

Danish Multiculturalism, Where Art Thou?

Nils Holtug, Centre for the Study of Equality and Multiculturalism, University of Copenhagen

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1. INTRODUCTION

It would be presumptuous to speak of a backlash of multicultural policies in Denmark, because in Denmark such policies never really gained much prominence in the first place. Thus, when Danish politicians and political commentators announce the end of multiculturalism, they seem to mostly express a desire that things should stay this way and perhaps a desire for more restrictive immigration and integration policies. A very recent example is Søren Pind's (2011) denunciation of multiculturalism, following his appointment as Minister of Integration in March 2011. Pind here echoed recent statements by David Cameron and Angela Merkel, and confirmed the general tenets of a statement he had made on his blog three years earlier, where he stated: "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).

In light of Danish integration policies, it may seem that a paper on multiculturalism in Denmark is really addressing a non-issue – and so at least it should have the academic virtue of being *short*. However, while multiculturalism may not have been centre stage when it comes to state policies, political debates on immigration and integration have often addressed multicultural issues and it is interesting that such debates seem to have been particularly heated in Denmark and, indeed, to have resulted in particularly restrictive policies here. Furthermore, it is interesting that while Denmark has some of the most restrictive policies in Europe (Think Tank on Integration in Denmark 2004; Kærgård 2010b: 478), a tough debate, and is often perceived as being rather hostile to immigrants, a number of studies indicate that Danes are no more hostile

or intolerant than other peoples in Europe, and in fact they are becoming more and more positive towards immigrants. Indeed, we might here speak of a 'Danish paradox', and in the present paper I shall try to discern a possible explanation.

I need to make a couple of introductory remarks. First, it is important to understand 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. Thus, 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).

Second, I shall take multiculturalism to be 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 2000; 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.

Nevertheless, it is important to notice 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 recognising diversity within a common curriculum in schools does not differentiate the rights of school children on the basis of culture or religion, but rather prescribes the same treatment for everyone (Banting et al 2006: 87). Indeed, 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. For example, whether a multicultural concern for the religious commitments of Muslim school children and their families is best captured by a

general school holiday on *Eid-al-fitr* at particular schools or an exemption for Muslim children so that they can skip classes may depend on various factors such as the number of Muslim school children and their dispersion on different schools.

In the following, I first give an overview of Danish immigration and integration policies, focusing especially on their (lack of) multicultural aspects. Then I 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 regarding multiculturalism, in part in order to determine to what extent policies have matched attitudes. Finally, I consider the Danish discussion of multiculturalism from a normative, political theory perspective, to assess the strength of various arguments.

2. POLICIES ON IMMIGRATION AND INTEGRATION

Denmark is in many ways a very homogenous society, by international standards.¹ Nevertheless, like other European states, it has experienced increasing levels of immigration from non-Western countries in recent times, beginning with the arrival of guest workers in the 1960's and 1970's. In 1973, policies were implemented to halt immigration due to the recession, but the number of non-Western immigrants has nevertheless continued to rise due to 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 in 2005 (Kærgård 2010a: 52).

As guest workers began to arrive, a pragmatic approach to integration was adopted (Hedetoft 2008: 47), the chief concern being that immigrants should fill gaps on the labour market, where this would in turn provide the required level of integration until the time when they were expected to return to

¹ For example, this is so both in terms of ethnicity and religion. Thus, in 2005 85 per cent of the Danish population were members of the State Lutheran Church – Muslims being the second largest religion, with 3 per cent (Kærgård 2010b: 475).

their country of origin. However, the pragmatic approach has been increasingly supplemented with policies that aim at limiting immigration and integrating foreigners into what is perceived as the 'Danish way of life'. This development has culminated with the election of a liberal-conservative coalition in 2001, relying systematically for support on the votes of the nationalist Danish People's Party. It is generally agreed that the election of this coalition, as well as their victory in the two consecutive elections since then, has been heavily influenced by their increasing restrictive policies on immigration and integration, including tightened immigration requirements (for example, to avoid that Denmark becomes a 'refugee magnet'), reduced social benefits for immigrants, more restrictive rules for citizenship and permanent residence (including more difficult language tests and knowledge tests regarding Danish politics, history and culture), as well as a 'tougher' terminology when addressing the crime, educational underachievement, unemployment, and (allegedly) illiberal practices of (some) immigrants and their descendents.

While this restrictive line has been backed up by a parliamentary majority – and in many cases a large majority, that includes the Social Democrats – it has also been accompanied by fierce public debates. Perhaps particularly controversial has been the so-called 24-year rule for family reunification of third country nationals, requiring, amongst other things, both spouses to be at least 24-years old, more strongly attached to Denmark than to any other country, to be self-supporting, and that the prospective immigrant must pass a test, showing basic knowledge of Danish language and society. The government is presently working on a proposal to render this rule more selective, as regards attracting qualified labour. Thus, applicants will need a certain number of points to qualify, where points can be obtained in four categories; education, work experience, language qualifications and 'other'. For example, a PhD or Master's degree from a Danish university or from a list of the world's top 20 universities will suffice, if other demands are also met (Stefansson et al 2011). The original age requirement is dropped, but applicants nevertheless need more points if they are younger than 24-years old.

Other controversial policies have included 'start help' (*starthjælp*), which gives immigrants a lower level of social benefits the first 7 years they are in

Denmark (Kærgård 2010a: 59),² 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 from the social liberal party (Radikale Venstre), the government has defended these restrictions as being 'tough but fair'.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the pragmatic approach has been abandoned. In the recent MIPEX (Migrant Integration Policy Index) III, Denmark is ranked just above the EU average regarding the implementation of policies that are conducive to integration (MIPEX III 2011: 11). And this overall score is based on both high and low performances in the different aspects of integration that are measured. Thus, Denmark does relatively well regarding labour market mobility, education, political participation and long-term residence, but poorly regarding anti-discrimination, access to nationality and (especially) family reunification.

At least two factors seem to have played an important role in shaping the restrictive Danish policies on immigration and integration. First, calculations indicating that non-Western immigrants are costly for the welfare state. These calculations showed that while, in for example 2000, the typical profile regarding net transfers to the welfare state was that these are positive in the age-interval mid-twenties to early sixties, there was no age group in which non-Western immigrants on average have positive net transfers (Tranæs and Zimmermann 2004: 4; Wadensjö and Gerdes 2004: 334).³ This caused economists and politicians to worry that immigration tends to undermine the basis for the

² This scheme has been criticized by, e.g., the Danish Economic Council for not leading to higher levels of employment amongst immigrants, which was the official motivation for the scheme, but rather just leading immigrants into poverty (Danish Economic Council 2006: 275).

³ However, it should be noted that *descendents* of non-Western immigrants did not differ significantly from the typical profile of 'Danes' (Tranæs and Zimmermann 2004: 4).

Danish welfare state, with its high levels of social spending, even by European standards.⁴ The response has then been two-fold; both to reduce the intake of asylum seekers and people seeking family reunification and to decrease social benefits for immigrants.⁵

Second, but probably not independently, there has been a growing discontent in the Danish population with what has been experienced as too lenient policies, resulting in growing support for the Danish People's Party, but also for the liberal-conservative coalition who have voiced similar concerns, and done so prior to for example the Social Democrats. Of course, there is an issue here of the extent to which politicians have been influenced by the public and vice versa, and presumably the causal chains go both ways. Either way, popular support for restrictive policies has been a necessary condition for their implementation, and indeed many Danes have been concerned about, for example, welfare costs, parallel societies and forced marriages, as well as the crime rates and educational underachievement of immigrants and their descendents.

These developments have not produced a climate particularly conducive to multicultural policies and indeed, scholars have generally observed not only an apparent lack of such policies, but have also to some extent labelled existing

⁴ According to the latest assessment of the net costs of immigration, immigrants and descendents from 'less developed countries' cost the Danish state respectively 4,0 billion DKK and 11,7 billion DKK in 2010. However, it should be noted that the group of descendents is relatively young and so will both involve fewer costs and contribute more later in their lives. Thus, it is estimated that this group will net contribute 4,2 billion DKK in 2050, when the group of Danes without an immigrant background will cost 38,9 billion DKK, primarily because of its demographic composition (Regeringens arbejdsgruppe om udredning af indvandringens økonomiske konsekvenser 2011: 10).

⁵ The liberal-conservative government's changes in immigration and integration policies from 2002 are estimated to have saved the Danish state 4,3 billion DKK or 0,29 per cent of the GNP in 2006 (Regeringens arbejdsgruppe om udredning af indvandringens økonomiske konsekvenser 2011: 42).

policies assimilationist (Hedetoft 2010; Jensen 2010; cf. Mouritsen 2006).⁶ In fact, in the index of multicultural policies for immigrants used by Banting et al (2006: 86), Denmark scores zero out of a possible 8.0. By comparison, Australia scores 7.0, Belgium 3.5, Canada 7.5, France 2.0, Italy 1.5, the Netherlands 4.5, Sweden 3.0, the UK 5.0, and the US 3.0. Here, the main multicultural policies referred to by Banting et al (2010: 56-7; cf. Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010: 3) are:

- (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 or media licensing.
- (4) Exemptions from dress codes, Sunday closing legislation etc. (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.

While, indeed, multicultural policies of these kinds have played a limited role in Denmark, it may be worth mentioning a few exceptions. Thus, Sikh men are exempted from the requirement of wearing a helmet when riding a motorbike. Furthermore, the liberal Danish rules for 'free schools' (*friskoler*), and the high level of financial support they receive, makes 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 when the duty of municipalities to provide mother-tongue instruction for immigrant children was abandoned in 2002 (Jensen 2010: 194). Nevertheless, municipalities may still

⁶ Along these lines, Ulf Hedetoft (2010) titles his contribution to an anthology on the multiculturalism backlash in Europe "Denmark versus Multiculturalism".

choose to provide mother-tongue instruction, and indeed 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 recently 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). Furthermore, some schools with many Muslim children choose to give all children a day off at *Eid-al-fitr*.

However, there is one domain in which Denmark has implemented highly multicultural policies at the level of the state, namely regarding national minorities and 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 the two as autonomous provinces (Adamo 2009: 210). Furthermore, Greenland and the Faroe Islands have quotas in the Danish Parliament, where each is secured two seats. Indeed, in the index of multicultural policies for indigenous peoples used by Banting et al (2006: 86), Denmark scores 6.0 out of a possible 9.0.

3. DISCOURSES ON INTEGRATION AND SOCIAL COHESION

Moving now from policies to the discourses in terms of which they have been discussed and justified, I want to emphasize a focal point in recent Danish debates on integration and immigration, namely the significance that has been attached to *social cohesion*.

The concern for social cohesion has played an increasingly important role in Danish politics since former Prime Minister, Poul Nyrup Rasmussen (Social Democrats), in the late 1990's began to express a concern for 'cohesion' as the glue that holds society together. However, with the election of the liberal-conservative coalition in 2001 social cohesion increasingly became 'ethnicized', in the sense that ethnic and other forms of diversity was considered 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 made most elaborately by former Minister of the Interior, Karen Jespersen, who links 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 ethno-culturally homogenous nation. This homogeneity and its positive effects, however, are perceived as under threat:⁷

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 ethno-cultural 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.

If immigrants are to feel attracted to the value-community on which Danish society is based, it is crucial that one speaks clearly and with pride about the central values and their significance for the Danish society’s qualities. (Jespersen and Pittelkow 2005: 98-99)

Perhaps one reason why social cohesion has played such a significant role in Danish debates on immigration and integration 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 so relatively low economic incentives to work (Svendsen and Svendsen 2006: 80-81).

⁷ For critical discussion, see Holtug (2010a; 2010b).

In any case, social cohesion is considered to be under threat, but also something necessary to avoid religious and political conflicts, parallel societies, crime, and to secure the level of solidarity between citizens required for upholding the welfare state. This has resulted in a fierce struggle over 1) what values are indeed conducive to social and political stability, and 2) what values define what it means to be Danish, where it is usually assumed, without argument, that the answers to 1) and 2) coincide. Most recently, a 'value commission' has been established by the government to scrutinize what values are important for Danes (Ministry of Culture 2011). Of course, not all discussions are about values that promote integration and foster cohesion – for example, discussions of social benefits to immigrants have often focussed on purely economic issues, including economic incentives to work – but there can be no doubt that these values have played a prominent role.

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 on which individuals interact in a group, including the distribution of social and cultural advantages, with the aim of securing social goods in that group, such as trust, cooperation, stability, belonging, solidarity and justice.

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

Increasingly, this liberal conception is supplemented with republican ideas about active or democratic citizenship (*medborgerskab*), as when the government (2011: 6) in the Action Plan stresses the need for immigrants to become active citizens, and supports citizenship classes in schools. In fact, active

citizenship has become quite a buzzword, both at the level of the state and in municipalities (see also, for example, Municipality of Copenhagen 2011). In part, perhaps this focus on active citizenship is 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 rather unclear what exactly active citizenship is supposed to amount to. In fact, the term seems to be in danger of becoming an almost purely prescriptive term, used only to condone specific policies and practices, but with no particular descriptive content.⁸ 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: 14-5).

Apart from being used in the official justification of policies at the level of the state and in municipalities, 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. Indeed, it is sometimes said 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, this last idea about the basis of inclusiveness seems mistaken. Even democratic citizenship presupposes a joint commitment to liberal, democratic values and to a set of procedures for negotiating disagreements. Rather, 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 differences.

However, while active citizenship has indeed become a buzzword amongst policy makers, this does not imply that all policies actually comply with

⁸ Nevertheless, for an attempt to put some flesh on the bones of active citizenship in a Danish context, see e.g. Korsgaard et al (2007).

this particular community conception. For example, former Minister of Culture in the liberal-conservative coalition, Brian Mikkelsen, commissioned a mono-cultural 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). Indeed, Mikkelsen (2004) described Danish authors as the “voice of the nation”, securing a Danish identity and sense of history. The community conception expressed here seems more in line with that of conservative nationalism than with active citizenship – a conception that after all 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. For example, the December 2010 test included questions about Danish authors, painters and athletes.

Indeed, even in the very policy documents that invoke active citizenship as the basis for Danish integration policies, one sometimes finds what seems to be a cultural or religious bias. For example, it is curious that the Action Plan referred to above expresses a deep concern for anti-discrimination and emphasizes the need to fight anti-Semitism (Government 2011: 2-3, 7), and yet it does not mention discrimination against other specific ethnic or religious groups, including Muslims.⁹

While some policies and influential discourses thus deviate from liberalism and/or republican ideas about active citizenship, others rather assume (or are compatible with) particular interpretations. Some discourses, for

⁹ The Action Plan does mention equal treatment in relation to ‘new Danes’ (*nydanskere*) – a term generally used to refer to non-Western immigrants and their descendents – and then goes on to stress a) that minorities sometimes discriminate against other minorities (a theme that has mostly been debated in relation to Muslims discriminating against Jews), b) gender issues in relation to ethnic discrimination (a theme that has mostly been discussed in relation to the verbal abuse of ethnic Danish girls by some Muslim boys), and c) that the sort of negative thinking that makes people see racism and discrimination everywhere needs to be stopped (Government 2011: 4).

example, lean towards liberal nationalism. According to liberal nationalism, 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, cultural background and in the Danish language (Jespersen and Pittelkow 2005: 25).¹⁰ And 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 particular Lutheran justification of liberal neutrality endorsed by parts of the Liberal Party (*Venstre*) in the liberal-conservative coalition. Thus, while former Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen's statement that there should be less religion in the public sphere seems reminiscent of a French republican conception of *laïcité*, his justification was not republican but 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 accept only means for securing them that are compatible with liberalism, conservative nationalists believe that 'integration' requires assimilation to an entire culture or way of life, to the extent it is even possible. For example, Søren Krarup, a priest and MP for the Danish People's Party, 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

¹⁰ For further elaboration on the idea that Jespersen promotes a form of liberal nationalism, see Holtug (2005).

they imply equal treatment, rather than a policy of ‘Denmark for the Danes’ (Krarup 2001: 46). Indeed, he is highly critical of liberal human rights – rights he considers, echoing Burke, ideological; abstract claims that have no founding in the concrete (national) history and lives of actual people (Krarup 2001: 46).¹¹

Like the other community conceptions mentioned above, conservative nationalism harbours distinct ideas about what factors are conducive to social cohesion. In a book on social cohesion, Kasper Støvring (2010) – a Danish academic and frequent participant in public debates – argues that in Denmark cohesiveness, including trust, presupposes a national culture that encompasses a common Danish history, Danish language, a common (protestant) religion, and virtues such as, amongst others, 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, whereas (Rawlsian) liberalism is at the thin end and active citizenship and liberal nationalism are somewhere in between.

In debates, the Danish People’s Party have especially targeted Muslims and expressed doubts about the compatibility of Islam and liberal values and labelled Islam an aggressive, oppressive, sexist, expansionist ideology. For example, Pia Kjaersgaard, MP and chairman of the party, has suggested “Islam is, in essence ... a religion that cherishes violence”. Similarly, Muslim symbols such as headscarves are considered sexist and, in fact, “un-Danish” (a term that has spread from the nationalist right to mainstream Danish politics and is generally used to discredit ideas with which one disagrees). Indeed, both Kjaersgaard and Søren Krarup have compared the Muslim headscarf – as a symbol of Islam – to a swastika.¹²

Unsurprisingly, then, both conservative and liberal nationalists have been highly critical of multiculturalism (Jespersen and Pittelkow 2005; Krarup 2001). For example, Krarup (2001: 114) associates multiculturalism with a loss of

¹¹ For further elaboration on the idea that Krarup promotes a form of conservative nationalism, see Holtug (2005).

¹² For these and similar quotes, see <http://www.humanisme.dk/hate-speech/samlet.php>.

identity and “contempt for human beings and rape of the people”. Of course, in debates these different discourses are not always easily disentangled, and several discourses may be represented by one and the same person. Thus, when Minister of Integration, Søren Pind, first declared his commitment to assimilation, he wrote:

I endorse a particular form of immigration – but I will do my utmost to fight multiculturalism (democratically, of course). It is this lie about all cultures being equal that has led to a situation in which – out of a strange sense of concern – pork is no longer served in many, many of our institutions in for example Copenhagen. For religious reasons, religious hymns are no longer sung ... (Pind 2008)

Here, Pind is obviously concerned with preserving aspects of Danish culture that go beyond liberal institutions. But when confronted with his claims about assimilation, after becoming Minister of Integration, Pind's (2011) concern was rather with what he labelled ‘democratic assimilation’, and in particular with liberal values such as freedom of speech, equal treatment, freedom of religion etc.

Also, it may be worth mentioning what may be dubbed a process of ‘liberalization’ in Danish integration debates, where policies that are originally conceived on the nationalist right travel into mainstream Danish politics, but undergo a transformation in the process where the justification for the policy is gradually cashed out in more liberal terms. A case in point is a law – passed in 2009 – 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 Danish People's Party in terms of concerns about sexism and the alleged totalitarian connotations of Muslim headscarves, and while the debate that preceded the new 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 to break taboos, break the silence and to counter political correctness.¹³ Here, 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. Indeed, Kærgård (2010b: 483) notes 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. And one reason may be that the discursive climate described above has pushed critics of existing policies into a defensive position, where it has been more important for them to try to fend off new restrictions than to propose new (politically unrealistic) policies to accommodate difference. Also, several surveys seem to suggest that multiculturalism has limited support in the population and this may of course make mainstream political parties think twice before they propose multicultural policies.

3. DANISH ATTITUDES

In a survey of 27 countries in 2003 by the International Social Survey Program (ISSP), Denmark came out as the country most opposed to multiculturalism. Thus, here 77 per cent responded that it is best for a country if different races and ethnic groups adjust to and participate in 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 (Larsen 2008: 27).¹⁴ In fact, even among people who voted for parties to the left of the Social Democrats, 44

¹³ Thus, in important respects, the Danish debate seems similar to debates in e.g. the Netherlands (Prins and Saharso 2010: 74).

¹⁴ Interestingly, Sweden was the country that immediately followed Denmark; here 73 per cent supported adjustment and participation (Larsen 2008: 29).

per cent favoured adjustment to and participation in society whereas only 32 per cent favoured maintaining customs and traditions. Furthermore, Denmark was also the country with the highest percentage of people who completely or partly disagreed that ethnic minorities should receive public support to maintain their customs and traditions, namely 54 per cent (Larsen 2008: 32).

However, in the Eurobarometer 2000 survey, only 25 per cent responded that in order to become fully accepted members of society, people belonging to minority groups must give up their own culture, whereas 69 per cent tended to disagree (Thalhammer et al 2001: 48). This may seem to suggest that support for multiculturalism declined dramatically in Denmark between 2000 and 2003. However, this would be a rather premature conclusion to draw, since the questions are formulated quite differently.

In fact, while social scientists sometimes do so, we need to be careful when interpreting these results as commitments to multiculturalism and assimilationism/mono-culturalism. Thus, when 77 per cent responded in the ISSP survey that it is best for a country if different races and ethnic groups adjust to and participate in the society that surrounds them, this formulation commits respondents to assimilation only in a very weak sense. Indeed, presumably most multiculturalists would be quite prepared to say that some form of adjustment and participation is desirable, if not required. And so when 69 per cent in the Eurobarometer 2000 survey disagreed with the claim that minority groups should give up their own culture, this may suggest that many Danes consider adjustment and participation compatible with maintaining one's culture. In fact, this combination of views is what is usually referred to as commitments to 'integration' rather than 'assimilation'. And this interpretation is further confirmed by a survey from 1996, according to which 85 per cent agreed that immigrants should be allowed to keep up their language and culture (Togeby 1998: 1147). Furthermore, it is confirmed in an analysis of the Eurobarometer 2000, according to which expectations of 'assimilation' amongst Danes seem "not

to focus on cultural habits in general, but only on those aspects of cultural life that violate domestic legislation” (Thalhammer et al 2001: 48).¹⁵

Interestingly, while Denmark has an above average rate that responds that minority groups must give up their own culture in EU15 (in this respect Denmark is 5th after Belgium, Greece, the Netherlands and France), it also has an above average rate that disagrees with this statement. This indicates that Danes are a particularly polarized people on issues of integration, which is a result that is further confirmed by a more thorough analysis of both the Eurobarometer 2000 and the ISSP 2003 survey (Larsen 2008: Ch. 7; cf. Andersen 2002: 15). For example, in a typology of people according to their attitudes towards minority groups on the basis of the Eurobarometer 2000 (Thalhammer et al 2001: 25), it is concluded that while Denmark has the 3rd highest percentage of intolerants (20 per cent) in EU15, it also has the highest percentage of actively tolerant people together with Sweden (33 per cent).

Related to the issue of multiculturalism, the Eurobarometer 2000 also revealed that Danes had the highest support in EU15 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).

Furthermore, it is interesting that while 25 per cent of Danes agreed in 2000 that minority groups must give up their own culture, this was in fact a drop from 35 per cent in 1997 – whereas in most other EU15 countries, the percentage had gone up in this period (Thalhammer et al 2001: 58).

In a more recent survey, the European Values Study in 2008, 16 per cent of Danish respondents said that it is best for society if immigrants maintain their own customs, while 49 per cent said that it is best if they conform to Danish

¹⁵ Another dimension in which many Danes may expect ‘assimilation’ is regarding language. At least 43 per cent of Danish respondents in the ISSP 2003 stated that *speaking* Danish is important for *being* Danish, which was the third highest proportion amongst the 27 countries (Larsen 2008: 56).

traditions (Borre 2011: 125). Interestingly, fewer people made either response than in 1999, where 19 per cent were in favour of immigrants maintaining their own customs and 63 per cent in favour of them conforming to Danish traditions. This may suggest that there has been no major fall in support for multiculturalism in the period, which includes the election of the liberal-conservative government in 2001.

Again, we should be careful when interpreting these results as commitments to, respectively, multiculturalism and assimilationism. For example, it is difficult to know what sort of customs and traditions people have in mind when they say that immigrants should conform to Danish norms. If these traditions are political and pertain to, for example, conforming to Danish laws, paying one's taxes and respecting people's right to equal opportunities, then respondents are not expressing an expectation of assimilation in any strong sense. In fact, presumably liberal multiculturalists will have such expectations as well. If, on the other hand, people have in mind more religious and cultural traditions, they will of course be expressing a strong such expectation.

Finally, in a poll following Søren Pind's recent denunciation of multiculturalism, 54 per cent responded that they were in favour of a multicultural society, whereas 29 per cent responded that they were in favour of a mono-cultural society (TNS Gallup A/S 2011). This was so even though 58 per cent agreed that multiculturalism has pushed back Danish culture and 45 per cent agreed that a multicultural society means 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.

Thus, the evidence presented above is mixed and does not justify a strong conclusion about commitments to multiculturalism, integration and assimilation in Denmark. On the other hand, one should not diminish the importance of the finding that a larger proportion of Danes express worries about various proxies to multiculturalism than in most of the other Western countries surveyed. The question is how exactly this result should be interpreted, and how it should be explained.

The findings do not particularly suggest that Danes in general are more hostile or intolerant towards immigrants than people in most other European or Western countries. And in at least one respect, it would be surprising if this were the case. On one standard type of 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 other European countries, the 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. And indeed, Denmark follows the general trend in that resistance to immigration and immigrants is highly overrepresented amongst these groups (Andersen 2002: 16; Borre 2011; Larsen 2008). However, first, Denmark has relatively few non-Western immigrants compared to European countries such France, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the UK. And second, Denmark has high levels of social security. These two facts may be expected to decrease competition and its effects on low-skilled Danes compared to low-skilled workers in large parts of Europe.

More to the point, the received view amongst social scientists working on attitudes to immigrants in Denmark seems to be that Danes are no more hostile or intolerant than other peoples in Europe (Andersen 2002: 15; Larsen 2008: 64; Nielsen 2004: Ch. 9), and nor are they been becoming more so over time – in fact, in the last 2-3 decades Danes have been getting less hostile and more tolerant (Andersen 2002: 8-11; Borre 2011: 124-28; Gundelach 2011: 22; Togeby 1998).

A few results may illustrate these points. Thus, in the Eurobarometer 2000, Danes were above the EU15 average regarding, for example, support for outlawing discrimination against minority groups; encouraging the creation of organisations 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 also suggests that Danes are no more hostile or intolerant than other peoples. However, as pointed out above, Danes are particularly polarized on issues of immigration and integration. For example, relative to the other countries surveyed, there are both many Danes who agree and disagree that there should be a right to citizenship for people who are born in Denmark, even if their parents don't have citizenship (Larsen 2008: 65). In fact, amongst the 27 countries surveyed in the ISSP 2003, Danes are the second most polarized people overall, the French being the most polarized (Larsen 2008: 71).

On a few issues in the Eurobarometer 2000, however, Danes had less positive views about immigrants than the average for EU15. Thus, Danes were more inclined to 'blame minorities' – for example, 78 per cent agreed that too many children from minority groups in schools decrease the quality of education, where the average was 52 per cent (Thalhammer 2001: 37). Danes were also more disturbed by the presence of minorities in their lives – for example, 31 per cent responded that they found the presence of people of another religion disturbing in their daily life, the average being 14 per cent (Thalhammer 2001: 42).

But in general, it seems fair to say that Danes are no more hostile or intolerant than other peoples in Europe. So 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 above. In part, the polarization in Denmark may provide an explanation. The polarization has meant that relatively many voters have moved from the Social Democrats (and to some extent also other parties on the left) to the Danish People's Party. And indeed, the Danish People's 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 has needed to accommodate some of the wishes of the Danish People's Party to maintain their parliamentary majority, but also increased their own votes by attracting voters from the left who were unsatisfied with what they considered too permissive immigration and integration policies.

Regarding changes in attitudes over time, the suggestion made by commentators, both in Denmark and abroad, that Danes are becoming more

hostile and intolerant (Nielsen 2004), cannot be confirmed by surveys. Thus, according to the European Values Study, whereas in 1990, 53 per cent agreed and 38 per cent disagreed that Danish labour should be preferred, 25 per cent agreed and 65 per cent disagreed in 2008 (Borre 2011: 125). And 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). Furthermore, while 39 per cent disagreed in 1970 that foreigners should be entitled to Danish citizenship only when they have learned to behave like Danes, 52 per cent disagreed in 1993; and while 31 per cent disagreed that some ethnic groups are more intelligent than others in 1970, the number had increased to 59 per cent in 1993 (Togeby 1998: 1143). Togeby (1998: 1151-2; cf. Gaasholt and Togeby 1995: Ch. 5) concludes both that Danes have never been as tolerant as their reputation may have suggested, and that intolerance has not risen but rather decreased a little since 1970, thus puncturing the “myth of a tolerant people’s gradual decline”.

Focussing now on the sort of issues Danes tend to find problematic regarding immigrants, at least many of these can be said to express worries about respect for the law and about the welfare state (Nielsen 2004: 225). And regarding the latter, as we have seen, these are worries that have also played a prominent role for many politicians and economists. In 1993, 76 per cent agreed that immigrants increase Denmark’s economic difficulties (Gaasholt and Togeby 1995: 40). The same year, only 34 per cent disagreed that many immigrants have come to Denmark to exploit the welfare system. This was a dramatic drop from 64 per cent in 1984, and in 1996, the number had further dropped to 32 per cent (Togeby 1998: 1147). In 2001, 47 per cent held that public expenses for refugees and immigrants were too high and 57 per cent disagreed that they should have the same social benefits as ‘Danes’ (Nielsen 2004: 224). Furthermore, in a recent poll, 59 per cent support 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).

Regarding respect for the law, 68 per cent agreed in 1993 that immigration increases crime and violence (Gaasholt and Togeby 1995: 40). Furthermore, as pointed out above, the Eurobarometer 2000 survey indicated that where Danes generally expect assimilation is regarding those aspects of culture that violate Danish laws. And, as that survey also suggested, Danes are more worried than the EU15 average about the effects of minorities on the quality of education.

To some extent, even attitudes to multiculturalist policies may be affected by worries about the welfare state. Thus, as pointed out above, the argument that such policies may undermine social cohesion and the welfare state have played a significant role in Danish politics. Of course, not much is known about how multicultural policies affect social cohesion and the welfare state, although some studies indicate that neither public spending nor social cohesion suffer from such policies (Banting et al 2006; Crepaz 2006). More generally, Denmark has the highest level of trust in the world and this level has continually gone up during the last 10-20 years, even with the increasing levels of immigration from non-Western countries (Torpe 2010). In fact, immigrants from non-Western countries have far greater levels of trust than people in their countries of origin, suggesting that being integrated in Danish society positively affects their trust in other people (Svendsen and Svendsen 2006: 174).

Negative views regarding immigrants are of course not restricted to concerns about law and order and the welfare state. For example, 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 coloured people in the country (38 per cent), where at least the last statement may seem to involve a fairly obvious form of racism (Gaasholt and Togeby 1995: 40). Regarding the former claim, Danes seem particularly concerned about the effects of religion on intolerance and conflict, and more so than any other people in the ISSP 1998 (Andersen 2002: 23). Furthermore, in the same survey, 46 per cent responded that they have very little sympathy for Islam (Andersen 2002: 24). Also, according to a recent poll on attitudes to Muslims, 53 per cent hold that Muslims are to blame if they are criticized in Denmark (Nannestad 2011: 4). 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). Indeed, there is little doubt that many Danes are sceptical about Islam and in particular what is perceived as its 'illiberal' tenets.

Note, however, that these views do not necessarily translate into strong anti-immigrant preferences, or into stronger anti-immigration sentiments than in other countries. Thus, in the Eurobarometer 2000, 27 per cent of Danish respondents would accept people from Muslim countries who wish to work in the EU without restrictions and 61 per cent with restrictions, where both these figures are above the EU15 average (Thalhammer 2001: 32). Furthermore, in the recent poll on attitudes to Muslims referred to above, 68 per cent of all respondents who expressed an opinion disagreed that Islam, as a religion, is a threat to Denmark (Nannestad 2011: 1). 90 per cent of respondents who expressed an opinion stated that they don't care whether their neighbour is a Muslim or for example a Christian, and a small majority of all respondents said that they would not mind if their son or daughter married a Muslim (Nannestad 2011: 2).

I have been arguing that while, in general, Danes seem to be no more xenophobic or less tolerant than other peoples in Europe, to a considerable degree they are worried about the effects of immigration on the welfare state, perhaps in response to the idea that a large welfare state is particularly vulnerable. In this respect, it may also be worth mentioning that while Danes are not particularly proud of their nation, the particular aspects they are proud of, relative to other peoples, relate to the welfare state and to democracy. Thus, in the ISSP 2003, Danes came out prouder of their welfare state than any other people, whereas Swedes and Norwegians figured much longer down the list (Larsen 2008: 41). This suggests that the Danish national identity relies quite heavily on a commitment to the welfare state that, perhaps, is also relatively sensitive to perceived dangers.

I have also suggested above that worries about the welfare state may at least in part explain the lack of multicultural policies, because people may be worried about effects on social cohesion, as well as about making Denmark too 'hospitable' and therefore attractive for refugees and other potentially

'expensive' immigrants. This is in accordance 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, although in the case of Denmark it is more a matter of their not really taking off in the first place.

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 (il)liberal credentials of Islam, as pointed out above. There is of course a more fundamental question of what liberalism really requires in diverse societies, and Muslim headscarves may be quite illustrative of this. Thus, liberals disagree about whether they should respect headscarves out of concern for freedom of religion or oppose them (in the public sphere at least) because they symbolize the oppression of women (Joppke 2009a). Indeed, the further in the direction of what Joppke (2009b: 561) has dubbed militant (or illiberal) liberalism the majority goes, the more it will be inclined to see minority cultures as threatening to liberalism and, presumably, the less they will incline towards multiculturalism. A case in point is the often-heard argument that Muslim requests for shower curtains in schools should 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 homogenous society. Thus, there is some evidence from social psychology suggesting that majority groups tend to favour the assimilation of minority groups into a single culture, which is a way in which they may preserve their privileges, whereas minority groups to a greater extent 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.

Let me end this section by briefly considering what the future might look like regarding integration policies in Denmark. While Danes have been pushing for more restrictive immigration and integration policies, there is now some indication that they are content with the present level of restrictions. Thus, here in 2011, only 34 per cent think 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 chairman of the Social Democrats, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, that immigration policies are now tight enough (Politiken 2010). And while, as described above, the government is planning to further tighten the rules for family reunification, the majority of Danes do not support this proposal (DR 2010).

These attitudes may reflect that, in part as a consequence of policies to change immigration patterns to meet labour market needs, immigrants and descendents are now experiencing much higher levels of employment (Kærgård 2010: 41; Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs 2011). Furthermore, immigrants and their descendents are getting better educated (Jacobsen and Liversage 2010) and commit less crime (Andersen and Tranæs 2011: 11-16). Thus, at least some rather deep-felt concerns amongst Danes about the welfare state and law and order seem to give rise to fewer worries. Indeed, this may in itself translate into more accommodating views, such as when fewer people think Muslims are excessively accommodated in Denmark in 2011 than in 2010 and, as we have seen, a majority now in fact states that they prefer multiculturalism to mono-culturalism (GNS Gallup 2011). All this may suggest that at least the popular support for increasingly more restrictive policies is in decline, although one should not underestimate the likelihood that specific events will revive such concerns (consider, for example, the effect in Denmark of the Muhammed cartoons).

4. LIBERAL THEORY AND THE DANISH DEBATE ON MULTICULTURALISM

In this section, I want to briefly discuss some aspects of Danish debates on multiculturalism from a normative, political theory perspective. Let me first outline what I take to be the best liberal argument for multiculturalism. It is based on a liberal concern for equality of opportunity (and may, to varying degrees and in different forms, be found in the work of for example Cohen 1999; Kymlicka 1995; Modood 2007; and Parekh 2000).

1. Individuals should have equal opportunities.

2. Identity of choice-sets is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for equality of opportunity.
3. Rather, what is implied by equality of opportunity is that individuals should have *equally valuable* sets of options.
4. Different factors, including (bad) health, social circumstances and culture may pose obstacles for obtaining equal opportunities.
5. Cultural obstacles arise, in part, because representative democracies tend to favour the cultural majority.
6. Equality of opportunity requires inclusion of minorities, including cultural minorities, which may again (sometimes) require culturally sensitive policies such as difference-blind minority accommodation and group-differentiated rights.
7. Therefore, culturally sensitive policies such as difference-blind minority accommodation and group-differentiated rights are (sometimes) justified.

To see that identity of choice-sets cannot be necessary for equality of opportunity, consider the following case. Suppose we want to provide equal opportunities for a deaf and a blind person. Obviously we cannot give them *identical* choice-sets. But presumably this does not prevent of from giving them equal opportunities, where this will involve compensating them in various (and different) ways.

Nor can identity of choice-sets be a sufficient condition for equality of opportunity. If we require everyone to be a member of the Catholic Church (and have no other religious affiliation), then we are indeed giving people identical choice-sets (regarding religion), but hardly giving them equal opportunities. Rather, as the case of the deaf and the blind person suggests, we give people equal opportunities by giving them *equally attractive* sets of opportunities, where 'equally attractive' will have to be specified in terms of our favoured currency of egalitarian justice.¹⁶

¹⁶ I argue that identity of choice-sets is neither necessary, nor sufficient for equality of opportunity in Holtug (2009), which includes a critique of Brian

Now, people may face various obstacles to obtaining equal opportunities. They may, for example, suffer from a congenital disease that prevents them from working and so having an income. Likewise, they may have a family background that is low on the kind of cultural capital that gives success in the educational system. Indeed, lack of the relevant kind of cultural capital may be due to a person's social *or* cultural background, and so *either* may function as an obstacle in a particular societal setting. And there are of course also other ways in which a person's cultural background may give rise to a lower level of opportunities in such a setting, including if there is widespread discrimination.

In various ways, disadvantages to which one's culture may give rise may be a function of it being a minority culture, where some of these functions relate to the fact that society is organized as a representative democracy. Thus, the public (as well as – in some cases – the private) sector in representative democracies tend to favour the cultural majority, for example regarding religious holidays, official languages, uniforms etc. (Kymlicka 1995).

There are then different ways in which disadvantaged minorities can gain access to better opportunities, including difference-blind minority accommodation and group-differentiated rights. By 'difference-blind minority accommodation' I mean the accommodation of minorities by extending the range of opportunities for everyone. Whether it makes most sense to accommodate minorities by difference-blind or group-differentiated rights will then have to be settled in individual cases in a very pragmatic way. For example, it may often make most sense to extend a holiday at *Eid-al-fitr* to all children in a particular school, irrespective of their religious background, just as it would seem pointless to restrict the availability of halal meat in schools to Muslim children. On the other hand, it may well make sense to exempt only Sikhs from a requirement to a safety helmet on construction sites, and perhaps also to restrict mother-tongue instruction to children who have a relevant linguistic background.

Often, political rejections of multiculturalism in Denmark are based on claims about the effects of multiculturalism on, for example, parallel societies,

Barry's argument for the claim that identity of choice-sets are crucial (Barry 2001: Ch. 2).

school segregation, crime and the deterioration of the welfare state. However, the causal mechanisms assumed in these rejections are rarely spelled out and indeed, are much more difficult to establish than it 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.

Another criticism often raised 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. However, what the argument presented above 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 is also worth pointing out that while the criticism seems to gain rhetorical appeal from the label *special* rights, referring to the fact that 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 medical treatments etc. Arguably, what makes it just to restrict unemployment benefits to the unemployed is that this contributes to equality of opportunity. And, to the extent multicultural accommodation is justified, the argument presented above suggests that this is for exactly the same reason.

In a recent quite influential Danish book, Jens-Martin Eriksen and Frederik Stjernfelt raise two further objections to multiculturalism. According to the first, multiculturalism shares with conservative nationalism a whole bunch 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 an individual has been formed by her culture she becomes incapable of adopting other cultural perspectives on the

world; each culture possesses a form of dignity that demands our respect (Eriksen and Stjernfelt 2008).

In fact, I agree with 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 between cultures and their members assumed is that the value an option has for a person may depend on his or her cultural affiliation. For example, having a holiday at Christmas (or at Eid) may have different value depending on one's religion.

Another 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, first note that not all group-differentiated rights give rise to a conflict of rights in this manner. Thus, even if Sikhs are exempted from a helmet requirement, this does not seem to *conflict* with other people's rights or interests. Second, 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 of course 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.

In fact, what many of the objections raised have in common is that they ascribe alleged problems to multiculturalism that are in fact quite general aspects of theories of justice; for example, group-differentiated rights are special rights, and such rights may come into conflict with other rights. Thus, the case made against multiculturalism in Danish debates does not seem to me to have challenged multiculturalism in its strongest version. This, however, does of course not imply that such a multiculturalism is ultimately persuasive, which is a question that must be settled on the basis of a much more elaborate scrutiny of the most important arguments.

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