CITIZENSHIP AND MULTICULTURALISM IN NORWAY

ABSTRACT

The transformations in the European understanding of multiculturalism and citizenship regimes, related to international migration, show some very obvious traits, but it is also misleading not to be aware of the significant differences between countries. Rather than delving into the detailed specificities of the opportunities for immigrants (including refugees) to effectively exercise their citizenship, this article will discuss some of the features of the Norwegian situation, through a Nordic (here only Denmark, Norway and Sweden) comparative perspective.

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The Nordic countries of Denmark, Norway and Sweden have had an almost century-old collaborative relationship with regard to citizenship laws (i.e., awarding of citizenship), which Finland (1960s) and Iceland later joined. Over the last decades, however, the confluence between these countries is ruined. Requirements for citizenship now vary, on various issues including as residency criteria, language requirements and to dual citizenship. The fracture lines are not that different from what is seen elsewhere in Europe. They represent different answers to questions such as how "ethnified" or culturally unified the nation-state has to be to effectively do its job. In brief, there are at least three distinct positions on this matter.

The first stresses that immigrants have to embrace the national traditions of their new country or become a part of them. Immigrants must not pose a threat to cherished traditions, or fragment the state's ability to serve as a guarantor for the well-being of all its members ("the welfare state").

A second position juxtaposes human rights with liberal-democratic perspectives. Immigrants must embrace certain "fundamental" values, such as liberal-democratic principles, freedom of expression (e.g., the Muhammed cartoons controversy) and equality of the sexes, and they must possess the knowledge tools to effectively participate in society (in particular, but not only, the language skills).

The third position is to view immigration issues as much more unproblematic. "Integration" on the whole is seen as relatively successful. Discrimination and "structural" issues, such as the way the housing market works, must not hinder the efforts made by immigrants to become contributing members of society and to enjoy its wealth. Notions of a fragmenting conflict between the nation-state "normality" or cultural apparatus in general, on the one hand, and "immigrant cultures," on the other, is seen as a vast simplification.

These positions have had different strengths in each Nordic country, and the Danish, Norwegian and Swedish cases can be used contrastively. The differences are manifest, especially in symbolically important contexts such as the requirements for awarding citizenship.

Denmark, Norway and Sweden

Both Norway and Denmark have populations of approximately 5 million people, while Sweden's population is almost 10 million. In Norway and Denmark, about 7% of the population is born abroad, while in Sweden this percentage reaches 14%. The total "foreign population" segment (including the second generation) is close to 9% in Norway and Denmark, and 18% in Sweden. The origins of immigrants vary widely, but immigration debates in the Nordic countries are now almost exclusively about immigrants from outside Europe (including Turkey). Denmark has a notable presence of immigrants of Turkish origin while, Norway has welcomed people of Pakistani and Sinhalese Tamil origin. However, Sweden does not have specific emblematic immigrant grounds from outside Europe. At present, Sweden has a vastly higher number of asylum seekers; in 2007 this group numbered more than 35,000, as opposed to slightly the more than 10,000 in Norway and Denmark combined. That same year, Sweden, which has received some 80,000 Iraqis, and until recently had one municipality that had welcomed with more Iraqi refugees than had the entire United States, received approximately 20,000 Iraqi asylum seekers, while Norway and Denmark together received less than 2,000.

In several ways, however, including in terms of public opinion, Norway is situated between Denmark and Sweden. The European Social Survey (ESS) measured responses to a variety of questions concerning immigration. Asked if refugees represent a security threat, 60% of Danes, 45% of Norwegians, and 24% of Swedes agreed. This pattern repeats itself on a number of issues. Where the three countries show a significant similarity is in their answers to the question asking how many foreign-born persons live in their country: here, the average response, close to 170% of the actual number, is comparable.

Norway, which used to be something of a wholesale importer of many Swedish program solutions with respect to immigration (there still are many similarities, including in recent laws and programs), is in some ways moving onto a track of its own. A 2000 Royal Commission[1] found that a majority suggested that Norway should allow dual citizenship, which Sweden has been permitting for decades now. The subsequent law, however, sided with the minority, and continued to disallow dual citizenship, which is also forbidden in Denmark. One must have resided in Sweden for five years to acquire Citizenship, in Norway for seven years, and in Denmark for nine years (these countries once shared a requirement of seven years residence, with special rules for Nordic citizens). Sweden is the only one of these countries that does not require, language proficiency or proven general knowledge about the receiving country for acquiring citizenship, .

The ESS statistics as well as the citizenship requirements bear witness to the "degree of openness" towards migrants, with Sweden being the most open, Norway in the middle, and Denmark the relatively least open.

In Europe more generally, and certainly in Norway and Denmark, but much less so in Sweden, the idea that "multicultural policies" have failed has gained wide currency. However, with the exception of Great Britain and the Netherlands, very few if any European states have had policies aiming towards a multicultural society in the sense that we can witness in Canada.

The politics of immigration

The Nordic countries, of course, reflect the "political realities" of each country. Denmark has a xenophobic party (Danish People's Party) as a prominent shaper of policy with respect to immigration issues. In their definition of Denmark as an ethnic nation, there is little space for openness. Norway has a similar party, the Progress Party, but in the more traditional Scandinavian style, and so significantly less extreme. This party, however, is now the major opposition party to the left-wing coalition forming the government, but its size should only to some degree be seen as related to its xenophobic tendencies. In Sweden, a small xenophobic party had secured some seats for one mandate period, in the early 1990s.

Norway's Progress Party has had and continues to have a significant influence. It claims to represent Norwegian interests. While certainly not lacking, the celebration of Norwegian cultural specificity is not central to Progress Party argumentation, but the arguments are often more generally construed. The "culturally remote" cannot fit into the Norwegian societal fabric, because these immigrants do not understand the liberal and democratic traditions that govern Norway, and their totalitarian religious and family traditions, from Islam to patriarchy, make them unwilling to "adjust themselves" to Norwegian society. However, prominent debaters of the left are giving roughly the same message with respect to immigrants. Joining forces, there is now an established rhetoric about immigrants' "duties" (such as learning Norwegian and expressing their solidarity with Norway, untainted by dual citizenship). It should be noted however that much of the law-given mechanics with respect to immigrants are fairly identical to what exists in Sweden.

Multicultural practices as accommodation

In Europe more generally, and certainly in Norway and Denmark, but much less so in Sweden, the idea that "multicultural policies" have failed has gained wide currency. In the debates about multiculturalism, there are several noteworthy features. With the exception of Great Britain and the Netherlands, very few if any European states have had policies designed to move towards a multicultural society as is the case in Canada. Instead, European countries are, in various ways, dealing with what has been perceived as a multicultural fact. Very few would argue that the post-war migration experience in Europe should have occurred without attempts by the states to ensure that migrants ended up in reasonable circumstances. Education, health, justice and labour exchange authorities, to mention but a few, had to make suitable accommodations. It may well be added that labour union federations in the Nordic countries forcefully argued against the creation of a "denizen category," made up of individuals with strenuous relationships to society and available for "social dumping" (i.e., non-tariff wages, exclusion from employers' statutory responsibilities such as pension fund contributions, etc.).

If multiculturalism in Norway should mainly be understood, to be a pragmatic adjustment to demographic realities, it is also possible to find expressions of a more principled multiculturalism. Two cases testify to this, the Sami and the "national minorities." The Sami have been granted the right to protect and develop their culture, language and way of life and there have been significant land rights and political-institutional developments, especially

over the last 20 years. The four "national minorities" – Jews, Kvens (a Finnoethnic minority), Roma ("Gypsies") and Skogfinnar (people of Finnish decent living in southern Norway) – have also been given a more principled "multicultural" status,[2] partly as a result of Norway signing on to two Europe-wide instruments in the late 1990s.[3]

From culture to individual

It appears completely exaggerated to claim that "failed" multicultural policies have created the massive concerns about immigration in Europe (Ley 2007). However, concerns on multiculturalism are voiced with different strengths. In public discourse, Denmark stands out as the most vocal, Sweden as the least vocal, and Norway somewhere in between.

The *Mangfoldsmelding* (a Ministerial Diversity Report) to the Norwegian Parliament in 2004 shows the soft official response to immigration concerns. This Melding was presented as a report about "values," and hence took its place in a massive series of other activities undertaken by this conservative government, which was incidentally led by a priest and aimed at discussing "values" in Norwegian society. It certainly had to be attentive to the heated debates in the Norwegian mass media about Islam as a reactionary religion, female circumcision, honour killings, second generation violence and the whole plethora of presumed evils associated with the "culturally remote" in Norway. One of the Melding's main arguments is the focus on the individual, and without actually denying a "cultural" argument (by extension a basis for multiculturalism), it suggests that one can be a good Norwegian even if one is part of a specific cultural category. However, it also states that there are limits to multicultural orientations and it gives the Norwegian as a normative guide. Significantly, and in contrast to what can be seen in several other countries, it is not an inflammatory document. The Melding also supports a two-pronged approach with respect to immigrant policies, with one relating to "mainstreaming" and the other to combating racism.

The mainstreaming approach simply means that immigrants should exercise their relationship with the state through the same vehicles as any other inhabitant. Refugee reception issues, of course, fall outside of this. While the authorities must respect the diversity of the population that they serve, there are no parallel universes created for immigrants.

The anti-discrimination work is the other part of the approach. In recent years, the most notable development is the *Anti-Discrimination Act* of 2006, which prohibits discrimination based on origin, ethnicity, national origin, skin colour, religion, descent and beliefs, and specific bodies were created to enforce this law.

In spite of the long-term contentious immigration debates in Norway, the Melding must be seen as an attempt to move on with a fundamentally pragmatic approach.

The obstacles to effective citizenship

Immigration issues are often discussed in *falsetto* and couched in the same doomsday vocabulary of a dramatic television talk show. One argument often heard in such settings is that Norway cannot accept more immigrants (read: culturally remote immigrants). There are already "too many," and this creates tensions in society. However, owing to Sides and Citrin (2007) and Kehrberg (2007), we now know with certainty that if there is a relationship between immigrant density and hostile attitudes towards immigrants and refugees, it is that the more numerous immigrants are, the more welcoming attitudes in the host population will be. Similarly, there is no relationship between employment levels and attitudes towards immigrants and refugees. One should remember, though, that the Nordic countries, including Norway, appear in the upper strata of European countries in terms of liberal attitudes towards immigrants and refugees.

> The way in which immigrants and refugees are presented in public discourse may create barriers that have a real impact on the well-being of both society as a whole and on the effective exercise of citizenship by immigrants and refugees.

Nevertheless, there are striking similarities as well as dissimilarities between the Nordic countries and other European counties. The similarities, as Hedetoft (2006) has pointed out, are in the actual day-to-day governmental mechanics with respect to immigrants and refugees. This reflects the general ambition of welfare states regarding the provision of decent conditions for their inhabitants. By and large, one may consider that the Nordic states have done a comparatively good job in terms of assisting immigrants in contributing to society and creating reasonably good lives for themselves.

The dissimilarities between them are also obvious, especially with respect to the host populations' attitudes and the role of immigrants and refugees in public discourse. There is, as noted earlier, a pattern that repeats itself in the ESS, with Sweden being the most positive, Norway in the middle, and Denmark the least positive in terms of attitudes towards immigrants. It is also noteworthy that, according to the ESS, Swedes are considerably more positive towards immigrants from non-European, Third World countries. The differences must certainly be reflective of how immigrants are dealt with in the public sphere, especially by the mass media. Here, the basically non-ethnic determination of what a Swede is, the much more ethnic determination of what a Dane is, and the in-between position of Norway translate into specific attitudes towards immigrants.

Rogstad (2001) found that Norwegian employers' "uncertainty" about immigrant applicants irrespective of formal qualifications, rather than outright racist sentiments, was a significant factor in explaining the higher immigrant unemployment rates. It is fairly obvious that this

uncertainty stems from public immigration debates. To extrapolate from Sides and Citrin (2007) and suggest that the problem with Norway and Denmark is that they have too few immigrants may be too simple. What this comparative reflection about the Nordic countries does suggest, however, is that issues related to effective citizenship may not be immediately related to differences in the governmental or institutional set-up encountered by immigrants and refugees on a daily basis.

Instead, the way in which immigrants and refugees are presented in public discourse may create barriers that have a real impact on the well-being of both society as a whole and on the effective exercise of citizenship by immigrants and refugees. Just how the differences between these three Nordic countries have emerged may well be rooted in the historical nation-building processes of each, but what clearly energizes them is, not least, the contemporary political scene (Lithman 2007).

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Notes

[1] A "Royal Commission" is what results in a publication from a NOU, or a "Norwegian Public Inquiry."

[2] For these cases, see for instance Haagensen's (2006) short but succinct presentation in a previous issue of *Canadian Diversity*.

[3] These are the European Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities and the European Language Charter for Regional and Minority Languages.

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Metropolis, the Political Participation Research Network and the Integration Branch of Citizenship and Immigration Canada collaborated with the Association for Canadian Studies to produce a special issue of the ACS magazine, Canadian Issues / Thèmes canadiens, "Newcomers, Minorities and Political Participation in Canada: Getting a Seat at the Table." Guest edited by John Biles and Erin Tolley (Metropolis Project Team), this issue includes interviews with the leaders of all major federal Canadian political parties (except the Bloc Québécois, which declined an interview), and 22 articles by researchers, policy-makers and practitioners from across the country.

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