Western Europe is more culturally diverse than ever. Growing percentages of Europeans have family origins outside their country of residence and outside Europe. People are more mobile within Europe, moving across national borders for work and leisure. Popular culture and consumer products display increasingly diverse influences from around the world. The streets of European cities increasingly look and feel like cosmopolitan melting pots. These dynamics suggest the emergence of a Europe where people are open to a wide range of cultures from beyond their nation-state.

Yet it is not clear how deep or profound these striking trends really are. One limitation is that cosmopolitan values appear to be developing unevenly among different segments of the European population. Urban, well-educated, professional elites are most likely to value cultural diversity, while the attitudes of the rest of the population range from indifference to outright hostility.

Not all forms of diversity are equally valued. Even people who welcome cultural diversity in food and consumer product offerings may be skeptical of demographic diversity in their neighborhoods or may seek to minimize the political influence of minority communities. Some of the most visible evidence of cultural parochialism in Europe is found in hostility to immigrant communities. This is especially the case in France, where the Attacking of the Charlie Hebdo offices in January 2015 and the November 2015 attacks in Paris came in the middle of the refugee crisis.

The parallel trends of openness and skepticism toward cultural diversity are likely to continue to coexist in Europe. The extent to which one dynamic proves stronger than the other will have serious ramifications for European politics and society. Stronger cosmopolitanism is characteristic of societies that are open to the world and more likely to have harmonious intergroup relations. In contrast, prevalent parochialism suggests that societies will resist cultural change and have tense intergroup relations.

My view is that cosmopolitanism is likely to continue spreading and deepening across Western Europe. This is because of the seemingly unstoppable cultural diversification of consumer products and the demographic trends of more intermarriage and higher birthrates among immigrants of non-European origin. However, cultural diversification does not mean the erasure of boundaries. I will conclude this essay by exploring social class and religion, two boundaries likely to structure and divide European society even in an era of increasing cultural diversity.

**Nation and Culture**

Exposure to diverse cultures is not a new concept in Europe. Trade has always brought products and people together and humans have always migrated, often due to economic and political crises. Yet the scale of cultural diversity in Europe today feels unprecedented. Contemporary cultural diversification is driven by the multiple dynamics of Europeanization, global migration, and globalization, which can make it seem out of control and overwhelming. This is especially

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*Cultural Diversity and Its Limits in Western Europe*  
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notable in comparison with times in living memory when cultural life was largely contained within the nation-state.

Nation-states emerged as the dominant form of cultural, political, and economic organization during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Europe was at the forefront of this transition. Before the emergence of the nation-state, much of culture was fragmented among the villages (or regions) where people lived most of their lives. By forging nation-states, European political leaders created powerful new imagined communities with national languages, symbols, currencies, bureaucracies, legal codes, militaries, and road and infrastructure systems. As a result, life—and cultural meaning—became increasingly organized around the nation-state.

In some respects, the transition toward a world of nation-states was a move toward greater cultural diversity and cosmopolitanism. Nation-states represented an expanded worldview in contrast to a world of isolated villages, because they bound together diverse and disparate village communities. However, nation-states were also a move toward broader cultural homogeneity.

Village life during pre-nation-state feudalism was culturally flexible in the sense that political and economic relationships were not based on presumed cultural unity. Political and economic organizations fluctuated with the vicissitudes of war, and there was no expected connection between the local village culture and the higher-level political-administrative culture headed by the feudal lord or the emperor. Nation-states changed everything by attempting to create culturally homogeneous political units, in which the citizens shared a common identity that was based on being different from everyone outside the nation.

The downside of dividing the world into distinct nations became apparent in the first half of the twentieth century as competition among nation-states cascaded into two world wars. Political leaders such as Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, and Francisco Franco combined extreme ideologies of national distinctiveness with technological developments in military capacity to pursue brutal programs of violent repression and genocide in the name of purifying their nation-state communities.

**EUROPEAN SOCIETY**

After World War II, European elites created the regional organization that would become known as the European Union to limit the destructive and competitive tendencies of a world of nation-states. The EU started (as the European Coal and Steel Community) as a way of promoting economic and political coordination by making European nation-states dependent on each other and therefore less likely to go to war with each other.

Over time, the scope of the EU has broadened and deepened. It is now increasingly focused on harmonization. European nation-states still exist as distinct entities, but they increasingly share the same political and economic institutions and standards. There is also greater Europeanization of cultural life, with more exchanges and collaborations among artists, chefs, and activists, and with the same films, music, and retail stores available in every European country.

Optimists have argued that Europeanization will lead to a new postnational society in which the cosmopolitan values of mutual respect and cultural diversity are more widely shared. One example they cite is Erasmus, an exchange program permitting European university students to spend one or two semesters at universities in other European countries. This exchange has created friendships, romantic relationships, and future business networks that span across nation-states and encourage the next generation to think of themselves as Europeans instead of belonging only to their home country's nationality.

Critics have been quick to point out that many of the benefits of the new European society are available only to well-educated professionals who either work for large multinational firms or can afford to relocate independently to a city of their choosing. Moreover, the growth of the EU has created new centers of political power (many of them run by unelected bureaucrats who are not directly accountable to the public) whose decisions inevitably have adverse effects on certain constituencies in some member states. This has generated a strong current of Euroskepticism among people who feel that the Europeanization of society results in a painful loss of nation-state autonomy while providing minimal benefits in return.

**Interruption and birthrates ensure that Europe will look less white and less racially homogeneous in the future.**
MIGRATION BACKLASH

The tensions around the question of whether European cosmopolitanism has proved good or bad for society have been further aggravated by other challenges to national culture, most notably the rise of global migration. Western Europe first experienced significant immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This was the era of rapid industrialization in Western Europe; peasants from Southern and Eastern Europe migrated westward in search of new job opportunities.

Integration was not easy for most of these migrants. They were often discriminated against because of their foreign cultural and religious practices. (Even though most of the migrants were Christians moving to Christian countries, they belonged to different denominations.) However, within two or three generations, Southern and Eastern European migrants were able to assimilate and become visibly and culturally indistinguishable from Western Europeans.

The migration dynamic changed after World War II when Western European countries faced labor shortages and needed significant infusions of manpower to rebuild their economies and their infrastructure. Due to the devastation wrought by the war, there were not enough migrants from Southern and Eastern Europe to meet the demand. So Western European countries began recruiting from poorer countries on the periphery of Europe (for example, Algeria, Morocco, and Turkey) or countries farther away in Africa, Asia, and the Americas with which they had colonial relationships (Indians and Pakistanis went to Britain and Indonesians went to the Netherlands).

At first, all parties viewed this global migration as a temporary “guest worker” arrangement offering migrants the opportunity to earn higher wages rebuilding Western European societies than they would get in the homelands to which it was expected they would eventually return. By the 1970s and ’80s, however, it became clear that large numbers of non-European migrants were going to remain in Europe and create new, culturally diverse communities. The growth of this cultural diversity contributed to a backlash from people who felt that non-Europeans were unfit for assimilation into European societies.

One of the most prominent complaints has been that immigrants from predominantly Muslim countries have conservative Islamic cultural values that conflict with modern secular European norms, particularly concerning gender equality, gay rights, and free speech. These concerns have only been exaggerated by fears of Islamic terrorism and the increasing security focus of debates over immigration and religious and cultural diversity in Europe.

This stigmatization of Muslim and non-European-origin immigrants has created a vicious cycle that is very difficult to override. When non-European-origin immigrants feel stigmatized, they are more likely to withdraw from mainstream society and retreat to segregated minority communities. This reinforces the belief that such minorities are culturally distinct from mainstream European society, which leads to further stigmatization, more alienation, and so on.

A prime example of this vicious cycle is the public debate earlier this year about non-European men attacking young European women in Cologne and numerous other cities on New Year’s Eve. These very specific crimes quickly became symbols of broader integration failures and led to critiques of refugee resettlement and cultural diversity in general, which then made the peaceful, law-abiding majority of non-European-origin men feel unfairly stigmatized and targeted.

The backdrop for the rising anxiety about greater cultural diversity is the increasingly global interconnection of politics, markets, and culture. Large multinational businesses produce, distribute, and sell products around the world. As a result, developments in an Asian economy can be felt immediately in European stock markets. Political turmoil in other parts of the world can have immediate ramifications for politics or social order in Europe.

The broad-based nature of globalization places it beyond the reach of any one nation’s government or institutions, which can make increasing cultural diversity within European countries seem inevitable and irreversible. However, the apparent inevitability of cultural diversification may also contribute to a sense of powerlessness and anger. Far-right political parties in Europe are especially adept at tapping into this resentment, blaming Europeanization, global migration, and globalization as the main culprits responsible for the degradation of contemporary society.

This raises questions about what we should expect for the future of cultural diversity in Western Europe. Will diversity and cosmopolitanism continue to grow, or is a stronger backlash inevitable?
**CULINARY CACHET**

One might fear that the backlash against cultural diversity could lead to the reversal or stagnation of cosmopolitanism in Europe. I disagree. In certain key areas, one of which is consumer products, cultural diversity is likely to continue growing. The logic behind this assertion is that global cultural influences are key assets for products in a market landscape that is increasingly competitive and on the lookout for new and attractive distinctions.

Food is a notable example of how European societies have become more cosmopolitan in recent decades and are likely to become even more so in the future. Throughout much of the twentieth century, European cuisines were dominated by domestic (or even more localized) cultural influences. Farmers’ markets and supermarkets primarily sold ingredients that were traditional in local cuisine. Restaurants mostly focused on regional specialties, with the main exception being a sprinkling of high-end French restaurants across the wealthier cities of Europe.

By the latter decades of the twentieth century, however, increased migration from both within and outside of Europe helped overcome this gastronomic insularity. Migrants imported their own foodstuffs and opened “ethnic” markets and restaurants that slowly introduced foreign foods to mainstream society.

As consumers developed a taste for unfamiliar foods, ambitious and adventurous chefs across Europe competed to find exotic and obscure ingredients, dishes, and techniques. Whereas foreign gastronomy may have been negatively stigmatized in previous decades, it increasingly became a signifier of cultural refinement, good taste, and worldliness.

Nowadays, even mainstream mass-market food products (such as potato chips, frozen foods, and sandwiches) increasingly distinguish themselves with foreign ingredients and flavors. In a recent collaboration, my colleague Michaela DeSoucey and I analyzed prepared meal products from the largest supermarket chains in France and Britain. We found that East Asian dishes and ingredients are very popular and are marketed for their spicy, vibrant, and exotic dimensions, which are easily juxtaposed against blander domestic flavors.

This ongoing search for new and exotic flavors is connected to Europeans’ growing participation in international tourism. For much of the twentieth century, travel was expensive and most Europeans either did not take vacations or went someplace they could reach by car or train. By the end of the century, international air travel had become more accessible to the middle and working classes, and countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America began developing robust tourism infrastructures. Europeans are increasingly likely to visit these foreign destinations, to eat tom yum soup or tacos al pastor in their native environments while on vacation, and then to want reminders of those flavors back home.

**HYBRID PRODUCTS**

Television, film, and music offer additional examples of cultural products that are increasingly global in scope. The early days of globalization allowed the cultural industry in the United States (and to some extent in Europe, as well) to send its products around the world with greater ease. However, the increased prominence of China and India has raised the profile of their cultural output (most notably the productions of India’s Bollywood movie industry) in Europe and around the world. There are also more collaborations among cultural producers from Europe and countries in other parts of the world, blurring the provenance of any given film or song and making it hard to say whether it is part of a distinct national cultural tradition or a global hybrid.

The growth of European hip-hop music is a good example of the new hybrid cultural products. Hip-hop began among racial minorities in the United States and was quickly adopted by immigrant-origin minorities in Europe, who related to its themes of oppression and exclusion. Initially it was segmented into distinct British, French, German, and Dutch hip-hop cultures, but over time it has become a mainstream musical style and a new cultural form that combines American, African, and multiple European influences. Hip-hop is now bringing a range of diverse sounds, themes, and cultural references into mainstream European cultural spaces such as television advertisements and background playlists for chain restaurants and clothing stores.

Fashion, beauty, and lifestyle products are also increasingly sold in Europe by using references that valorize foreign cultures and their wisdom. Yoga is one of the most prominent examples, offering a blend of Indian meditation and exercise traditions in formats that have become more compatible with the contemporary urban and subur-
ban European professional schedule. On a smaller scale, countless beauty creams, facial scrubs, spa treatments, fashion accessories, and dietary supplements are marketed based on the notion that their foreign cultural origins are a source of legitimacy and distinction.

I am not claiming that culturally diverse consumer products are the best indicator of deep cosmopolitanism. Foreign references can be used to sell products in ways that demean and exoticize the source cultures. Consumers of such products do not necessarily respect or welcome people from those cultures.

Nonetheless, the saturation of foreign cultural influences in consumer products in any given retail aisle is unprecedented, and it is worth reflecting on what this will mean for the development of European society. Given the perpetual search for the new and the different in the world of consumer products, it is highly likely that Europeans will have increasing levels of exposure to culturally diverse influences when they shop.

**DEMOGRAPHIC DRIVERS**

Alongside the speculative debates about what cultural diversity will look like in the future of Western Europe, there is the demographic fact that Europe is becoming more multicultural and diverse whether everyone likes it or not. Two key demographic drivers are intermarriage and birthrates. Together, these dynamics ensure that Europe will look less white and less racially homogeneous in the future.

Interrace marriage is important because when people from different cultures marry, they simultaneously fuse their original cultures and create new cultural forms. Moreover, the effects go beyond the two individuals in the relationship: Their families become connected and their children become the physical proof of cultural diversity. This is why intermarriage is often considered one of the best long-term prospects for intergroup harmony.

Research suggests that intermarriage rates between immigrant-origin and native-origin Europeans are rising over time. This will create a growing population of people who are the embodiment of diversity in Europe, whether through the merging of multiple European cultural traditions or through the combination of European and non-European traditions.

These culturally mixed Europeans may not be very visible among the middle-aged incumbents of the upper echelons of business or politics, but they are a normal part of universities, schools, and playgrounds (though not necessarily a majority). The next generation of diverse Europeans will inhabit a world in which cultural mixtures are standard and historical nation-states are the starting points rather than the final definition of culture.

Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that intermarriage rates are not the same among all subgroups. In particular, intermarriage with natives is more common for European as opposed to non-European-origin immigrants, as one might expect. In addition, religion is a major barrier to intermarriage. Even among non-European-origin immigrants, Christians are much more likely than non-Christians to marry Europeans.

This apparent religious divide foreshadows my concluding point about the likelihood of religion remaining a salient cultural boundary in Europe. Yet it is not necessarily clear what to make of the lower levels of intermarriage among non-Christians. One possibility is that Christians and non-Christians find it difficult to develop meaningful romantic relationships because their values and social networks are too different.

This sounds plausible, but research suggests that non-Christians are most likely to marry within their national-origin group, irrespective of religion. For example, Muslim Turks in Europe mainly marry other Turks (who happen to be Muslim) and they are not more likely to marry Muslims from the Middle East as opposed to native Christians. We may expect to see some erosion of this apparent religious marital divide as national cultures and boundaries become less distinct over time and across generations.

Birthrates are obviously another important element of Europe's demographic future, because they determine the composition of the population. In this respect, the combination of low birthrates (below the 2.1 children per woman replacement rate) among white Europeans and the higher birthrates among non-white, non-European-origin immigrants ensures that the racial and ethnic composition of most European countries will shift over time.

Food is a notable example of how European societies have become more cosmopolitan in recent decades.
This simple demographic observation has prompted dramatic headlines across Europe and has become fodder for far-right politicians who fear the cultural implosion of their national communities. Because these demographic changes are so visible, and can be seen on streets and in shopping centers across Europe, there is plenty of opportunity for fear and anxiety. The recent influx of Middle Eastern refugees has further stoked these concerns, especially since so many of them are young men who may further increase the non-European-origin population if they later bring wives and children from home.

However, it is important to retain some perspective. Immigrants of non-European origin account for less than 10 percent of the population in most European countries (with the exception of Britain, France, and the Netherlands, where the percentages are around or slightly above 10 percent). There is no indication that Europe will reach US or Canadian levels of racial and ethnic diversity anytime soon. Despite all the bombastic headlines, even the roughly one million refugees who arrived in Europe in 2015 amount to less than 0.2 percent of Europe’s population, and many of them will return home eventually. Nonetheless, there is a clear demographic trend toward more diversity in Europe.

**PERSISTENT BOUNDARIES**

My main argument has been that Western Europe is experiencing unprecedented and irreversible growth in cultural diversity that will further entrench cosmopolitanism. These dynamics are likely to go beyond merely redefining and renegotiating distinct nation-state cultures. Instead, Europeans will increasingly incorporate influences from multiple national cultural traditions in their daily lives.

Yet it is not clear what these cosmopolitan developments will mean for intergroup relations and intercultural understanding. On the positive side, there should be more space for Europeans from diverse backgrounds to operate in mainstream culture. This may help alleviate some of the tensions and distrust between majority and minority residents.

However, the content of culture is always open to diverse interpretations and selective appropriations. American movies are popular around the world, but that does not mean all countries want the US political and economic system. Similarly, the fact that Europeans are increasingly familiar with African and Asian cuisines does not mean that they will be equally open to the assimilation of African and Asian social and political values. Despite the expansion of cultural diversity, boundaries will persist. Two of the most important are likely to be social class and religion.

Social class is important because many advantages of the new cosmopolitanism are mostly available to the middle and upper-middle classes. They include international education, employment, and travel opportunities that are often unavailable to individuals who have working-class backgrounds or low-status manual or service-sector jobs. While many culturally diverse consumer products are accessible to all socioeconomic classes (for example, inexpensive Indian or Thai curries), there is a general socioeconomic divide in the degree of enthusiasm for consumer products bearing foreign cultural influences. Highly educated urban professionals are the most likely to exhibit cosmopolitan shopping habits and to be open to internationally influenced food, clothing styles, and leisure activities.

All of this contributes to a class divide in acceptance of cosmopolitanism. If working-class Europeans continue to perceive minimal benefits from cultural diversity, they will keep voting for far-right nationalist parties that push back against the cosmopolitan trend.

Another way in which social class may prove to be an enduring boundary in cosmopolitan Europe is variation in opportunities for different non-European-origin immigrants to assimilate. In general, these immigrants are vulnerable to stigmatization and exclusion from mainstream European society. Yet upper-middle-class individuals with non-European origins are more likely to be able to avoid those difficulties and gain access to the social and economic benefits of cosmopolitan Europe. They attend selective schools and universities with Europeans who are more likely to value cultural diversity. They work in professional environments where international experiences and a wide range of cultural influences are more likely to be prized. In some cases, these individu-

*Hip-hop now brings a range of diverse sounds, themes, and cultural references into mainstream European cultural spaces.*
als may be able to carve out networks and social worlds in which their origins are not a hindrance and can even be a benefit.

This is not to suggest that upper-middle-class European environments are free from cultural prejudice. In many cases, moreover, economic integration operates on a different wavelength from cultural assimilation. Some immigrants with high socioeconomic status can afford to create insular bubbles with co-ethnics (consider wealthy Middle Eastern immigrants in Britain) while immigrants with lower socioeconomic status may have high rates of intermarriage and cultural mixing with the working-class native whites with whom they share neighborhoods, schools, and jobs (for example, Caribbean immigrants in Britain).

Nonetheless, non-Europeans with working-class origins live in communities where cosmopolitan values and cultural diversity are less valorized. They are also more likely to walk the streets and ride public transportation in situations where they come into conflict with prejudiced European residents and police officers. Working-class people who live in disadvantaged neighborhoods are often on the front lines of ethnic, racial, religious, and cultural conflict in contemporary Europe. The advance of cosmopolitanism may not extend to these working-class worlds. In that case, the rise of cultural diversity could further exacerbate social class divides among non-European-origin immigrants.

**FEAR FACTOR**

Religion—particularly Islam—is one of the most volatile boundaries in contemporary Europe, and is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. One might see cause for optimism in the work being done through the Islamic councils that have been set up across Europe as a way for governments to help manage the technical and practical challenges of assimilating large numbers of adherents to a new religion. However, one of the most insidious effects of Europeans’ conflict with the Islamic State, al-Qaeda, and other terrorist organizations is that fear infiltrates and politizes even the most mundane daily interactions.

To make non-Muslims feel comfortable, European Muslims must constantly prove their allegiance to European values and norms, which can become tedious and a source of resentment. The religious boundary around Islam is so salient in large part because it sets apart everyone with origins in majority-Muslim countries, regardless of their actual religiosity. Europeans who are otherwise open to cultural diversity may become tense and awkward around people whose Muslim appearance triggers fears of terrorism. This fuels a destructive cycle of distrust and social division that spans far beyond the supposed religious origins of the divide. The dramatic increase in refugees from the Middle East has only strengthened the boundary around Islam in Europe.

Despite these challenges, Europe is likely to continue its cultural diversification. The simultaneous trends of Europeanization, international migration, and globalization show no signs of slowing down. This growing diversity should be especially pronounced in the areas of consumer products and demographic trends. However, the lofty cosmopolitan goal of true equality among diverse people is not likely to be reached, since key social boundaries will remain in place. A new Europe is on the horizon, but it will be as complicated as ever.