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Immigration and Conflict in Europe

Immigration and Conflict in Europe by Rafaela M. Dancygier

Review by: Sara Wallace Goodman

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Immigration and Conflict in Europe. By Rafaela M. Dancygier. (Cambridge University Press, 2010.)

One of most intractable, and seemingly inevitable, consequences of immigration to Europe is sporadic instances of violence in ethnically diverse communities. Policymakers usually explain such events as the result of either bald-faced, nativist xenophobia or economic depravity and integration failure on the part of the immigrant. Such broad brush strokes obfuscate the potential variation in causes of these clashes, as well as impede the development of workable solutions to ameliorate interethnic conflict.

Rafaela Dancygier's *Immigration and Conflict in Europe* not only provides new, in-depth answers for the causes of conflict, but questions the uniform understanding of immigrant-related conflict itself. In this erudite study, Dancygier distinguishes between immigrant-native conflict, which "involves the sustained confrontation between members of the immigrant and the native populations in a given locality" (21) and immigrant-state conflict, in which confrontation occurs between "immigrant communities and state actors" (23), namely the police. In characterizing different types of conflict, Dancygier's main interest lies in explaining "why, where, and when immigration leads to conflict in the areas of immigrant settlement" (3).

In the book's first section, Dancygier explains these outcomes as a result of the interaction of two variables: economic scarcity and immigrant political power. Conflict generally occurs under conditions of economic scarcity, "where there is a shortage of goods desired by both immigrants and natives," like housing, jobs, or other material goods (24–25). However, the mechanism by which scarcity yields immigrant-state versus immigration-native conflict lies in local immigrant political power: "Natives protest resource allocation to electorally pivotal immigrants, leading to immigrant-native conflict, while politically powerless immigrant minorities, who will not be able to induce local politicians to disburse scarce resources to them, will register their discontent with an unresponsive state, leading to immigrant-state conflict" (129). Though local-level variables account for the varied incidence of both types of conflict outcomes, Dancygier elaborates how differences in national

immigration regimes and political institutions underpin variation in local economic scarcity and immigrant electoral leverage. This memorable and parsimonious explanation engenders systematic predictions about the likelihood, nature, and level of immigrant-related conflict in democratic settings.

The second part turns to testing this theory by examining instances of immigrant-state and immigrant-native violence among West Caribbean and South Asian communities in Great Britain, using both qualitative and quantitative data. Through meticulous and innovative data collection—spanning interviews, surveys, and archives, Part Two shows that, despite similar postcolonial migratory experiences and local economic scarcity, West Caribbean immigrant communities who tend to lack local political power have yielded high instances of immigrant-state conflict, whereas South Asian communities with political leverage almost exclusively experience immigrant-native conflict. In Part Three, Dancygier convincingly traces the processes that connect immigrant political behavior and resource scarcity to conflict outcomes in two London boroughs (Tower Hamlets and Ealing) and two Midland cities (Birmingham and Leicester). The selection and examination of these cases are methodical and rigorous.

In the fourth and final section, Dancygier turns to the continent to consider what impact different immigration regimes have on conflict patterns. In Germany (Chapter 7), guest worker regimes alleviated economic scarcity, and thus immigrant conflict. Finally, Chapter 8 argues the identification of levels of immigrant political power and scarcity "help us understand and predict [immigrant conflict] in other countries and cities" across Europe (262). It includes a minicase study of France to illustrate how "the different ways in which ethnic minorities have penetrated the local electoral arena in a context of economic scarcity explains the variegated outcomes of conflict" (263).

Dancygier's brief conclusion highlights the study's key contribution: "resource scarcity—not ethnic difference—is the key driver of immigrant conflict" (292). This is an important observation that policy-makers should take to heart in light of the fashionable scapegoating of multiculturalism for the failings of immigrant incorporation. Highlighting the economic roots of conflict lends new urgency to state politics during economic recession in immigrant-receiving societies.

That said, a rational approach may assume a greater amount of information among actors than reality would support. Do nativist rioters have an informed sense of how much is allocated and to whom and by what means? And to what degree does political mobilization by far-right parties like the British National Party play in connecting or conflating grievances of competition to violence? Dancygier's parsimonious approach also excludes consideration of whether differences in instigating parties are significant; in immigrant-state conflict, the initiator of violence is the politically powerless immigrant, while in immigrant-native conflict, the initiator of violence is the local native. Finally, Dancygier's examination of Germany and France stand in contrast to the exactitude with which the four British cities are compared. In

it, Dancygier characterizes Germany's guest worker strategy by its precision and foresight, which belies a messy immigration reality in which temporary labor proved neither to be rotational (as originally intended) nor, in the end, temporary.

These comments, of course, point to suggestions for work beyond the scope and expectation of a single project. As it stands, *Immigration and Conflict in Europe* is path breaking in its careful theory development and deft use of mixed methods. It sets a new standard for comparative research on immigrant behavior, conflict, and European politics and will fast become required reading for students and scholars alike.

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Review by: Jan Erk

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Immigration and Conflict in Europe. By Rafaela M. Dancygier. (Cambridge University Press, 2010.)

Rafaela M. Dancygier's *Immigration and Conflict in Europe* is a new addition to the literature on one of the most pressing issues facing the western world. It arrives with glowing advance reviews on the back cover. One reviewer calls it the "best book on immigration and conflict," another one praises how Dancygier's book "transcends the vast scholarship on immigration," the third reviewer emphasizes the "path-breaking conclusions" while one commends the "methodological precision... in this immaculately researched book." Due to its admirable quest to seek a parsimonious explanation, this certainly is an important contribution to the literature, and it will likely influence coming debates. However, my review is not as unreservedly effusive since I see some missing elements in reasoning. That being said, by highlighting material factors, *Immigration and Conflict in Europe* brings a welcome balance to the culturalist perspective that has come to dominate the debate in Europe (and one that has inadvertently spawned an anti-Muslim cottage industry of alarmist oeuvre).

Dancygier seeks to provide a deductive and systematic explanation as to why in some countries immigration is accompanied by conflict—which she categorizes into immigrant-native conflict and immigrant-state conflict. Her argument rests on the interaction between two factors: economic scarcity and immigrant electoral power. Conflict between immigrants and natives is about competition for scarce resources, and it arises when immigrants enjoy political power; when they are politically disenfranchised, the conflict is with the state. But the desire to show the prominence of material concerns over cultural ones sometimes leads to the omission of important factors that are also part of the explanation.

For a book emphasizing the interaction between material and political factors, it is a little surprising that partisan politics (and ideology) is left out of the picture. Christian democrat and social democrat party families in Europe tend to rely on the welfare state and regulation, while liberal parties favor more market and less regulation. Within the context of Dancygier's reasoning highlighting the role of local

economic resources (such as housing), partisan politics should have logically played a role in explaining variations across time and place.

Another important factor left out is the importance of homogeneity of the immigrant population. Bradford's predominantly Pakistani-origin immigrants and Brixton's West Indian concentration played a key role in collective (violent) action. Demographic dynamics are also left out in the reasoning. Competition for scarce resources (especially housing) is certainly valid for the United Kingdom, but many continental European cities are in fact facing demographic decline. Without immigrants, many continental European cities would have underpopulated downtown neighborhoods vacated by white flight to up-market neighborhoods and low birth rates. Size, together with geographic concentration, also plays a role in explaining the variation across time and place.

What is also missing is the link between the two factors (economic scarcity and immigrant electoral power) and political violence (and patterns of contentious politics). While many interpreted the 2005 riots in France as a sign of immigrant disenfranchisement, an alternative is to see it as part of the French barricades tradition of street demonstrations. Even if one disagrees with this observation, what remains is a clear difference between European countries in the patterns of contentious politics. In the last year we have witnessed how some Europeans were more likely than others to take their anger about the economy onto the streets. Dancygier does not touch upon the political sociology literature on contentious politics that could help make sense of these variations. Furthermore, some European countries tend to have far-left political violence that would complicate Dancygier's argument. While youth delinquency amongst Turkish immigrants is indeed a problem in some German cities, the opponents of the far-right on the streets tend to be the German far-left.

Dancygier's analysis of the interaction between political incentives and the local competition for scarce resources is systematic and detailed. However, such diligence coexists with occasional statements that need further factual unpacking. For example, it would be helpful to hear more about the "stringent naturalization requirements that were later liberalized" in Germany (11). Readers would also benefit from hearing how conflicts over dual citizenship continue to create difficulties for the integration of

immigrants. It was the rejection of dual citizenship that prevented many Turks from using this opportunity after the German citizenship laws were relaxed.

Another statement in need of further unpacking is how West Indian and South Asians in the United Kingdom live in economically similar towns (59). While this holds for metropolitan areas, it does not capture the pattern of northern English cities with East Asian downtown majorities—Bradford being the prime example in this context due to the infamous 2001 riots. There is no such settlement pattern for West Indians.

The process of explaining everything through economic scarcity and political involvement has an unintended normative side-effect as well. The theoretical angle emphasizing competition between natives and immigrants over scarce resources carries with it an inevitable reduction of racism to the impoverished white underclass facing economic vulnerability, thereby letting off the middle class a little too lightly. From the Netherlands to Switzerland,

anti-immigrant sentiment also exists in prosperous areas without sizeable immigrant communities. This appears only late in the book: the comparative discussion in Chapter 8 indeed shows an awareness of this complexity. To be fair, Dancygier is only interested in political violence and not xenophobia. Had the book been cast explicitly as one on violent conflict, this criticism would have been redundant. But with such an overmarketed title, the book inevitably exposes itself to such questions.

Immigration and Conflict in Europe is not about immigration, integration, racism, or conflict in broad terms for that matter; it is about how and when *violent* conflict flares up between two economically deprived communities fighting over scarce economic resources or between one disenfranchised group and the state. And it does a very good job in doing this.

Jan Erk, *University of Leiden*