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Danish Multiculturalism, Where Art Thou?

Nils Holtug

Introduction

It would be presumptuous to speak of a backlash against multicultural policies in Denmark because in Denmark such policies never gained much prominence in the first place. Thus, when Danish politicians and political commentators announce the end of multiculturalism, they seem to be expressing a desire that things should stay as they have been and perhaps a desire for more restrictive immigration and integration policies. An example is Søren Pind's (2011) denunciation of multiculturalism following his appointment as Minister of Integration in 2011. Pind echoed statements made by British Prime Minister David Cameron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel. But he also affirmed a statement he had made on his blog three years earlier: 'I really don't want to hear any more about integration. Please stop – the right word must be assimilation. There are so many cultures and people can go elsewhere and engage with them if this is what they want' (Pind 2008).

While multiculturalism may not have been on the Danish centre stage, political debates on immigration and integration have often addressed issues of how to tackle diversity. Such debates have been particularly heated in Denmark and, indeed, have resulted in particularly restrictive policies. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that while Denmark has some of the most restrictive immigration policies in Europe (Think Tank on Integration in Denmark 2004; Kærgård 2010b: 478), has had fierce debates over immigration and integration policies and is often perceived as being hostile to immigrants, a number of studies indicate that Danes are no more hostile or intolerant than other peoples in Europe. What is more, the trend line is that they are becoming more positive to immigrants. We might speak, then, of a 'Danish paradox', and in the present chapter I advance explanations for it.

At the outset, it is important to recognize that, to a large extent, Danish debates on immigration and integration tend to focus on Muslims – as, indeed, is the case elsewhere in Europe (Modood 2007: 4–5). At least in part, this reflects the fact that Muslims comprise by far the largest influx of immigrants from non-Western countries: it is estimated that there are 175,000–200,000 Muslims in Denmark, comprising up to 3.6 per cent of the population (Hussain 2011: 34).

I approach multiculturalism as a (normative) political doctrine that requires the accommodation of group differences in the public sphere, for example in laws, policies and state and municipal discourses, with the aim of reducing discrimination and hierarchy and securing inclusion and equality of opportunity (cf. Kymlicka 1995; Modood 2007; Parekh 2006; Phillips 2007; Young 1990). While the term ‘accommodation of group differences’ is somewhat vague, it is often associated with so-called group-differentiated rights – rights that are assigned to some but withheld from others, depending on their membership of cultural and religious groups (Holtug 2009: 81). By way of illustration, such rights may include an exemption for Sikh men from the legal requirement of wearing a safety helmet when working on construction sites so that they can wear a turban instead.

There are other ways of accommodating the concerns of cultural and religious groups and indeed other kinds of multicultural policies. For example, a traditional multicultural concern such as recognizing diversity within a common curriculum in schools does not differentiate the rights of school children but rather prescribes the same treatment for everyone (Banting et al. 2006: 87). Whether a particular concern for group difference is best captured by group-differentiated rights or, for example, by introducing new difference-blind rights may be an open question that multiculturalists will want to settle pragmatically.

This chapter begins with an overview of Danish immigration and integration policies, focusing especially on their (lack of) multicultural aspects. I then analyze the different discourses present in recent Danish debates on these issues, in response to which policies have been formed focusing on liberalism, active citizenship, liberal nationalism and conservative nationalism. I then turn to the attitudes of Danes with regard to multiculturalism, in part to determine to what extent policies have matched attitudes. Finally, I consider the Danish discussion of multiculturalism from a normative, political

theory perspective, mainly to assess the strength of various common arguments against multiculturalism.

Policies on immigration and integration

Denmark is in many ways a very homogeneous society by international standards, in terms of both ethnicity and religion. In 2005 85 per cent of the Danish population were members of the State Lutheran Church, and Islam was the second largest religion with 3 per cent (Kærgård 2010b: 475). Nevertheless, like other European states, it has recently experienced increasing levels of immigration from non-Western countries, beginning with the arrival of guest workers in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1973 policies were implemented to halt immigration because of the recession, but the number of non-Western immigrants has nevertheless continued to rise for reasons of family reunification and asylum for refugees. Thus, whereas in 1980, 43,978 residents were born in non-Western countries, the number had risen to 227,296 by 2005 (Kærgård 2010a: 52).

As guest workers began to arrive, a pragmatic approach to integration was adopted (Hedetoft 2008: 47). The chief concern was that immigrants should fill gaps in the labour market, where they would experience the required level of integration until the time when they were expected to return to their countries of origin. However, the pragmatic approach was increasingly supplemented with policies that aimed at limiting immigration and integrating foreigners into what is perceived as the 'Danish way of life'. This development culminated with the election of a Liberal–Conservative coalition in 2001 that relied systematically for support on the votes of the nationalist Danish People's Party (DPP). The election of this coalition, as well as their victory in the two elections that followed, was heavily influenced by their increasingly restrictive policies on immigration and integration, including tightened immigration requirements (for example, to avoid Denmark becoming a 'refugee magnet'), reduced social benefits for immigrants and more restrictive rules for citizenship and permanent residence (including more difficult language and knowledge tests regarding Danish politics, history and culture). These measures were accompanied by a 'tougher' terminology to address the crime, educational underachievement, unemployment and (allegedly) illiberal practices of (some) immigrants and their descendants.

While this restrictive line was backed up by a parliamentary

majority that sometimes included the Social Democrats until this party took power in 2011, it was also accompanied by fierce public debates. Particularly controversial was the so-called ‘twenty-four-year rule’ for family reunification of third-country nationals, requiring, amongst other things, that both spouses be at least twenty-four years old, more strongly attached to Denmark than to any other country and self-supporting, and that the prospective immigrant must pass a test showing basic knowledge of Danish language and society. The Liberal–Conservative government later applied this rule more selectively in order to attract qualified labour. Thus, applicants need a certain number of points to qualify with points being obtained in four categories: education, work experience, language qualifications and ‘other’. For example, a doctoral or Master’s degree from a Danish university or from a list of the world’s top 50 universities will provide almost the necessary number of points even if the applicant is under twenty-four (Olwig et al. 2011).

Other controversial policies have included ‘start help’ (*starthjælp*), which gives immigrants a lower level of social benefits during the first seven years that they are in Denmark (Kærgård 2010a: 59), the increasingly strong language and knowledge requirements for citizenship and permanent residence and a policy of selecting quota refugees on the basis of their ‘potential for integration’, which has resulted in a significantly lower percentage of refugees from Muslim countries. Despite protests primarily from the left and the Social Liberal party (*Radikale Venstre*), the Liberal–Conservative government defended these restrictions as being ‘tough but fair’.

After the Liberal–Conservative coalition lost power in September 2011 and an electoral coalition of Social Democrats, the Socialist People’s Party and *Radikale Venstre* won the election, it was not clear how much of a difference this would make to existing policies. The new coalition abandoned ‘start help’ and sought to reintroduce the twenty-four-year rule in the original version (without the points system). However, it seemed doubtful that many of the restrictions imposed by the former government would be reversed.

In spite of these developments, the pragmatic approach has not been abandoned. In the 2011 Migrant Integration Policy Index, Denmark was ranked just above the EU average regarding the implementation of policies that are conducive to integration (MIPEX III 2011: 11). This overall score was based on both high and low performances in the different aspects of integration that were measured. Thus, Denmark does relatively well on labour market mobility,

education, political participation and long-term residence, but poorly on anti-discrimination, access to nationality and especially family reunification.

At least two factors have played an important role in shaping restrictive Danish policies. The first is calculations indicating that non-Western immigrants are costly for the welfare state. They showed that while, in 2000, the typical profile of positive net transfers to the state was in the age interval of mid-twenties to early sixties, there was no age group in which non-Western immigrants on average had positive net transfers (Tranæs and Zimmermann 2004: 4; Wadensjö and Gerdes 2004: 334). Certainly, *descendants* of non-Western immigrants did not differ significantly from the typical profile of 'Danes' (Tranæs and Zimmermann 2004: 4). Economists and politicians worried that immigrants arriving in the country were undermining the basis of the Danish welfare state, with its high levels of social spending, even by European standards. The state response was to reduce the intake of asylum seekers and people seeking family reunification and to decrease social benefits for immigrants.

An assessment of the net costs of immigration suggested that in 2010 immigrants and descendants from 'less developed countries' cost the Danish state 4 billion and 11.7 billion DKK respectively. However, the group of descendants is relatively young which will both involve fewer costs and larger contributions later in their lives (Regeringens arbejdsgruppe 2011: 10).

A second factor making for a restrictive approach is growing Danish discontent with what have been viewed as too lenient policies. It resulted in support for the DPP and the Liberal–Conservative coalition. Of course, politicians may also have influenced public sentiments. Either way, popular support for restrictive policies has been a necessary condition for their implementation, and many Danes have genuinely been concerned about welfare costs, parallel societies, forced marriages, crime rates and the educational underachievement of immigrants and their descendants.

These developments have not produced a climate conducive to multicultural policies. Indeed, not only have scholars observed an apparent lack of such policies, but they have to some extent labelled existing policies assimilationist (Hedetoft 2010; Jensen 2010; cf. Mouritsen 2006). One bottom line is that in the index of multicultural policies (MCPs) for immigrants used by Banting et al., Denmark scores 0 out of a possible 8 (see Table 9.1).

Table 9.1 Multicultural Policy scores for selected countries

	<i>Immigrant MCPs</i>	<i>Indigenous MCPs</i>
Canada	7.5	7.5
Australia	7.0	3.5
UK	5.0	—
Netherlands	4.5	—
Belgium	3.5	—
Sweden	3.0	1.5
US	3.0	7.0
France	2.0	—
Italy	1.5	—
Denmark	0.0	6.0

Source: Banting et al. 2006, p. 86.

The multicultural policies identified by Banting et al. (2006: 56–7; cf. Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010: 3) include:

1. Constitutional, legislative or parliamentary affirmation of multiculturalism, at the central and/or regional and municipal levels.
2. The adoption of multiculturalism in the school curriculum.
3. The inclusion of ethnic representation/sensitivity in the mandate of public media.
4. Exemptions from dress codes, Sunday closing legislation, and so on either by statute or by court cases.
5. Allowing dual citizenship.
6. The funding of ethnic group organizations to support cultural activities.
7. The funding of bilingual education or mother-tongue instruction.
8. Affirmative action for disadvantaged immigrant groups.

Multicultural policies of these kinds have played a limited role in Denmark but there are a few exceptions. Sikh men are exempted from the requirement of wearing a helmet when riding a motorbike. Liberal Danish rules for ‘free schools’ (*friskoler*), and the high level of financial support they receive, make it relatively easy for immigrants to form religious schools: in fact, Denmark has the highest number of Muslim free schools in Europe relative to country size (Jensen 2010: 194).

In some cases, however, multicultural policies have been retracted, such as the 2002 elimination of the requirement that municipalities provide mother-tongue instruction for immigrant children (Jensen

2010: 194). Nevertheless, municipalities may still choose to provide mother-tongue instruction, and generally it is easier to find examples of difference accommodation at the municipal level than at the level of the state (cf. Hedetoft 2010: 111). For example, the Municipality of Copenhagen has introduced a 'policy of inclusion' according to which 'diversity is a strength', and 'Copenhageners must be treated equally, but not necessarily identically' (Municipality of Copenhagen 2011: 6). Some schools with many Muslim children even choose to give children a day off for *Eid-al-fitr*.

There is one domain in which Denmark has implemented highly multicultural policies at the level of the state – on indigenous people in the Danish Commonwealth. Thus, Greenland and the Faroe Islands have been granted self-government rights in the Home Rule Government Acts, defining them as autonomous provinces (Adamo 2009: 210). Furthermore, Greenland and the Faroe Islands each have two seats set aside in the Danish Parliament. In the index of multicultural policies for indigenous peoples (see Table 9.1), Denmark scores 6.0 out of a possible 9 points.

Discourses on integration and social cohesion

A focal point in recent Danish debates on integration and immigration is the significance attached to social cohesion. This subject has played an increasingly important role since former Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen (Social Democrat) began in the late 1990s to express a concern for 'cohesion' as the glue that holds society together. With the election of the Liberal–Conservative coalition in 2001 social cohesion became 'ethnicized', in the sense that ethnic and other forms of diversity became regarded as a threat to social cohesion. For example, in his Constitution Day speech in 2007, Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen stated that:

if we are to maintain the high level of social cohesion that is so important for the progress and stability of Denmark, it is necessary that we continue to meet one another as human beings and citizens of Denmark in the public sphere – not as representatives of different religions. (quoted in Heinskou et al. 2007)

The suggestion that ethnic diversity drives down social cohesion has perhaps been most succinctly elaborated by former Minister of the Interior Karen Jespersen. She linked survey results indicating that Danes are the happiest people in the world and have the highest

level of trust (Svendsen and Svendsen 2006: 88) with the fact that Denmark is an ethnoculturally homogeneous nation. This homogeneity and its positive effects, however, are perceived as being under threat (see Holtug 2010a and b):

It is not about integration on the labour market or in the educational system, but about something more fundamental: the experience of being part of a *value-community* (*værdifællesskab*) in the society one inhabits.

If such a community is missing, social cohesion withers away. The social capital that creates trust between citizens will be missing. Indeed, social scientists have shown that there is a relation between large ethnocultural differences and low levels of social trust in society. This has highly problematic consequences for the way society works and for the ability to work for common political goals. (Jespersen and Pittelkow 2005: 98–9)

One reason why social cohesion may play such a significant role in Danish debates is that this factor has been considered particularly important in a society committed to equality and high levels of social spending. Thus, the high Danish level of trust is often mentioned as a significant factor when explaining how it is possible for Denmark to be economically successful and competitive despite high taxes and social benefits – and therefore relatively low economic incentives to work (Svendsen and Svendsen 2006: 80–1).

Social cohesion is considered to be under threat but also necessary to avoid religious and political conflicts, parallel societies and crime, as well as to secure the level of solidarity required between citizens for maintaining the welfare state. This has resulted in a struggle over (1) which values are conducive to social and political stability; and (2) which values define what it means to be Danish; the assumption being that the answers to both questions are the same. A ‘values commission’ was established by the Liberal–Conservative government to identify which values are important for Danes (Ministry of Culture 2011); it was dropped when the Social Democratic-led coalition took power.

Let us call conceptions of what kinds of values are conducive to social cohesion ‘community conceptions’. More precisely, a community conception can be usefully thought of as a set of (formal or informal) values regulating the conditions in which individuals interact in a group, including the distribution of political, social and cultural advantages, with the aim of securing social goods within that group, such as trust, cooperation, stability, belonging and solidarity.

What are the most important such conceptions in Danish policies and discourses?

Official policies often rely on what may be described as a traditional liberal approach that emphasizes the public-private sphere distinction (cf. Rawls 1993). Here, integration amounts to acknowledging or confirming a set of basic liberal values, and religion and other conceptions of the good are relegated to the private sphere. For example, in the Action Plan on Ethnic Equal Treatment and Respect for Individuals, the Liberal-Conservative government (2011: 1) stated that Danish society is based on fundamental values of personal and political liberty, respect for individuals, equality of opportunity and democracy. These are viewed as supportive of social cohesion (Government 2010: 2).

Increasingly, this liberal conception has been supplemented with Republican ideas about active or democratic citizenship (*medborgerskab*). Thus, in the Action Plan the former government (2011: 6) stressed the need for immigrants to become active citizens and supported citizenship classes in schools. In fact, active citizenship has become a buzzword, both at the level of the state and in municipalities (for example, Municipality of Copenhagen 2011). In part, this focus on active citizenship may be due to a strong tradition for civic participation in Denmark in the form of volunteering in civic organizations, where such participation is sometimes referred to as instrumental for the development of a high level of trust (Svendsen and Svendsen 2006: Ch. 3). However, while the rhetorical commitment to active citizenship is firm, especially as regards democratic participation, more often than not it is unclear what active citizenship is supposed to amount to. In other words, what is lacking is a specification of the particular civic virtues thought to uphold democratic institutions, solidarity and social cohesion (Laborde and Maynor 2008: 14–15).

Active or democratic citizenship has also become a popular community conception in academic circles (Korsgaard et al. 2007). Here, democratic citizenship is considered a more inclusive alternative to conservative nationalist community conceptions. It is sometimes claimed that democratic citizenship is more inclusive in that it does not presuppose a common identity based on common values (Christensen and Lindhardt 2007: 213). However, whatever the virtues of democratic citizenship are, this idea about the basis of inclusiveness is mistaken. Even democratic citizenship presupposes a joint commitment to liberal, democratic values and to a set of

procedures for negotiating disagreements. Democratic citizenship is more inclusive than conservative nationalism in that the common identity it presupposes is less thick, and (partly for this reason) more accommodating towards difference.

While active citizenship has indeed become a buzzword amongst policymakers, this does not imply that all policies actually comply with this particular community conception. A former Minister of Culture in the Liberal–Conservative coalition, Brian Mikkelsen, commissioned a monocultural Danish Cultural Canon, consisting of selected Danish architecture, paintings, design, films, literature, music, theatre and artworks for children, to strengthen communal values by referring to a common Danish heritage (Ministry of Culture 2006). Mikkelsen (2004) described Danish authors as the ‘voice of the nation’ securing a Danish identity and sense of history. This community conception seems more in line with that of conservative nationalism than with active citizenship – a conception that focuses on political rather than cultural values. Likewise, the current Danish citizenship test includes questions not just about Danish political institutions, but also about Danish history and culture; the 2010 test included questions about Danish authors, painters and athletes.

Furthermore, the very policy documents that invoke active citizenship as the basis for Danish integration policies sometimes display a cultural or religious bias. The Action Plan referred to above expresses a concern for anti-discrimination and emphasizes the need to fight anti-Semitism (Government 2010: 2–3, 7), yet it does not mention discrimination against other ethnic or religious groups, including Muslims.

While some policies and influential discourses thus deviate from liberalism and/or Republican ideas about active citizenship, others assume particular interpretations. Some discourses, for example, lean towards liberal nationalism where a common national identity or culture is necessary for – or at least conducive to – maintaining the stability and cohesion of liberal institutions (Miller 1995). For example, Karen Jespersen holds that the liberal Danish welfare state relies on a common set of traditional liberal values, but also on a feeling of being Danish, rooted in a common history and cultural background and in the Danish language (Jespersen and Pittelkow 2005: 25; see also Holtug 2005). As pointed out above, she sees ethnic diversity – and especially the immigration of Muslims – as a threat to these values and so to social cohesion.

Another example of a liberal nationalist discourse pertains to the Lutheran justification of liberal neutrality endorsed by sections of the Liberal Party (*Venstre*) in the preceding Liberal–Conservative coalition governments. While former Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen’s statement that there should be less religion in the public sphere was reminiscent of a French Republican conception of *laïcité*, his justification rested on a Lutheran conception of the separation of religious and worldly affairs. Indeed, on the same occasion, he stressed that Denmark is a Christian country and that the Queen needs to be a member of the Lutheran Established Church because she symbolizes national unity and therefore the foundation of Danish society (Bjergager and Hoffmann-Hansen 2006).

A further dominant discourse in Danish integration debates is that of conservative nationalism. Where liberal nationalists are concerned with the basis for securing liberal institutions and human rights, and only accept means for securing them that are compatible with liberalism, conservative nationalists believe that ‘integration’ requires assimilation to an entire culture or way of life. Søren Krarup, a priest and former MP for the DPP, holds that being Danish ‘is not an idea, an ideology, a point of view. To be Danish is to be a Dane – that is, a child of Denmark’s history, of the Danish language, of the Danish people’s life and life-history’ (Krarup 2001: 15). On this basis, he is sceptical of liberal approaches to integration because they imply equal treatment, rather than a policy of ‘Denmark for the Danes’ (Krarup 2001: 46). He is critical of liberal human rights which, echoing Burke, he finds ideological – abstract claims that have no foundation in the concrete (national) history and lives of actual people (Krarup 2001: 46; see also Holtug 2005).

Like other community conceptions described, conservative nationalism harbours distinct ideas about what factors are conducive to social cohesion. Kasper Støvring (2010), a Danish academic and public intellectual, argues that cohesiveness, including trust, presupposes a national culture encompassing a common Danish history, Danish language, a common (Protestant) religion and virtues such as politeness, honesty, dependability and parsimony (which, according to Støvring, are specifically Danish virtues). Thus, in a spectrum going from thick to thin community conceptions, conservative nationalism is at the thick end (see Figure 9.1).

The DPP has particularly targeted Muslims and expressed general doubts about the compatibility of Islam and liberal values.

<i>thick</i>		<i>thin</i>	
conservative	liberal	active	liberalism
nationalism	nationalism	citizenship	
conservatism	nationalism	citizenship	liberalism

Figure 9.1 Conceptions of community: from thick to thin

It has labelled Islam an aggressive, oppressive, sexist, expansionist ideology. Pia Kjærsgaard, party leader, suggested that ‘Islam is, in essence . . . a religion that cherishes violence’. Muslim symbols such as headscarves are considered sexist and ‘un-Danish’ – a term that has spread from the nationalist right to mainstream Danish politics. Both Kjærsgaard and Søren Krarup have compared the Muslim headscarf – as a symbol of Islam – to a swastika. Unsurprisingly, then, both conservative and liberal nationalists have been highly critical of multiculturalism (Jespersen and Pittelkow 2005; Krarup 2001). Krarup (2001: 114) even associates multiculturalism with a loss of identity and ‘contempt for human beings and rape of the people’.

Interestingly, a process of ‘liberalization’ has been taking place in Danish integration debates: policies that are initially conceived on the nationalist right travel into mainstream Danish politics, but they undergo a transformation where the justification for the policy is elaborated in more liberal terms. A case in point is a 2009 law that renders it impermissible for Danish judges to wear religious symbols in courts of law. While the ideas behind the law were originally put forward by the DPP in terms of concerns about sexism and the alleged totalitarian connotations of Muslim headscarves, and while the debate that preceded the law focused almost exclusively on headscarves, it was ultimately justified in terms of a concern for state neutrality and the impartiality of courts, and ruled out religious symbols of all kinds (Holtug 2011).

While conservative and liberal nationalists differ in their value commitments, they have often employed similar rhetorical strategies. Thus, they often refer to the effort to promote more restrictive policies as a ‘value war’ (*værdikamp*) or ‘culture war’ (*kulturkamp*), and emphasize their courage in breaking taboos and silence, and to counter political correctness. In this respect the Danish debate seems similar to those in the Netherlands (Prins and Saharso 2010: 74). A contrast is often made to Sweden, which is perceived as being

politically correct and repressive towards people who dare speak the truth about the problems of immigration. Furthermore, this value war is considered non-elitist and opposed to the soft liberal and multicultural sentiments of academic leftists and social liberals. Kærgård (2010b: 483) notes that the debate has been so fierce that the divide it has caused between ethnic Danes may be a larger threat to social cohesion than non-Western immigrants are.

Multiculturalist discourses, then, have played a relatively small role in Denmark in recent times, at least in national political debates. One reason may be that the discursive climate has pushed liberal critics of existing policies into defensive positions, where it becomes more important to fend off new restrictions than to propose new (politically unrealistic) policies to accommodate difference. Given that some surveys show limited support for multiculturalism, this may make mainstream political parties think twice before they propose multicultural policies.

Danish attitudes

In a survey of twenty-seven countries carried out in 2003 by the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), Denmark came out as the country most opposed to multiculturalism: 77 per cent believed that it is best for a country if different races and ethnic groups adapt and blend into the society that surrounds them, whereas 11 per cent responded that it is best for a country if these groups maintain their distinctive customs and traditions (see Table 9.2). Ironically Sweden, which generally self-identifies as multicultural (see Chapter 7), was the country that immediately followed Denmark: here 73 per cent supported adjustment (Larsen 2008: 29). Denmark was also the country with the highest percentage of people (54 per cent) who completely or partly disagreed that ethnic minorities should receive public support to maintain their customs and traditions (Larsen 2008: 32).

Eurobarometer 2000 survey results painted a different picture. Only 25 per cent of Danes responded that in order to become fully accepted members of society, people belonging to minority groups must give up their own culture; 69 per cent disagreed. The two sets of questions were formulated differently and interpreting results as commitments to multiculturalism or assimilationism/monoculturalism was problematic. For example, ISSP 2003 may have represented a commitment to 'integration' rather than 'assimilation'. Indeed, much depends on whether the norms that people think minorities should

Table 9.2 Danish attitudes to multiculturalism, 2000–11

Eurobarometer 2000

In order to become fully accepted members of the Danish society, people belonging to minority groups must give up their culture.

Agree: 25%

Disagree: 69%

(Source: Thalhammer et al. 2001: 48)

ISSP 2003

It is better for a country if different racial and ethnic groups maintain their distinct customs and traditions: 11%

It is better if these groups adapt and blend into the larger society: 77%

(Source: Larsen 2008: 27–9)

European Values Study 2008

It is best for society if immigrants:

- | | | |
|---|------------|------------|
| – maintain their distinct customs and traditions: | (1999) 19% | (2008) 16% |
| – do not maintain their distinct customs and traditions but adopt Danish customs: | (1999) 63% | (2008) 49% |

(Source: Borre 2011: 125)

TNS Gallup A/S 2011

Do you basically support:

- a monocultural society: 29%
- a multicultural society: 54%

Source: TNS Gallup A/S 2011.

conform to are cultural or just political – pertaining to, for example, paying one's taxes and obeying the law. A 1996 survey lends support to this view: 85 per cent of Danes agreed that immigrants should be allowed to keep up their language and culture (Togeby 1998: 1,147).

If Denmark has an above average proportion who agree that minority groups must give up their own culture (among EU-15 Denmark is fifth after Belgium, Greece, the Netherlands and France), it also has an above average proportion who disagree with this statement. This indicates that Danes are particularly polarized on issues of integration which is confirmed by more thorough analysis of Eurobarometer 2000 and ISSP 2003 surveys (Larsen 2008: Ch. 7; cf. Andersen 2002: 15). Thus, in a typology of people according to their attitudes towards minority groups (Thalhammer et al. 2001: 25), Denmark had the third highest percentage of intolerants (20 per cent) in EU-15 but also had the highest percentage of actively tolerant people, together with Sweden (33 per cent).

On the theme of multiculturalism, Eurobarometer 2000 revealed that Danes gave the highest support in EU-15 for the claim that diversity in terms of race, religion and culture add to a country's strengths (58 per cent); for promoting the understanding of different cultures and lifestyles (57 per cent); and for encouraging the participation of people in minority groups in political life (40 per cent) – the last finding being consistent with an ideal of active citizenship (Thalhammer et al. 2001: 29–30, 45). In turn the European Values Study in 2008 found that 16 per cent of Danish respondents said that it is best for society if immigrants maintain their own customs; 49 per cent said that it is best if they conform to Danish traditions. The respective figures for 1999 were 19 and 63 per cent. This showed there was no major fall in support for multiculturalism. But again, we should be careful when interpreting these results as commitments to multiculturalism or assimilationism.

Finally, a poll following Søren Pind's denunciation of multiculturalism indicated that 54 per cent favoured a multicultural society and 29 per cent supported a monocultural one. This was the case even though 58 per cent agreed that multiculturalism had pushed back Danish culture and 45 per cent agreed that a multicultural society meant more oppression of women and violence against children. Furthermore, 60 per cent responded that Denmark should aim to integrate immigrants, whereas 29 per cent responded that Denmark should aim to assimilate.

The body of evidence presented is, therefore, mixed. It does not lead us to an unambiguous conclusion about Danish commitments to multiculturalism, integration or assimilation. Moreover, the findings do not suggest that Danes are more hostile or intolerant towards immigrants than people in most other European or Western countries. Perhaps this is not surprising. According to a standard account of the exclusion of ethnic minorities, Ethnic Competition Theory, ethnic exclusionism may be affected by competition reinforcing mechanisms of social identification and contra-identification (Coenders et al. 2003: 9). In Denmark and many European countries, immigration of non-Westerners primarily increases competition amongst relatively poor, low-skilled workers who are also threatened by other effects of globalization such as outsourcing. Denmark follows the general trend in having these groups highly over-represented in opposing immigration (Andersen 2002: 16; Borre 2011; Larsen 2008). However, Denmark has relatively few non-Western immigrants compared to other European receiving societies. It also

has high levels of social security. These two factors may decrease competition and mitigate negative effects on low-skilled Danes compared to their counterparts elsewhere in Europe.

The received view amongst social scientists working on attitudes to immigrants in Denmark is that Danes are no more hostile or intolerant than other peoples in Europe (Andersen 2002: 15; Larsen 2008: 64; Nielsen 2004: Ch. 9). Indeed, over the last three decades, they have been getting less hostile and more tolerant (Andersen 2002: 8–11; Borre 2011: 124–8; Gundelach 2011: 22; Togeby 1998).

A few results may illustrate these points. In Eurobarometer 2000, Danes were above the EU-15 average in endorsing an outlawing of discrimination against minority groups; encouraging the creation of organizations that bring together people from different races, religions and cultures; encouraging trade unions and churches to do more against racism; accepting people from Muslim countries who wish to work in the EU; accepting people fleeing from countries where there is serious internal conflict; and accepting people suffering from human rights violations in their country who are seeking political asylum (Thalhammer 2001).

The ISSP from 2003 did indeed indicate that Danes are particularly polarized on issues of immigration and integration – second among twenty-seven countries to the French (Larsen 2008: 71). But if, in general, they are no more hostile or intolerant than other peoples in Europe, why has the Danish debate been particularly heated and why have policies tended to be particularly restrictive? This is what I labelled the ‘Danish paradox’. In part, polarization in Denmark may provide an explanation. It has meant that significant numbers of voters have shifted support from the Social Democrats and other parties on the left to the DPP. This populist party has made it easier for voters to make this move by combining restrictive immigration and integration policies with largely Social Democratic views on the welfare state. This has shifted the majority to the right, where the Liberal–Conservative coalition in power in the period 2001–11 needed to accommodate some of the wishes of the DPP to maintain their parliamentary majority, but also increased their own votes by attracting voters from the left who were dissatisfied with what they considered overly permissive policies.

The allegation that Danes are becoming more hostile and intolerant (Nielsen 2004) cannot be confirmed by surveys. While the percentage that held that the government should allow entry for anyone who wants to come to Denmark had dropped from 7 per cent in

1999 to 5 per cent in 2008, the percentage that held that the government should let in immigrants as long as there are jobs had risen from 24 per cent to 39 per cent (Borre 2011: 125). In their studies Tøgeby (1998: 1,151–2; cf. Gaasholt and Tøgeby 1995: Ch. 5) concluded both that Danes have never been as tolerant as their reputation may have suggested, and that intolerance has not risen but has instead decreased slightly since 1970, thus puncturing the ‘myth of a tolerant people’s gradual decline’.

Focusing on the issues that Danes find problematic regarding immigrants, many of these involve worries about respect for the law and the health of the welfare state (Nielsen 2004: 225). In a recent poll, 59 per cent of respondents supported a proposal according to which immigrants need to earn the right to certain social benefits, for example a full package of public health care (Bonde and Steensbeck 2011). The perceived threat to the welfare state is visible in survey results showing that 84 and 79 per cent agree that Denmark should allow more high-skilled workers from Western and non-Western countries to immigrate respectively. By contrast, only 31 per cent and 28 per cent agree that low-skilled Western and non-Western immigrants should be allowed entry (Dinesen et al. 2011: 10).

These survey results suggest that Danes are more worried about threats to the economy and the welfare state than about threats to Danish culture. Thus, even though they are not particularly proud of their nation, the aspects they are most proud of, relative to other peoples, relate to the welfare state and to democracy. In ISSP 2003, Danes came out prouder of their welfare state than any other people, whereas Swedes and Norwegians figured much lower down the list (Larsen 2008: 41). This suggests that Danish national identity relies heavily on a commitment to the welfare state that, perhaps, becomes more assertive when threats to it are perceived.

Even attitudes to multiculturalism may be affected by worries about social cohesion and thus, ultimately, the welfare state. However, not much is known about the effects of multicultural policies on the welfare state and, in fact, some studies suggest that public spending does not suffer from them (Banting et al. 2006). More generally, Denmark has one of the highest levels of trust in the world and this level has risen over the last twenty years even as immigration has increased from non-Western countries (Torpe 2010). In fact, such immigrants have far greater levels of trust than people in their countries of origin (Svendsen and Svendsen 2006: 174).

Negative views regarding immigrants are of course not restricted

to concerns about law and order and the welfare state. Large minorities agreed in 1993 that there is reason to fear that Muslims will come to completely dominate Denmark (36 per cent) and that they don't like the increase in people of colour in the country (38 per cent) (Gaasholt and Tøgeby 1995: 40). According to a more recent poll, 53 per cent hold that Muslims are to blame if they are criticized in Denmark (Nannestad 2011: 1–4); 68 per cent of respondents who expressed an opinion disagreed that Islam, as a religion, is a threat to Denmark; 90 per cent stated that they don't care whether their neighbour is a Muslim or, for example, a Christian. And while 90 per cent of Danes have trust in people in their neighbourhood, only 55 per cent have trust in Muslims in Denmark (Christensen 2010: 155). Finally, 28 per cent would disapprove if a colleague of theirs wore a Muslim headscarf (Christensen 2010: 151). There is little doubt that many Danes are sceptical about Islam and in particular what is perceived as its 'illiberal' tenets. Nevertheless, these attitudes do not necessarily translate into strong anti-immigrant preferences; in Nannestad's survey 68 per cent of respondents said they would not mind if their son or daughter married a Muslim.

Concerns about the welfare state may, at least in part, explain the lack of multicultural policies in the country. People may be worried about the impact of multicultural policies on social cohesion, as well as about making Denmark too 'hospitable' and therefore attractive for refugees and other potentially 'expensive' immigrants. This is consistent with Will Kymlicka's (2010: 46) suggestion that where immigrants are considered net burdens to the welfare state, multicultural policies are more likely to suffer a backlash.

Another condition mentioned by Kymlicka (2010: 46) as detrimental to multicultural policies is the perception of immigrants as being illiberal, and there is little doubt that many Danes are worried about the liberal credentials of Islam. The further the majority goes in the direction of what Joppke (2009: 561) has dubbed militant (or illiberal) liberalism, the more it will be inclined to see minority cultures as threatening to liberalism and, presumably, the less it will incline towards multiculturalism. A case in point is the often-heard argument that Muslim requests for shower curtains in schools be rejected because they do not reflect Danish liberal-mindedness.

Apart from concerns about the welfare state and illiberal practices, a further explanatory factor may be that Denmark is still a relatively homogeneous society. Some evidence from social psychology

suggests that majority groups tend to favour the assimilation of minority groups into a single culture – a way in which the majority may preserve its privileges. Minority groups tend to favour a multiculturalism that encompasses both their distinct identities and a common superordinate identity (Dovido et al. 2010). On this assumption, we should expect to find less support for multiculturalism in homogeneous societies, everything else being equal.

While Danes have been pushing for more restrictive immigration and integration policies, there is now evidence that they are content with the present level of restrictions. Thus, in 2011, only 34 per cent thought that immigration and integration laws should be tightened. Furthermore, support for these laws has dropped from 60 per cent in 2008 to 51 per cent in 2011 (TNS Gallup 2011). Indeed, in a survey from 2010, 63 per cent agreed with the Social Democrats' leader, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, that immigration policies are now tight enough (Berlingske Tidende 2010). Issues of immigration and integration played less of a role in the 2011 general election than they did in the previous three elections, and there is little doubt that the change of focus from such issues to the economic crisis helped the coalition of Socialists, Social Democrats and Social Liberals win.

This shift in attitudes may be related to a change in immigration policies designed to prioritize labour market needs. As a result, immigrants and descendants are experiencing higher levels of employment (Kærgård 2010a: 41; Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs 2011). They are also becoming better educated (Jacobsen and Liversage 2010) and commit less crime (Andersen and Tranæs 2011: 11–16). A majority of Danes now say they prefer multiculturalism to monoculturalism (TNS Gallup 2011). However one should not underestimate the possibility that specific events – consider for examples the publication of twelve controversial Muhammed cartoons in 2005 – may reverse this trend.

Liberal theory and the Danish debate on multiculturalism

I conclude this chapter with a discussion of Danish debates on multiculturalism from a normative, political theory perspective. Political theorists who are attracted to multiculturalism often defend their claims on the basis of a liberal concern for equality of opportunity, suggesting that such equality requires sensitivity to the distinct cultural and religious interests of different individuals or groups (Cohen

1999; Holtug 2009; Kymlicka 1995; Modood 2007; Parekh 2006). Thus, specific options may have different values for people depending on their cultural and religious affiliation, such as the option of going to (a Protestant) church, or celebrating Christmas; and equality of opportunity requires equalizing the value of the options available to people (Holtug 2009).

A criticism often raised against multiculturalism in Denmark pertains to this egalitarian ideal. It consists in labelling group-differentiated rights (and even difference-blind minority accommodation) 'special rights' (*særrettigheder*), thus implicitly suggesting that minorities receive special – and especially good – treatment. In other words, the charge is that such rights involve discrimination. However, what the liberal argument suggests is that minorities should sometimes be accommodated insofar as this is necessary in order for them to obtain *equal* opportunities, not *better* opportunities. Therefore, insofar as such accommodation would in fact give minorities better opportunities than the majority, it would not be justified by the argument.

It should also be pointed out that while this objection to multiculturalism gains rhetorical appeal from the label *special* rights, highlighting how these rights are granted only to some, *all* rights are in fact special in this sense. For example, minors are not granted the right to vote, people who have jobs are not granted unemployment benefits, the healthy are not offered publicly funded medical treatments and so on. Arguably, what makes it just to restrict unemployment benefits to the unemployed is that this contributes to equality of opportunity. And, to the extent that multicultural accommodation is justified, the argument presented above suggests that this is for exactly the same reason.

Often, political rejection of multiculturalism in Denmark is also based on claims about how multiculturalism facilitates the emergence of parallel societies, school segregation, crime and the deterioration of the welfare state. However, the causal mechanisms assumed in these linkages are rarely spelled out and, indeed, are more difficult to establish than is acknowledged by critics (Kymlicka 2010; Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010). No doubt some kinds of multicultural policies may promote parallel societies, but this does not imply that all will.

In a recent influential Danish book, Jens-Martin Eriksen and Frederik Stjernfelt raise two further objections to multiculturalism. The first is that multiculturalism shares with conservative

nationalism a series of dubious 'culturalist' assumptions, including the following: there are no impartial values on the basis of which differences between cultures can be normatively assessed; all cultures are entitled to tolerance or recognition; cultures are unified, organic entities in which the importance of each part can only be understood in relation to the whole; once individuals have been formed by their culture they become incapable of adopting other cultural perspectives on the world; each culture possesses a form of dignity that demands our respect (Eriksen and Stjernfelt 2008).

I support Eriksen's and Stjernfelt's reservations about many of these culturalist claims. However, the argument presented above relies on none of them. The only relation assumed between cultures and their members is that the value an option has for an individual depends on his or her cultural affiliation. For example, having a holiday at Christmas (or at Eid) may have a different value depending on one's religion.

The second criticism raised by Eriksen and Stjernfelt (2008: 190) is that group-differentiated rights may conflict with individual rights. For example, a right to affirmative action in universities may conflict with the right to be admitted on the basis of merit. However, not all group-differentiated rights give rise to a conflict of rights in this manner. Thus, even if Sikhs are exempted from a requirement to wear a helmet, this does not seem to *conflict* with other people's rights or interests. In addition, it is a general feature of rights that they may conflict with other rights; this has nothing in particular to do with group-differentiated multicultural rights. Thus, social rights may conflict with liberty rights but unless we are libertarians, this will not discourage us from endorsing social rights. Finally, the solution in cases of conflict is to weigh up the different considerations, in this particular case a meritocratic principle against a concern for equality of opportunity. This is not to prejudge how these particular values should be weighed in cases of conflict, but merely to point out that such weighing is a general aspect of rights.

What many of the objections raised here have in common is that they ascribe problems to multiculturalism that are in fact general aspects of theories of justice. Examples include the claim that group-differentiated rights are special rights, and that such rights may come into conflict with other rights. Thus, the case made against multiculturalism in Danish debates does not challenge multiculturalism in its strongest version. Whether such a multiculturalism is ultimately persuasive is a question for continuing examination.

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