, fostering integration and securing
migrants’ rights (i.e. Freeman 1995a; Hollifield 1992; Soysal 1994). Yet states in
Europe increasingly appear to also be deploying liberal norms as boundary-markers
that delimit and demarcate the symbolic borders of the state. Liberal norms, it seems,
may in some cases be replacing or supplementing other boundary-markers, such as ethnic or civic nationalism, in shaping migration and integration policies in European states.\textsuperscript{2}

In many respects, this trend stands in marked contrast to assumptions regarding policy-making in the post-WWII period. The literature on postwar immigration and citizenship politics has emphasised the opening up of liberal states to previously excluded groups, through the renunciation and replacement of racially discriminatory admissions policies (Joppke 2005a; King 2000; Tavan 2005; Triadafilopoulos 2010); the expansion of foreigners’ rights to family reunification (Hansen 2009; Soysal 1994); and the relaxing of rules governing residency, the provision of civil and social rights and the acquisition of citizenship (Carens 2002; Hammar 1990; Hansen and Koehler 2006; Hansen and Weil 2001; Jacobson 1996; Jacobson and Ruffer 2003; Joppke 1999; Howard 2009; Soysal 1994; Weil 2001). That states are using liberal norms in an exclusionary fashion thus presents a challenge to much of the literature on immigration and citizenship politics and policy-making.

How are we to understand these developments? Some might argue that they simply represent a shift in the ‘immigration cycle’ (Brubaker 1995; Freeman 1995a, 1995b) or, alternatively, that they are primarily a reaction to a specific set of real or imagined security threats (Hampshire 2009; Tsoukala 2005). Such policies could also be viewed as an extension of the increasingly hostile approaches taken by liberal states to asylum-seekers and undocumented migrants in the 1980s and 1990s. These policies have often been explained by reference to the influence of extreme-right-wing parties—political actors whose adherence to liberal principles, however, is questionable (Angenendt 2003; Betz 2003; Givens 2005; Messina 2007; Minkenberg 2001, 2002; Zaslove 2008).

The deployment of liberal norms in an exclusionary fashion could represent a populist turn in European migration and integration policy—in effect a ‘democratising’ of policy-making in this area in ways which reflect popular sentiment rather than entrenched interest groups, thus shifting what is considered to be legitimate public discourse on migration (Brubaker 1995; Freeman 1995a; Guiraudon and Joppke 2001). Arguably such developments could also be interpreted as symbolic of a deeper transformation of state identity and community boundaries away from nationalism and towards the notion of ‘civilizational’ identities of which liberalism then becomes a key tenet (Huntington 1996).

**Illicit Liberalism?**

Not surprisingly, the challenge of understanding these developments has prompted a lively debate. While some see the deployment of liberal norms—such as gender equality—as a ploy for pursuing and extending long-standing exclusionary programmes based on deeply entrenched racist mindsets (Fekete 2006; Razack 2008), others note that their support among ‘progressive’ actors is novel and therefore worthy of more sustained analysis and explanation. Bans on religious attire
in public spaces can be squarely situated in a republican or secular liberal tradition (Barry 2001; Bowen 2008; Laborde 2002). The deployment of liberal norms can be viewed as a fundamentally progressive development, designed ultimately to protect and safeguard basic liberal values of liberty, equality and tolerance in European societies. Or, alternatively, such developments can be viewed as symptomatic of the rise of a new form of ‘illiberal liberalism’ that draws boundaries against its ‘illiberal others’ in a fashion that fundamentally undermines core principles of pluralism and tolerance (Kostakopoulou 2010; Tebble 2006; Young 2002: 42–5).

This debate is not wholly new, of course. Critics of liberalism have always pointed to its inherent contradictions, and the intimate relationship between the historical development of liberal thought in Europe with empire, colonial domination and racial hierarchies (McCarthy 2009; Mehta 1990, 1999). In a series of important books and articles, Christian Joppke (2005b, 2007a, 2007b, 2009, 2010) has amended his views on the intrinsic openness of the liberal state in diagnosing the causes of what he has variously termed ‘regressive liberalism’ and ‘civic integrationism’. According to Joppke (2007a: 268), recent trends warrant a Foucauldian reading of liberalism which emphasises its power and disciplining aspects. This reading forces one to engage with a deeply rooted repressive strain in liberal thinking. Joppke cites John Stuart Mill’s 1859/1974) approval of the use of illiberal means to achieve liberal goals as evidence of how this strain can be seen as stemming from liberal theory itself. In a similar vein, Adam Tebble (2006) argues that the use of exclusionary immigration and integration policies reflects a distinctive mode of liberal nationalism—‘identity liberalism’—which rejects multiculturalism’s emphasis on compromise and accommodation in favour of a more definitive assertion and defence of distinctively liberal ways of life.

Both Joppke and Tebble note that new modes of liberal exclusion are indicative of shifts in liberal theory and practice and not simply manifestations of racism, although their effects often are—and are intended to be—exclusionary. As such, they echo and build on Veronika Stolcke’s (1999) claim regarding the distinctiveness of contemporary exclusionary rhetoric and practice (see also Gilroy 2000). What Stolcke referred to as ‘cultural fundamentalism’ has arguably been shaped into a distinctively liberal fundamentalism that does not target foreigners per se, but rather particular subsets of immigrants or minorities whose religious/cultural practices or political demands are deemed incompatible with liberal ways of life. This targeting is reflected, for example, in the deployment of integration and citizenship tests, perhaps the most notorious of which was the German state of Baden-Württemberg’s ‘interview guide’ (Gesprächsleitfaden) for ascertaining the values of citizenship applicants from Muslim countries (Joppke 2010; Prantl 2006). According to Joppke (2010), policies along these lines seek to particularise universalism by demanding that membership in the liberal state be reserved exclusively for liberal people. Making good on this demand compels the liberal state to regulate the motivations and internal dispositions of so-called ‘suspect groups’. It is precisely when liberal states move from regulating individuals’ outward conduct to enquiring into and authoritatively prescribing
internal dispositions that liberalism becomes ‘regressive’ and ‘illiberal’. Joppke (2009) maintains that European states’ distinctive forms of liberalism explain variation in the degree and intensity of ‘illiberal liberalism’ in Europe. In so doing, he appears to contradict his earlier (2007b) claim that the trend toward ‘civic integrationism’ had made any talk of ‘national models’ of immigrant integration redundant. These tensions in Joppke’s work suggest that there is still much to be done in making sense of contemporary shifts in liberalism as it relates to issues of immigration and integration policy in Europe.

The Boundaries of the Liberal State

Examining the ‘limits of the liberal state’ encourages us to pay closer attention to the role that boundaries play in defining contemporary liberal democratic states. Such boundaries can be symbolic and discursive, but may also call into question the relationships that exist between the territorial, identity, governance and policy-making dimensions of the European state. It is instructive that European states are rethinking their criteria for naturalisation and incorporation of migrants at the same time as they are facing what could be termed a ‘boundary crisis’ that is both symbolic and literal.

Immigration and incorporation processes always raise the issue of group boundaries of identity and belonging (Alba 2005; Korteweg and Yurdakul 2009; Lamont and Molnar 2002). The state has historically used immigration policy as a tool in fostering a particular national identity (Triadafilopoulos 2010; Zolberg 2006), balancing its pursuit of economic and strategic interests against concerns of national integration and social cohesion (Adamson 2006; Chin 2009). Zolberg and Long (1999: 8–9) note that boundary-crossing, boundary-blurring and boundary-shifting all represent possible patterns of identity negotiation in migration contexts, in which the redeployment of liberal norms as boundary-markers rather than principles of inclusion could be viewed as a form of boundary-shifting that is occurring in European states—with the blurring of racial, ethnic and religious boundaries through such developments as anti-discrimination legislation (Joppke 2007a)—accompanied by the simultaneous emergence of a bright boundary of membership based on liberal criteria.

The challenges of setting the symbolic and discursive boundaries of belonging in Europe are compounded by additional ‘boundary challenges’ that are increasingly relevant for understanding the limits of the liberal state. The greater openness of these liberal states has allowed for the emergence and thickening of ‘transnational fields’ and ‘social spaces’, which temper the importance of territoriosity both in scholarly analyses of migration and in migrants’ lived experiences (Basch et al. 1993; Bloemraad et al. 2008; Faist 2000). Meaningful transnational identities—whether national, religious or ideational—may include political identifications that transcend the physical boundaries of the state (Adamson and Demetriou 2007). How might liberal states react to actions on the part of their residents—citizens and non-citizens
that signal allegiance, political or spiritual, to extra-territorial authorities and/or communities? In some contexts, the boundary negotiations occurring within particular national contexts may also mirror broader negotiations and contestations that occur within a geopolitical context. In this sense, they are not merely national negotiations, but are tied into larger global circuits of power and identity. Within the UK, for example, identity claims and political demands made by Muslims are often articulated using language that evokes a broader geopolitical context of British foreign policy and US hegemony. The liberal state may be viewed not simply as a domestic arena for identity negotiation, but as a component of a broader geopolitical structure of liberal hegemony (Adamson 2005). Similarly, Muslim political demands articulated within a domestic context may also reference debates and discourses that emerge within the broader context of a transnational Muslim public sphere.

The challenge faced by liberal democratic states is therefore how to reconcile liberal principles and identities that transcend the state (Soysal 1994) with competing principles or sources of authority which also transcend it. An example of this type of conflict would be the liberal principle of equality under the law, with demands for the recognition of a plurality of legal frameworks within the liberal state. Such questions have, of course, been the staple of long-standing debates on multiculturalism and communitarianism. Jonathan Laurence’s (2006) work on the incorporation of Islam in contemporary European liberal democracies suggests that concerns regarding religious transnationalism among Muslims (encouraged in part by European receiving states’ tendency to leave the spiritual needs of immigrants to sending countries and/or Muslim states claiming authority in religious matters) is leading European states to forge formal consultative links to domestic groups representing Muslims. Here transnationalism has provoked noteworthy and consequential boundary shifts featuring the adaptation of existing corporatist institutions regulating church–state relations to better capture the realities of societies transformed by postwar immigration. In a similar vein, Matthias Koenig (2007) has demonstrated that global human-rights norms have pushed European states to extend religious rights previously reserved for Christians and Jews to Muslim immigrants. Here an unbounded, broadly encompassing ‘logic of appropriateness’ has provoked shifts in domestic institutions and practices in a more-or-less inclusionary trajectory. These examples of integrative boundary shifting stand in stark contrast to the more exclusionary tendencies pointed out in discussions of illiberal liberalism, suggesting that approaches to integration may be informed by quite distinctive logics, ranging from corporatist/problem-solving to partisan/political.

These various challenges point to the tenuous nature of the identity boundaries of the liberal state in an age in which territorial nationalism is increasingly being challenged (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002, 2003). The importance of territory is being called into question, for example, in the emergence of ‘external integration measures’ in which some European states are administering integration tests abroad (Guild et al. 2009: 9–14). This can be viewed as an extension of the ‘remote control’
border policies of the 1990s (Guiraudon and Lahav 2000; see also Torpey 2000; Zolberg 1997). At the same time, questions relating to the boundaries of membership, identity and belonging are being raised in a period marked by shifting boundaries of policy-making and governance, as regional institutions are increasingly involved in shaping migration and incorporation policy at the state level. With the transfer of immigration policy competence to the EU in 1999, the issuing of the EU Race Directive in 2000, and the emergence of the EU framework on integration that produced a set of ‘Common Basic Principles for Immigrants’ Integration’ in 2004, aspects of policy-making in liberal democratic states in Europe are now increasingly being delegated, at least in part, to Brussels (Guild et al. 2009; Joppke 2007a; Thielemann 2008).

Summary of Articles

The papers in this special issue of JEMS employ a mix of analytical, normative and legal reasoning to contribute to these emerging debates and areas of research. In developing their arguments, the contributors draw on a wide range of perspectives and literatures, including comparative politics, sociology, political theory, international relations and EU law. The papers collectively explore the contemporary policy challenges and contexts with which liberal states are grappling; examining what liberal states are doing empirically in terms of policy and, in some cases, what they ought to do if they are to live up to their status as liberal states and achieve their policy objectives. Hence, the articles in this issue contribute both to recent empirical work on migration and integration politics and more-philosophically oriented works on multiculturalism and the so-called ‘limits of toleration’ in contemporary liberal-democratic states.

Not surprisingly, given the variety of disciplinary and philosophical perspectives the authors bring to their work, the range of diagnoses and prescriptions vary—at times quite widely—making for a lively exchange of ideas and interpretations. Here we briefly summarise the main arguments of the authors in this issue before concluding with some thoughts as to how research on the limits of the liberal state in the spheres of immigration, integration and ethnic and minority rights in Europe might move forward.

Triadafilos Triadafilopoulos argues in the next article that the turn to a more aggressive ‘civic integrationism’ among European states is based on a complex confluence of factors, including the breakdown of the postwar economic order and consequent hollowing out of welfare states, the dissolution of party systems and the rise of ‘new’ parties of the Left and Right, the end of the Cold War, the deepening and expansion of European integration and the emergence of the so-called ‘war on terror’, which has emphasised civilisational distinctions based in part on religious differences. Triadafilopoulos argues that these factors form a backdrop for the emergence of a distinctively ‘Schmittian liberalism’, which rejects multicultural accommodation and compromise and seeks instead to protect liberal publics from migrant groups whose
unfamiliarity with liberal values and putatively illiberal practices calls for either their full assimilation into liberal ways of life (through integration courses and bans on religious attire and practices) or outright exclusion, either at the border (through more stringent admissions policies, especially as regards family reunification) or into the citizenry (through rigorous naturalisation tests). Triadafilopoulos notes that, while some manifestations of Schmittian liberalism may be consistent with certain strands of the liberal tradition—indeed, they are a logical outcome of perfectionist approaches taken to their extremes—they are not likely to be helpful in terms of furthering integration and social cohesion. As Triadafilopoulos concludes, Schmittian liberals ‘risk alienating the very groups they seek to integrate—turning potential friends into enemies’. Thus, he calls for integration policies that are ‘consistent with liberal-democratic values but also respectful of deeply held differences and open to dialogue and mutual accommodation’.

Randall Hansen next offers a competing perspective in his contribution to the debate. Drawing on survey data on Muslims in Britain and France, he argues that European states must reconsider the particular form of liberalism they embrace, if they are to harness immigration in a manner consistent with their interests. With regards to the economy, Hansen notes that overly generous Continental European welfare states have tended to integrate immigrants into welfare rather than work, leading to ‘unemployment rates among immigrants [that] are at best double the national average and, at worst, over three times it’. He therefore counsels a laissez faire direction, as represented first and foremost by the United States, so that immigrants are given greater incentives to enter the labour market. According to Hansen, ‘[t]he solution for Europe...is a bit of tough love: reduce or remove welfare benefits for migrants, and make it clear to them that they are welcome, but that their welcome is contingent upon their willingness to enter the labour market’.

With regard to identity, Hansen rejects liberal multiculturalism, arguing that it weakens bonds of commonality among immigrants and members of the host society. He recommends instead that European states adopt more assertive, self-confident expressions of national identity modelled after the French republican tradition, as doing so will provide immigrants with a clearer sense of what the society they are joining holds up as its core values. While the freedom of religion remains deeply embedded in liberal states’ practices, it should be limited to the private sphere and granted to individuals rather than groups—with special exemptions and accommodations granted only in rare circumstances. The broader public sphere should be governed by civic mores and clear expectations, reinforced by state power where necessary.

Fiona Adamson’s article also examines the relationship between Muslims and the liberal state in Europe. She examines the growing use of ‘Muslim’ as a category by both Muslims and state authorities in Europe. Placing contemporary domestic debates surrounding Islam in Europe in a broader geopolitical context, Adamson argues that the emergence of ‘Muslim identity politics’ in European states cannot be understood only as a domestic-level development internal to states, but must also be
seen as deeply connected with geopolitics and with broader debates and discourses that are occurring in globalised Muslim public spheres that extend beyond the state.

Focusing on the variety of Muslim political organisations operating in the UK, Adamson points out that the deployment of the political identity category of ‘Muslim’ vis-à-vis the liberal state can be used by different actors for different purposes. On the one hand, there are groups such as the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) that can be viewed largely as a standard interest-group—an umbrella organisation that presents itself as primarily interested in collective claims-making, lobbying and interest representation on behalf of British Muslims seeking to secure their rights to exercise religious freedom. On the other hand, a group such as Hizb ut-Tahrir uses the category of ‘Muslim’ as a means of asserting a political identity that stands in opposition to the liberal state. This group has explicitly juxtaposed a ‘Muslim’ identity with a ‘British’ or ‘Western’ variant and has, at times, publicly encouraged British Muslims to reject liberalism, disengage from institutionalised participation in British politics, and instead identify themselves primarily with a broader global ummah in the form of working for the re-establishment of a global caliphate. While a group such as Hizb ut-Tahrir represents a minority perspective, it nonetheless provides an explicit example of a form of ‘illiberal politics’ which liberal states must then respond to—with some liberal states banning such a group (as Germany did in 2003) and others accepting it as one amongst a multitude of competing voices that are expressed as part of free debate in a liberal state’s civil society.

Erik Bleich’s article examines this dilemma in greater detail by exploring the limits of free speech in liberal states. Tracing liberal states’ approaches to the regulation of hate speech and hate crimes since World War II, Bleich argues that liberal states are capable of enacting and enforcing laws that limit the ‘freedom to be racist’ while maintaining liberal principles of freedom of opinion and freedom of expression. The ‘slow creep’ that has typified policy development in this area reflects states’ efforts to balance respect for freedom of speech with ‘[v]alues such as community cohesion, public order [and] human dignity’. This ‘value shift’ is a distinctively post-WWII phenomenon, rooted in liberal states’ reactions to the horrors of Nazism, the emergence of human rights norms, and the discrediting of racism. Bleich notes that liberal states’ particular approaches to the regulation of racist speech and conduct differ; while most European states have implemented ‘laws against forms of racist speech such as incitement to racial hatred and Holocaust denial’, the US has bucked this trend by ‘elevating the value of free speech over protections against racist language’. However, as Bleich goes on to note, the US has also introduced laws that penalise racially motivated crimes, such as assault and battery, ‘despite their potential to infringe on freedom of opinion and expression’. This distinctive feature of the American approach has been picked up by some European countries and especially by Great Britain, where policy-makers explicitly drew on legislation introduced in the US.
While Bleich sees the regulation of racist speech and conduct as broadly in line with liberal norms, he fears that recent trends push the limits of this compatibility. As an example, he notes that the ‘British government has used the “war on terror” to justify expanding its laws to cover incitement to religious hatred [while] also enact[ing] provisions to punish the glorification of terrorism, which could prohibit statements made against racial, ethnic or religious groups that have been the targets of attacks’. The elevation of national cohesion and public order through these laws may lead to further curbs on speech. In another case, France’s efforts to outlaw denials of the Armenian genocide may open the door to claimants who want to establish their victimhood as legally unassailable. According to Bleich, the key to avoiding such slippery slopes lies in proceeding cautiously, cognisant of the particulars of the case at hand, the difference between ‘racist expression that incites violence and stirs up extreme hatred’ and ‘speech that is merely offensive, even if hurtfully so’.

Gallya Ruffer’s article focuses on recent debates over family reunification policy, at both the EU and member-state levels. Ruffer notes that the rationale animating family reunification policies has changed; whereas ‘family reunification was thought of as a socially just and practical solution that would enable the integration of long-term labour migrants’ in the past, more recently it has been used to shape ‘cultural integration’ by limiting access to particular groups of immigrants, particularly Muslims. States such as Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria and Britain have introduced provisions ostensibly aimed at preventing forced and fraudulent marriages and enhancing the ‘assimilability’ of immigrants through integration tests and courses to be taken outside the destination country in advance of admission. Ruffer maintains that such policies are best thought of as means undertaken by states to weed out undesirable migrants and thus reassert control over nation-building. This leads to perverse situations where immigrants who hold citizenship in an EU member-state enjoy rights to family reunification and mobility that are withheld from Third Country Nationals (TCNs). Efforts aimed at improving and streamlining the treatment of TCNs at the EU level have been tempered by member-states’ insistence on maintaining their sovereign right to guide societal integration through immigration controls.

Ruffer also notes that European courts’ adjudication of the rights of immigrants versus states has been uneven, owing in part to differences in their conceptualisations of the ‘right to family life’. Though subtle, these differences have allowed policy-makers at the member-state level to justify restrictions on family reunification that would otherwise be unconstitutional under domestic law. The end result is a situation where children and spouses face new barriers to their ability to join family members in European countries. Ruffer maintains that such positions hark back to an antiquated conceptualisation of membership, unsuited to an increasingly mobile world. As such, she argues in favour of a very different approach to family reunification, premised on the recognition that ‘under conditions of migration, cultures will remain in flux’.
James Hampshire’s article focuses on debates over naturalisation courses and tests, asking whether demands for evidence of immigrants’ societal integration on the part of the state as a precondition for their being granted citizenship are warranted. Hampshire distinguishes liberal arguments in favour of quick access to citizenship after a short period of residency to nationalist positions which hold that naturalisation can only move forward where immigrants demonstrate assimilation into a national culture. Hampshire notes that the nationalist position is problematic on both philosophical and empirical grounds. With regard to norms, liberal states’ commitment to neutrality makes the imposition of a particular view of the good life illegitimate: ‘[a] requirement that naturalising citizens assimilate to a thick national culture amounts to the imposition of a particular conception of the good and is to that extent illiberal’. This commitment to neutrality is also based on the recognition that life in contemporary liberal states is shaped by the ‘fact of pluralism’; thus the onus is on nationalists to identify a particular national culture which naturalising citizens could be expected to assimilate into. While there may indeed be a ‘majority culture’, there will also be important areas of disagreement on what the national culture is and what the principal goals of the nation should be. In short, ‘in pluralist societies there simply is no consensus about national identity’.

Yet, the discrediting of the nationalist argument does not vindicate a minimalist liberal position. Hampshire maintains that democratic politics depends on citizens sharing some core competencies or ‘civic skills’, including the ability to understand and interact with each other in a common language. Moreover, ‘flourishing liberal societies are founded upon liberal citizens who are reflective and self-critical, and who accept and endorse the public values of a pluralistic and tolerant public culture’. These insights lead Hampshire to endorse a thickening of the liberal position on naturalisation: while assimilation into a common culture is ruled out, demands that immigrants demonstrate some knowledge of the host states’ official language(s) and the ‘generic liberal values that govern public life’ are justifiable on liberal grounds. While immigrants should be expected to take advantage of opportunities to engage in language and civics training provided by the state, tests should not determine whether citizenship is conferred. In other words, a normatively defensible liberalism accepts compulsory attendance in integration courses but looks suspiciously at tests which can be used to deny access to citizenship.

**Conclusion**

We trust that the contributions to this special issue of *JEMS* will provoke further debate and research on the ‘limits of the liberal state’ in Europe. In particular, we hope the collection demonstrates the fruitfulness of interdisciplinary engagement. By combining insights from both empirical and theoretically oriented literatures, and by taking perspectives that focus on national policy-making as well as the regional and transnational context within which liberal states are embedded, we present a complex and nuanced view of the multiple ways in which boundaries of membership,
belonging and identity are being renegotiated in Europe with respect to migration, citizenship and ethnic and minority rights.

As a research agenda, much work needs still to be done to understand the limits of the liberal state in Europe. States—liberal or otherwise—‘do not function as autonomous actors…but rather as instruments manipulated by internal actors who have gained the upper hand in this particular sphere at a given time’ (Zolberg 2006: 12); hence, we need to pay closer attention to the influence of parties, the media, opinion-makers and social movements. Recent work by Marc Howard (2009) and Erik Bleich (2009) offers stimulating insights into how distinctively political processes, featuring discreet actors and institutions, may be analysed to better understand liberal-democratic states’ responses to immigration- and membership-related challenges.

Secondly, more work needs to be undertaken to explain the variation in particular states’ approaches to the regulation of practices, speech and other embodied forms of cultural difference. Here scholars in the field of migration studies could benefit from paying closer attention to the contributions of students of social policy, who emphasise the mediating role of formal and informal institutions (for a good overview see Amenta 2003). Koenig’s (2005) research on varieties of church–state relations and their influence on liberal states’ approaches to the integration of religious minorities generally, and Muslims in particular, offers a good example of such an approach. More-ethnographically oriented work also points to the importance of local understandings in shaping outcomes.

Thirdly, there needs to be a greater level of dialogue between comparative or single-country scholars of migration and scholars of International Relations and transnationalism, whose work can help to illuminate broader global trends in, for example, the structure of global civil society, the role of regional and international organisations in norm promotion, and in shaping policy-making and policy outcomes, as well as drawing attention to the geopolitical context within which national-level debates and policy developments take place. As Peter Gourevitch (1978) pointed out long ago, domestic politics is embedded in global structures and processes. Identifying and theorising these linkages will go a long way toward better understanding trends in liberal states’ conduct over time in the fields of immigration, citizenship and integration policy.

Fourthly, and finally, there is the important issue—largely unaddressed in these papers—of liberalism’s lack of guidance with regard to the formulation of admission policies. Given the steadily growing demand from the developing world for entry to states in Europe, which is unlikely to abate in the foreseeable future, there must be some grounds for limiting admissions; and if admissions are going to be limited, there is a need for selection criteria among the demand. Should liberal states privilege the entry of temporary foreign workers in a bid to meet domestic needs while simultaneously creating an indirect mode of international development assistance driven by remittances, as recommended by economists such as Lant Pritchett (2008), or should liberal principles counsel that labour migration of any kind be downplayed...
in an effort to meet the needs of refugees and thus stem the misery of the world’s most vulnerable individuals and groups? While there have been some important responses to these questions (see, for example, Carens 1987, 2010; Ruhs and Martin 2008; Zolberg 2010), more sustained attention is sorely needed to both clarify liberal principles and guide liberal states’ policies and practices.

Ultimately, we believe that the papers in this special issue of JEMS should encourage scholars to take more care to combine insights generated by both empirically and normatively driven research programmes. With some all-too-rare exceptions, empirically and normatively oriented scholars have tended to ignore each others’ insights, preferring to operate on more familiar, specialist terrains. We believe this is a mistake and hope that the papers in this special issue demonstrate the benefits of combining empirically and more-normatively driven lines of inquiry. This will allow for well-grounded theories and observations that also provide direction to policy-makers grappling with the challenges of immigration and integration in contemporary liberal-democratic states.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the generous support of the Foundation for Population, Migration and the Environment (PME) in Switzerland for the sponsorship of the workshop ‘The Limits of the Liberal State: Migration, Identity and Belonging in Europe’ at University College London (UCL) in December 2006, from whence these papers are derived. Additional support was provided by the School of Public Policy (SPP) at UCL. We are particularly grateful to Sally Welham, who managed the logistics of the workshop. In addition to the authors included in this special issue, additional workshop participants and observers—including Michael Bodemann, Khadijah Elshayyal, Pontus Odmalm, Saime Özçürümez and Gökce Yurdukal, along with an anonymous JEMS reviewer—provided helpful comments that informed this introduction and the editing of the special collection. We would also like to thank the Council of European Studies (CES) for supporting our grant application to the PME Foundation in the context of the Council’s Immigration Research Group (IRG). Finally, our thanks extend to Jenny Money and Russell King at the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies for their facilitation of this special issue.

Notes


[3] ‘Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement and the means justified by actually effecting that end’ (Mill 1859).
References


