THE FRENCH MODEL OF INTEGRATION

ABSTRACT

The foundations for the model of integration adhered to in France today can be found in the works of some of history's greatest political philosophers. In this article, Jean-Charles Lagrée traces the development of the French Republic through time, showing "threads of continuity" among the various writers in question. His thought-provoking conclusion both defends and challenges the search for universalism which is at the core of the General Will and the French melting pot.

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This paper in no way attempts to present the complete model of integration that exists in France today. Carrying out this task would be almost impossible in so few words. Accordingly, I will limit myself to highlighting some of the features of the model that emerged from philosophical debates and which still prevails in present day social science discussions and controversies. Only six authors will be discussed, and briefly so, as reference points that have shaped the French model of integration: Thomas Hobbes (De Cive, 1642), John Locke (*Second Treatise of Government* – 1632-1704), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (*Le Contrat Social,* 1762), Ernest Renan (*Qu'est ce qu'une Nation?* 1882), Dominique Schnapper (*La Communauté des Citoyens,* 1992), and Didier Lapeyronnie (*Les deux figures de l'immigré,* 1997).

To begin a discussion on the French model of integration by referring to British writers, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, is definitely a historical paradox or oddity. Yet, any historicizing of thought, ideas and social phenomena call for the discovery of points of rupture in an almost unfailing continuity. The school of thought pertaining to the state of nature, natural rights, and later to the social contract, is a true break from the political thinking that attributed sovereignty and the right to govern to some divine principle, a theocracy. In this sense, the thesis about the transition from the state of nature to society marks a rupture. The entrance into the Age of Enlightenment is characterized by a secularization of sovereignty. In the final analysis, for the writers who refer to social contract theory, whatever their differences, sovereignty lies with the people.

The differences between these philosophers are very important. They are sometimes diametrically opposed to one other as to the 'political' conclusions that can be drawn from their reflections. However, I would mainly like to emphasize the threads of continuity in this short article. The universalistic model that emerged with the French Republic after the 1789 Revolution was founded on a few solid principles strongly taken up and stated in a variety of forms over the decades. Let us recall some of them: the search for peace and the preservation of one's existence, the relinquishing of natural rights, the principle of delegation, the voluntary contract reached by free individuals, the central role of the law, and the idea that the state has the sole authority to enforce law and order.

Thus, Thomas Hobbes begins by postulating that the state of nature is a war of everyone against everyone else. To get out of this unenviable situation, find peace, preserve one's existence, and pass on one's belongings, individuals must relinquish their 'natural rights' to the sovereign, whether a human or an assembly, forming in the process, civil society.

- "If for the preservation of Peace, and the Government of Man-kind there were nothing else necessary, than that Men should agree to adhere to certaine Covenants and Conditions together, which they themselves should then call Lawes."
- "The modern citizen holds his citizenship from the act through which he constitutes sovereignty in instituting the sovereign. The State or republic is based on the principle of sovereignty, through the contract to which modern individuals all agreed."
- The founding act of the modern State is the original act by which the *voluntary union of a multitude* is carried out separately and simultaneously giving rise to the body of a republic, which creates the state as a sovereign power and brings about the political subject, which is the citizen as person, which is to say the physical citizen, the modern individual in his political role. (Gérard Mairet, Introduction to De Cive)

The creation of a legitimate state and of society as subject is not only the product of a deliberate act, but this decision to associate is part of a formal agreement that determines the rules for 'living together.' The law arising out of the agreement of all is the principle that governs the conduct of

individuals. It is on this basis that society is created, allowing for the transition from the 'multitude' or the 'aggregation of individuals' governed or subjected to a prince, to 'a nation' or an organized society. Interestingly, Ernest Renan, in examining the distinction between the multitude and society, notes that all regimes and all peoples do not make up a nation. This distinction is also present in the writings of modern historians of Europe who point out the major difference between the peoples who make up a nation and give themselves a democratic regime, whatever its form, and the empires that are built on enslaving individuals and peoples. Hobbes' central thesis can be summarized with the following points:

- The contract that founds civil society and the state (sovereignty) is established at the expense of the renunciation by individuals–now citizens–of their natural rights.
- In exchange for civil peace that the sovereign (monarchy or republic) must provide to them, individuals put themselves under the protection of the law that makes them all equal, the weak as well as the strong. The legitimacy of the sovereign flows from the will and the freedom of the individuals who decide to unite as a people.
- The sovereign is the expression of this union.
- *The power of the sovereign is without limit:* this type of State is called Despotism.

Locke's argument is also based on the transition from the state of nature to civil and political society. However, unlike Hobbes, Locke believed that the multiplication of social relationships is what transformed the state of nature, initially peaceful, into a state of war, and gradually eliminated the equality and independence between men and put covetousness at the very heart of human relationships. To escape from the risks of insecurity to individuals and property, men bring themselves to agree on a CONTRACT, creating in the process, a political and civil community. The contract founds society on the basis of a *political and civil community.* This is a modern idea, at the very core of the political philosophy of 21st century republican France:

> "*There and there only is political society, where everyone of its members have quitted this natural power,* resigned it up into the hands of the community *in all cases that exclude him not from appealing for the protection to the law established by it.*"

Locke's arguments, developed in the *Second Treatise of Government* are only touched on here to highlight the significant difference that separates him from, even sets him in opposition to, Hobbes: despotism or a limitation of the powers of the sovereign by the people.

- A contract is an individual, free and voluntary act.
- It implies accepting the rights and obligations that form the basis of a political society.
- The latter is not given; rather, it is a construction of the social body.
- In this political community the people are the only sovereign;
- The people elect their representatives who make the LAWS in the name of the people;
- The rule is that of the majority.

The power of the sovereign is limited by the power of the people; the people alone are sovereign. After many ups and downs, this principle has been placed at the very centre of French political philosophy and the republican conception that developed in this country. It guided the drafting of the constitutions of the various republics. However, this sovereignty at issue always works on a representative basis. In delegating their power, the people relinquish it, be it only for an inter-electoral period.

Considering the goal of this work, which is to retrace the ongoing development of the French republican model, it is without a doubt Jean-Jacques Rousseau who established the foundational references that prospered during the Revolution and throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. The echoes of his writings can still be heard in the current debates of the *Assemblée nationale* and the media. When taken in the context of the history of political thought, the writings of Rousseau represent both continuity and change. In terms of continuity there are three ideas to highlight:

- Only a freely accepted agreement can found a legitimate society.
- This agreement is founded on the *renunciation of the freedom of independence* (of the state of nature) in exchange for civil liberty, that of the citizen, member of the sovereign people, author of the laws.
- As subjects, man is obliged to abide by the law.

However, Rousseau's break with traditional political thought is also important. I list only four points in this regard:

- The sovereignty of the *General Will* arises out of the independence of individual wills.
- The Republic is the rule of the general will.
- The collective interest supersedes individual interests.
- This republic is characterized by the *requirement of universality.*

Regarding the latter point, the state that founded the 'Rousseauist' society is built and works on the principle of universalism. It comes from transcendence: what is individual is subsumed within what is universal. Thus the republic tends towards universalism and if the state aims to embody the general will, it is much less a question of tendency than it is of an actual reality. In fact, for Rousseau, the contradiction that exists between the sovereign adjudicating between individual wills and the general will is never settled or completed. It is this tension that acts on the life of the political body. With the essential contradiction between the general will and individual wills being at the very heart of the social dynamic, an agent is needed to implement it. In the Rousseauist conception, society invests the state and law with a central role. However, and this is where the break with previous political philosophy occurs, the state and law (political instruments) deal with abstract individuals, with citizens whose political body only recognizes their rights and duties. The state and the law deal with disembodied individuals:

> "*When I say the object of the laws is always general in nature, I mean that law considers subjects en masse and actions in abstract, and never man a particular person or action.*"

The space allocated for this account does not allow me to continue reviewing the philosophical tradition that nurtured

the French model of integration. Accordingly, I will not examine the thinking of De Tocqueville or even Benjamin Constant. I will leap into the modern era and concentrate on the short speech given by Ernest Renan at the Sorbonne in 1882. He entitles his paper "What Is a Nation?" Some brief propositions will allow me to present his thesis, which constitutes an important reference base for understanding the French concept of a nation. Let me begin with what is *not* a nation for Ernest Renan. A nation:

- It is not a race. (Thus, he writes: "*The idea of different races in the French population, so obvious in Grégoire de Tours' work (538-594), does not present itself to any degree among French writers and poets after Hugues Capet (987)").*
- It is not based on an ethnic principle;
- All human groups do not make up a nation.
- It is not based on a linguistic principle. (To France's credit, it never tried to use coercive measures to obtain language unity. Is it not possible to have the same feelings and the same thoughts, to like the same things in different languages?)

Religion cannot serve as the basis of a nation either. It played a role in Athens, Sparta, in the Middle Ages… when one could not be a citizen without practicing the religion of the City. However:

> "*Today, religion has become a personal thing. It concerns one's own conscience. The division of nations into Roman Catholics, Protestants does not exist any more…*"

In addition, Ernest Renan mentions two other facilitating factors, the 'community of interests' presented as a powerful bond between men, but insufficient to give rise to a nation, and geography and borders, which trace the lines of division between nations, thereby favouring the emergence of their identities. However, according to E. Renan, "geography and land are only stratum and man is the only thing that counts." Thus, nation is not race, language, interest, religious affinity or geography. So what is a nation? The answer is revealed in one word: a nation is fusion, the fusion of different peoples who forge an historical identity. This fusion is based on:

- Individuals agreeing to 'live together.'
- Forgetting the past and even historical errors.
- A common background of shared cultural references.

However, equally, on the political side:

> "*A nation is a* soul, a spiritual principle. *Two things that, in reality, are but one constitutes this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, the other in the present. One is the shared possession of a rich legacy of memories of the past, the other is a consent in the present, a desire to live together, a will to continue to make the most of an undivided heritage.*"

And finally:

- If a nation is part of history and if it is established on the basis of a heritage… it defines itself in relationship to a collective future. "*It is a daily plebiscite.*"
- It is an historical development and as such, it has an end. Nations also die… "*The European confederation will probably be replacing them.*"

From Rousseau to Renan, political theorists established the basis of the modern conception of the French style of integration into the republic. Dominique Schnapper undoubtedly is the most accomplished scholar of this line of thought. Following in the footsteps of Rousseau, she shows that the nation rests on an essential contradiction at the very heart of the republican conception of it, between the *universalism* for which it aims and the *particularisms* that make up the context in which it evolves. All societies, all states, all political communities without a doubt must confront this contradiction or duality. However, the French republic and the French model of integration are built on a rift, a strong rift between what is private and what is public, between the individual and the citizen and between culture and politics, a rift that the term individual-citizen does not manage to erase. The credo advocated by Schnapper is without ambiguity; the political domain is its cornerstone. National ties are essentially political and it is first and foremost in political terms that a nation must be analyzed. As a political community of citizens, the nation is radically different from other forms of historical and cultural (ethnic) collectivities and from the State.

On the basis of this line of thinking, Schnapper asserts that:

> "*We can then examine the constituent tension inherent in the concept of nation, between the universal ambition of transcendence through politics and the concrete markers of distinctiveness of each historical nation.*"
>
> "*The very concept of an ethnic nation is a contradiction in terms.*"
>
> "*It is the effort to uproot oneself from the identities and the sense of belonging experienced as natural through the abstraction of citizenship that distinctively characterizes the national project.*"

This project that involves abstracting what is universal and uprooting oneself from what is distinctive and individual is unending. It is a tension, a goal, a value that the republic strives to achieve and make concrete without ever completely succeeding. This is undoubtedly why the French style of republic functions in the exception, with strong rules that overlook differences, only to reintroduce them through the side door with amendments or special provisions for one group of individuals or another, for whom the rule could not apply itself without being prejudicial. Nevertheless, the principle rule is clear. It is based on the assimilation of differences that are blended to conform to a model that leans towards the status of universality. In this sense, the idea of nation is congruent with the idea of integration and by way of consequence, that of education.

As for education, it is one of the strongest pillars of the French Republic. The concept of education, says Schnapper, is based on the idea of nation. It leads immediately back to learning about 'the common good', values, norms, heritage… but also to learning about public life. The idea is to "*respect the practices of public life*" and to internalize the idea that there is a public domain. The basic function of education through the use of symbolic violence is to reduce political and cultural particularisms and thereby ensure domestically the effective development of the process of national integration. This process of reducing differences founds a nation that legitimates the actions of the STATE. However, the school is but an example

used here. In fact, and in the final analysis, "*it is the political community that gradually imposed homogeneity/uniformity on people.*" Integration is a socio-historical process fairly easy to initiate for it merely adds the national character to the individual character. Yet, the following two conditions are required:

- That there be a political area independent of individual interests and that citizens respect the rules of its operations.
- That the existence of a collective INTEREST, separate and sometimes conflicting with the individual interests, be recognized.

Lastly, before concluding, there is the issue of citizenship. In France, it is the process whereby individuals root themselves in what is universal through a 'transcendence' effect. I will try to characterize this process with several basic ideas:

- Political society tries to develop a political body from individuals deemed to be radically independent.
- It starts from the need to regulate relations between subjects of LAW and not the face-to-face relations between people or individuals.
- In all cases, the idea is to create a political sphere ruled by common norms that function as a basis for resolving rivalries and conflicts.
- The general will is the result of this negotiation, manoeuvring and regulation. The citizen is the expression of the general will.

For this alchemy to work effectively, however, political society has to foster a process of uprooting the concrete attachments or affiliations of individuals. It implies the agreement and support of citizen-individuals. Conversely, it confers on individuals an identity and a sense of belonging to a collectivity, i.e. a community.

Is it is necessary to state that this model, outlined by Schnapper, is largely proven by the facts? At times, in official or expert circles, it is recognized that the French integration machine is out of order, or slowing down, or that is does not work as well as it used to. Theorists then come to examine the patient and suggest in some cases radically alternative solutions, drawing inspiration from the Canadian or North American examples or in other cases, produce critical analyses calling for significant changes to the model. The CADIS is one of the protagonists, no doubt one of the most active ones, in this debate. Among the members of this group is Didier Lapeyronnie, with his article entitled "Les deux figures de l'immigré[1]" (The Two Faces of the Immigrant). In the media, in the political arena, and in intellectual circles, people are debating models of integration: the universalistic model versus the communitarian model, positioned on the particularistic end of the continuum – two extremes which oppose each other. However, the debate is sterile because it does not lead to any practical conclusions. Furthermore, national models no longer constitute very distinct empirical realities. In fact, many European countries are not that different with respect to the objective situations that immigrants face, despite very different models.

In conclusion, inherited from the Age of Enlightenment, patterned on the 1789 Revolutionary ideal, the French republican model is without a doubt not only an ideal type but an ideal type that embodies a cluster of values instrumental in the building of a nation according to a specific logic: that of assimilation. In search for what is universal to successfully drive the General Will, the French melting pot is not only supposed to ignore individual differences, which must be uprooted, but it must 'reduce' them, have them disappear de facto or return them to the private sphere.

As was mentioned above, it is far from a model of concrete reality; the machine works and can only work if it tolerates exceptions. The school unified and indivisible, like the Republic, epitomizes the model's mode of operation. The special support measures provided to children in underprivileged neighbourhoods are indicative of the option taken by the state in recognizing differences and even inequalities. Can we then speak of an 'affirmative-action policy' in this case, which would go against the republican principle? Some time ago, the conscripted army, which one in three young people eluded, also functioned according to exceptions. The distinctive religious signs provide another example. Examples are numerous and show the subtle game to which the republican universalistic model leads with respect to the issuing and application of rules. However, we can and must ask ourselves up to what point the subtle tension between the universal and the particular, between standards and any deviation from them, can be maintained. Unemployment, exclusion, migratory movements, the rise of religious or ethnic demands, Europeanization and/or globalization all seem to bring into question the integrating principle that makes or was making a unified society that overlooked its differences.

No doubt in Europe, in neighbouring countries, there are other models of integration also being questioned. Similar factors, if not identical ones, can explain this common trend. How is integration possible when work is not available, when the social protection system limits benefits and leaves more and more gaping holes in the social safety net? How is integration possible when norms and values are not assured as they used to be and when the doubt of their place permits the questioning of their legitimacy? In the European framework, let us also add another factor: the progressive and regular questioning of nation-states and their growing interconnection following the Europeanization process. The French model of integration is being debated and criticized. Moreover, some of our neighbours can hardly understand it. The concepts of uprooting, of ignoring particularisms, of submitting the individual interest to the general interest can seem perplexing if not unacceptable to some people. However, the competing models are not shielded! Germany is reviewing its nationality code, Sweden is discovering the principle of secularism… etc.

Europe is on the move. It is favouring a reconciliation that is encouraging drastic revisions. Within the European framework, the universalistic French model will no doubt be brought to accept a small dose of particularism. However, one can think that other countries will also be led to modify their manner of conceiving of integration in the European space, as much at the level of blood, as of language, religion, and culture. In the European space, more than ever, integration will be an affair of belonging, fusion and contract.

Note

[1] In *Une société fragmentée? Le multiculturalisme en débat.* (Michel Wievorka, ass. dir.), La Découverte/Poche Essais, 1997