

## Tolerance and Multiculturalism: a study of the relationship between tolerance, diversity and transnationalism

### Synopsis

This project will explore the meaning of tolerance in multi-ethnic European societies, measured through people's attitudes, perceptions and practices towards ethno-cultural diversity. The project is based on the idea that transnationalism, measured both through practices, identities and orientations and through perceptions of the practices of others, is a key explanatory factor for differing levels of tolerance towards diversity.

### Background

From the 1970s to the 1990s, some European countries, such as the UK, the Netherlands and Sweden, shifted towards greater recognition of cultural diversity, as seen both in public attitudes towards diversity and official policies of multiculturalism. But more recently this trend appears to be reversing, with a new emphasis on integration, adherence to core values and social cohesion (as shown, for instance, through integration contracts, citizenship tests and critiques of multiculturalism by politicians and in the media). In the Netherlands, for example, 'tolerance and respect' have become a major concern to the majority non-migrant Dutch while in the UK, some fear that immigrants' non-integration is placing Britain's 'traditional tolerance under threat'. One strong concern expressed by politicians, the media and the public is that if immigrants or ethnic minorities do not integrate, this is likely to have a negative effect on social cohesion in the receiving societies.

Tolerance can be defined as a sense of openness to difference, openness to and an acceptance of cultural, religious and other forms of diversity. But tolerance can also reflect the existence of a power relationship between the tolerator and the tolerated. As the numbers of people of immigrant descent have been growing, we can observe a decline in tolerance for cultural diversity in several European societies. It is frequently claimed that many immigrants reject mainstream values, build 'parallel lives' and are unwilling to integrate into their new environment. Too much cultural diversity is often seen as a threat to national cohesion and even security.

The ESRC Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford conducts high quality research in order to develop theory and knowledge, inform public opinion and contribute to policy debates on migration.

[www.compas.ox.ac.uk](http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk)

## Research Aims

This research project *aims* to explore the meaning of tolerance in multi-ethnic European societies, measured through people's *attitudes*, *perceptions* and *practices* towards ethno-cultural diversity.

## Research Objectives

1. To address this theme among 20 groups in cities across five countries, and
2. To compare across selected countries the differences and similarities in the relevant public and policy discourses and how these impact on tolerance, diversity and transnationalism.

There is much social scientific debate about the meaning and significance of tolerance, transnationalism and diversity. This project will explore these concepts through empirical study of the practices attitudes and perceptions of various groups. The data generated in this way will provide new evidence to inform theoretical debates amongst European social scientists. The project will also examine the relationships between multiple belongings and national identities and how these are currently unfolding amongst various groups in Europe.

## Methods

An interdisciplinary approach and research design will be used, combining quantitative (survey) and qualitative (interviews, life histories) research among 20 ethno-cultural groups living in five cities in London (UK), Rotterdam (Netherlands), Paris (France), Italy (Rome), and Istanbul (Turkey). The cross-comparative design studying and comparing different groups living in different national and local settings will allow exploration of the heterogeneity and the complexity of the tolerance-diversity-transnational relationship. In each of the five cities, four groups will be studied: immigrant and majority population groups, some of which will have different national and cultural backgrounds and different migration histories. Some of the selected groups will provide a comparative basis to the project as they have a presence in a number of countries. It will be useful to study the same immigrant and ethnic minority groups in countries with different immigration regimes, policies of incorporation and welfare states, as well as different and similar migration histories, gender, class and other relevant characteristics of immigrant groups, while taking into account the different characteristics and background of immigrant groups in each of the countries.

The methods will include:

- Survey
- In-depth interviews
- Life histories
- Survey of policy, local authorities and immigrant organisations
- Theoretical synthesis

## Work In Progress

Hamaz, Sofia and Vasta, Ellie (paper-in-progress), *'When in Rome do as the Romans do': negotiating belonging in and beyond multi-ethnic London*.

Vasta, E. (forthcoming 2010) 'The Politics of Avoidance: a lens from the UK' in *Dutch Racism*, Essed, P and Hoving, I (eds), US: Thamyris Publishers.

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