

FORUM: HOW ARE EUROPEANS MADE? DEBATING A NATIONAL MODELS APPROACH TO IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

What if National Models of Integration Did Not Exist?

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We seem to know exactly what we are talking about when we use a notion such as ‘national models of integration.’ However, closer observation reveals that this notion is not a research tool but rather an argument in the normative conflict over the integration of migrants and minorities. Therefore, it becomes problematic to use this notion as a framework of reference in the analysis of the *content* of public policies, institutional logics, and social practices in regard to citizenship.

I would also add that, in itself, the notion of a ‘model’ is useless for the very simple reason that these models do not exist and have never existed – or, at the very least, they never existed in the way we usually picture when we use them as an independent variable, and try to construct them as analytical framework labeled in terms of a ‘national idiom’ (Brubaker, 1992), a ‘philosophy of integration’ (Favell, 1998), or a ‘constellation of citizenship’ (Koopmans et al., 2005). However, if the ‘national models of integration’ which are described by most of the scholarship are useless to the analysis of citizenship, it is impossible to divest what they claim they analyze (‘models’ as a dependent variable) entirely of any relevance or any social function. But, when taken as ‘dependent variables,’ the social and institutional reality we usually discuss in terms of consistent, coherent, stable, and aprioristic ‘self-definitions of a nation’ ceases to be so consistent, so coherent, so stable, as it is suggested by our analytical frameworks. The distance between ‘models’ as independent and dependent variables is rarely controlled. In the end, we merely explain that France is republican because France’s dominant model (or philosophy, or idiom, or constellation) would be republican, or that the Netherlands are multicultural because this is what they would have been. Models are taken for granted, and scholars doing comparison tend to take them as a convenient substitute for reality (models fit categories used for comparison much easier than a complex social, institutional, or symbolic reality).

My point is this: an important aspect of this discussion must be the way the literature apprehends the role of ideas in the institutionalization of “models of

integration,” as well as the interplay between ideal frames, institutions, cultures, and identities. Thus, instead of looking at ‘pathologies,’ ‘counter-discourses,’ or ‘identity-based (Muslim) claims’ that would have challenged *pre-existing* ‘models,’ I argue that the problem of ‘models’ has to do with an ambiguous definition of these models in the literature, and *inter alia* the ambiguity of the *prima facie* conceptualization of national ‘idioms’ (Brubaker, 1992), ‘philosophies’ (Favell, 1998) or ‘constellations’ of citizenship (Koppmans et al., 2005). Once these ambiguities are made apparent, the issue of indicators assumes centerstage and must be discussed alongside these ambiguous research strategies. But ‘indicators’ are not the only problem. The problem is much wider and includes the very goal assigned by scholars to the sociology of integration: that is, proving the *a priori* existence of models.

Do we know what “models” are or do we want to prove they exist?

The issue of ‘models’ seems rather empirical in my view: when researchers go to the field¹, how can they make sense of the behavior of people who justify their actions using concepts such as the ‘Republic,’ ‘secularism,’ ‘integration,’ ‘multiculturalism,’ ‘pillarization,’ ‘ethnicity,’ ‘ethnic minorities,’ or ‘race’? Does a ‘model’ provide an explanation for all or part of the empirically observed reality?

A reflex of citizenship and immigration studies in the last thirty years or so has consisted of taking for granted the existence of ‘public philosophies’ that are more or less coherent or normatively consistent. These philosophies are used as yardsticks that reduce social, institutional, and political behaviors to ‘republicanism’ in France and to ‘multiculturalism’ (or ‘racial and ethnic communalism,’ in French ‘*communautarisme*’) in the Netherlands or Britain.

1 These questions stem from field research in military and healthcare institutions where the discourse of actors revealed the issue of ‘diversity’ to be framed by the obvious assertion that ‘we are governed by the principles of the Republic.’ See C. Bertossi and C. Wihtol de Wenden, *Les couleurs du drapeau : l’armée française face aux discriminations*. Paris: Robert Laffont, 2007.

As soon as the issue of the integration of migrants or minorities is raised at any level, these references are immediately summoned to frame the discussion. The ‘model’ is used to explain everything, including the various national structures of opportunity according to the various regimes of citizenship or religious ‘governance’; the collective mobilization of various groups of migrants in each country; the formal and informal institutional practices; the attitudes of minorities and national public opinion; the political discourse and forms of politicization of immigration and national identity. The institutions that ‘govern’ the cultural or religious diversity are said to derive from these historically rooted great ‘philosophies’; secularism is seen as a translation of the principles of the French Revolution; multiculturalism in the Netherlands is said to echo the ‘pillarization’ of Dutch society; and ‘race’ is portrayed as the product of British or American ‘racial and ethnic communalism.’

Yet, everyone certainly agrees that these ‘models’ are often laden with contradictions. In France, recent publications have highlighted the political power of these contradictions. They have also unearthed the complex ambiguities of French *color blindness* and have had an obvious impact on the potential of sociology to be a discipline that comprehends reality—for “the interest in ignorance”² of many scholars precludes the use of certain so-called ‘ethnic’ categories for reasons that have nothing to do with the conditions of legitimate scientific discourse and everything to do with the ideological nature of the public debates regarding these issues.

As a result of these contradictions, academic debate no longer consists of an effort to reveal republicanism as a ‘model of citizenship,’ but is rather a discussion linked to the ideological tug-of-war over a relatively hidden facet of the Republic, i.e. the ‘racist inequality’ that republicanism serves to hide or the “racialization of the republicans” (E. Fassin, 2006). This reveals a discursive slippage “from the social to the racial issue” and the impact of this transition increases the complexity of debates on cultural and religious diversity (D. Fassin, 2002). Thus, the abstract principles

2 A phrase borrowed from Patrick Simon.

of republican universalism are confronted with the realities of a *de facto* multicultural French society. This makes it possible then to propose a republicanism that is more in line with the motto of 'liberty, equality, fraternity' by correcting the ambiguities of the French 'model' or by adapting it to the 'diversity' of the social context.

These discussions are crucial and allow the clarification of the balance of power among the various interests involved in the republican argument. This makes them socially and politically relevant – and I, personally, am absolutely in their favor. However, these discussions will not provide an answer to the question of the 'republican model' itself. Rather, by highlighting the contradictions and costs of republicanism 'as it is,' the authors who are involved in this discussion are in the end only debating the cost of the discrepancy between praxis and the normative reference. This normative reference remains an imagined normative republic, characterized by abstract universalism, individual equality, state neutrality in matters of religion, and the work of integration institutions—in short, the same 'republican model' that is described by those for whom it represents an indisputable positive value.

In other words, we cannot break with the discourse that turns unique national characteristics into a model simply by point out its contradictions. Quite the opposite, we end up reluctantly confirming the obvious existence of this 'model' even if the overstatement of its principles needs to be nuanced. Debating 'republicanism' does not explain what the 'republican model' is; instead, it leaves the field researcher to ask: Does the 'model' explain the observed reality?

The crisis of models: a new paradoxical moment in European discourse

In the last ten years, this question has taken a specific turn in public debates in France and elsewhere in Europe. The choice between multiculturalism and republicanism, a choice that was long considered as the *summa divisio* of citizenship policies, culminated in a double failure: on the one hand, there was a 'backlash'

against multiculturalism in the Netherlands and Britain, while, on the other, French republicanism was not left unscathed by the 'integration crisis' which culminated in the 'suburban riots' of the fall of 2005.

This rhetoric regarding the failure of the 'models' developed on two speeds, beginning with the intense effort of "moral entrepreneurs" (Becker) to create a new public grammar and a new causal narrative of citizenship and identities—one which accepted that, when faced with the "Islam challenge," the traditional 'models' were no longer enough to respond to the 'new problem' of integration. Even worse, it was argued that these models were founded on principles that are not only no longer adapted to the current situation, but which were actually responsible for the 'integration crisis.' In 2004, for example, Trevor Philips, the President of the *Commission for Racial Equality* in Britain, explained that "multiculturalism is a solution of the past....It implies separation" (Philips, 2004), while Brian Barry gave normative legitimacy to this debate by proposing a very subtle philosophical critique of multiculturalism (Barry, 2001). In the Netherlands, an article published by Paul Scheffer in 2000 was closely preceded by a similar article by Paul Schnabel, another important opinion leader. Both argued that the crisis of integration in the Dutch context was a 'multicultural crisis,' caused by the Netherlands' tradition of multiculturalism. Although the framework of the debate in France did not *a priori* seem to suggest a confidence crisis or a rejection of 'republicanism,' the same rhetoric of maladaptation and normative failure of the "solutions of the past" to "today's problems" (i.e., Islam) was used, starting with the metaphor of the "lost territories of the republic" (Brenner, 2002).

Thus, spurred by this new debate, researchers became engrossed in attempting to provide an answer by measuring the potential 'crisis' of these 'models' (cf. Schain, 2008), without having clarified their academic definition, their heuristic power, and their institutional existence. This gave rise to a powerful paradox: never before did scholars take the obvious existence of these 'models' so much for granted as when they began discussing their 'crisis' or 'end.'

'Elusive models'

Beyond the various previously mentioned problems which hinder our ability to understand what the French, Dutch, or British 'models' are, is another aspect that is even more consequential for our discussion. It seems to me that in order to conduct a debate on the values of republicanism or multiculturalism as 'models,' we ought to be able to extract a sufficiently stable normative 'model' of the 'republic' in France or of 'multiculturalism' in the Netherlands or the United Kingdom in order to be able to use it as a standard in what we are attempting to explain.

However, the normative consistency of these models becomes difficult to grasp when we look back at the last three decades of politics and public policies of integration in France, the Netherlands, or Britain.

In the Netherlands, the idea of a 'multicultural model' easily escapes analysis. Behind the idea of a 'Dutch integration model,' the real issue is not to find out which normative type of multiculturalism could have produced the 'Dutch model,' but rather to understand why, despite the repetitive reversals in the problematization of the 'model,' the Netherlands are said to have adopted a 'multicultural model' that barely applies to a decade of public policies which were actually abandoned twenty years ago.

A comparable analysis may be done regarding the 'republican model' in France. Ever since the emergence of the integration of 'immigrants' as a political agenda item in the mid 1980s, we have found not one but at least four normative problematizations of the French 'model' (nationality in the 1980s, antidiscrimination in the 1990s, *laïcité* in the 2000s, and assimilation-cum-dignity in the 2010s). Each of these conceptualizes integration and the corresponding public response in a specific manner that clashes with

the three others: under the label of 'immigrants,' the concerned groups are never defined in the same way; behind the idea of a challenge to the republican concept of 'common belonging,' the diagnosis of the problem is never the same; behind the constant call for 'tradition' and the 'principles of the Republic,' the public response is always different and always clashes with the "historical republican foundation."

The British situation illustrates a third aspect of the difficulty of finding 'models,' especially while debating the crisis of these same models, for behind

the apparent 'crisis of multiculturalism' is in fact a reformulation of the objective of the negotiation of citizenship. Britain is certainly considered (by French scholars) as 'the other *communautariste* country' along with United States (Bleich, 2003). But here, just as in France or the Netherlands, even the idea of 'model' is difficult to grasp. The work done by

the most influential British authors may in fact be seen as an attempt to move from practice to a normative multicultural 'model' (e.g. Modood, 2005; Parekh, 2000). On the other hand, the 'multicultural crisis' seems to represent a new wave of transformation in the frameworks defining public debates and public interventions which has constantly shifted from 'race' to 'ethnicity' and now to 'religion.'

This repositions the 'crisis of models' discourse in a perspective that is no longer one of 'before' and 'after,' of a 'glorious era' which preceded a 'decline' or of a sudden and recent reversal that represents, in France, the passage from classical universalism to the new racialization; in the Netherlands, a slippage from tolerance to intolerance under the influence of a rigid definition of national identity; and in Britain, multiculturalism backlash. In short, it allows us to rid ourselves of the idea of normative blocks being put to the test of realism or nationalist reaction. There never

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were ‘multicultural models’ in Europe nor a ‘normative republic’ in France. These ‘multicultural models,’ as we often imagine them, have never existed, not because of the contradictions or the gap between their precepts and observable reality, but for the simple reason that they were never institutionalized or internalized on the basis of a stable, univocal, and coherent normative approach.

Five working propositions

However, it is not enough to conclude that ‘national models do not exist’ because the reality which scholars observe is in fact saturated with modeled thoughts and modeling practices. The subjects of our research (social actors) believe in the existence of a ‘French model’ built on principles inherited from the French Revolution or in the existence of a Dutch or an ‘Anglo-Saxon multiculturalism.’ ‘Models’ are discussed everywhere: in working-class pubs, hospital hallways, at the desk of a family allowance organization, in police stations, in school staff rooms, in union or NGO meetings, in the ‘readers’ section of newspaper websites, in European ministers of interior summits, etc.

It is therefore insufficient to say that ‘models’ should not be taken seriously because we are dealing with actors who happen to take these ‘models’ very seriously. Taken seriously, these concepts are used, imagined, negotiated, affirmed, contested, challenged—and I would add misunderstood—by significantly different types of actors. ‘Models’ should not therefore be sought in a stable and consistent (i.e. complete) normative, cultural, historical, and institutional context, but rather in these diverse uses, these negotiations, these discussions, and these misunderstandings. We must avoid the positivist approach of ‘models’ which reduces, more than often, the question of ‘models’ to the question of “how institutions think” (Douglas, 1986) and how ‘citizens’ are thought of by institutions. Consequently, we must remove social actors’ agency from behind the smoke screen of official and formal narratives of nations’ cultural self-understandings.

To illustrate the way we can avoid these two equally problematic conceptions of ‘models’ and take ‘models’ as dependent variables, we made with Jan Willem Duyvendak five interrelated working propositions (Bertossi and Duyvendak, 2009):

- 1) Far from being homogeneous blocks, ‘models’ are constantly contradicted by social, political, and institutional practices. Contradictions are part of these ‘models’ and can represent exogenous divergences (the precepts of a model are contradicted by public policies in certain sectors) or endogenous divergences (contradictory principles may be claimed in the name of the same model).
- 2) ‘Models’ are not stable and allow varying problematizations across time. To speak of ‘republicanism’ as the French ‘model’ or ‘multiculturalism’ in Britain or the Netherlands leaves much to be said about the stark differences that characterize public discussions on the integration of migrants and the project of equality and inclusion of ‘diversity’ within the citizenry of those nations.
- 3) ‘Models’ are not an *a priori* normative matrix but an *a posteriori* problematization. French ‘universalism,’ Dutch ‘tolerance’ or British ‘race relations’ are not the starting point but the temporary outcome of public discussions. ‘Models’ are the result of chaotic negotiations about the meaning of ‘the integration problem’ and its solution.
- 4) ‘Models’ are not absolute, but polysemic expressions. The content that each attaches to these or other similar concepts (‘secularism,’ ‘pillarization,’ ‘State neutrality,’ ‘integration,’ etc.) is always different. They all seem to be discussing the same issues; however, behind the seeming linguistic stability of these concepts, people attribute widely different, even opposite, normative connotations. Here, contradictions are caught up by possible misunderstandings by the concerned actors, and this, in turn, reinforces the contradictions already mentioned. For instance, the principle of gender equality may be used to

liberate the ‘oppressed’ (say women wearing the *niqab* and “deemed to be dominated by a husband or a brother”) and, at the same time, to deprive these same women of their status as citizens (by refusing them access to nationality because they wear the *niqab*). In the Netherlands, tolerance (toward same-sex couples for instance) may be used as a basis for intolerant discourse (against Muslim populations, for example).

- 5) While they lack any stable normative content, ‘models’ represent a performative practice. This type of practice produces additional meaning in routine social relations between actors who share the belief in a normatively consistent and coherent social and political world, but attribute very different meanings to this fact (point 4). Behind the various uses, contradictory practices, disagreements regarding future action, disputes on the normative approach of what the integration of migrants ‘ought’ to be or on citizenship in a context of cultural, religious, ethnic or ‘racial’ diversity, the actors discuss the contradictions, driftings, and limitations of the ‘models’ without ever doubting the existence of these ‘models.’ These discussions in effect institutionalize the idea that France is “undeniably republican” or that Britain and the Netherlands are ‘multicultural.’ However, this institutionalization must not be merely looked for in the realm of official institutions (i.e. policies, quasi-professional philosophies, political structures), but in the cognitive construction of social reality.

These five working propositions suggest a shift in the research on ‘models’. We have spent a considerable amount of energy trying to extract a complex social reality from ‘national integration models,’ taking the risk of replacing the world that we study by extremely attractive narratives. It seems to me that it is time for us to move backward, inducing ‘models’ from reality, conceiving of them as dependent variable that must be explained. This would better equip us for measuring the enormous impact they have on societies that struggle to locate their racial, ethnic, cultural, or religious diversity at the heart of their program of equality. If we really want to understand (and act on) the injustices of

our societies, I believe that we need to find the actors behind the ‘public philosophies,’ and understand from a sociological perspective how ‘national models of integration’ play a central role in social life.

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