

“Cultural identity is subjective”

On the political role of culture in multicultural societies

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Abstract

In this study, the wide area of cultural integration politics is approached. Departing from a theoretical fusion between constructivist post-colonialism and liberal cosmopolitanism, the study investigates the approach to culture that is found within the integration strategies of multiculturalism and assimilation, respectively. By employing two stylized ideal-types and applying them to a political reality, the thesis suggests that cultures are often treated as definable wholes, a treatment which can be said to hamper social integration. Further, by approaching cultural identity from the critical perspective, suggesting that cultures are non-static and fluid processes rather than identifiable entities, the results have a normative implication; cultures should not be used as integration tools in multicultural societies. Rather, majority and minority groups should be united on a basis of deliberation, recognizing differences in values and norms, and making the notion of a unified culture obsolete. This imperative also makes the idea of minority cultures needing special legal protection redundant. Central in the associated prescription is to reduce economic and social inequalities between minority and majority groups. The thesis concludes that it is both possible and desirable to shift the focus in integration from cultural conformity or difference to socio-economic measures such as labour-market and education policies.

Key words: integration, cultural identity, multiculturalism, assimilation, post-colonialism, cosmopolitanism, ideal-types

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1 Introduction

The process of globalization has given new impetus to the subject of cultural identity politics. As a reaction to the fact that the world is getting smaller and influences travel at a greater speed, people often turn to culture and an imagined collective identity, contrasted to the Other, in order to secure some sense of belonging (see Kinnvall 2004, Djikstra 2006, Vertovec 1996, Petersson 2006). Globalisation mechanisms such as migration have resulted in a simultaneous distancing and mixing of different cultures, which suggests that one of the major contemporary challenges is the establishment of dialogue between cultural worlds (Djikstrah 2001, Dryzek 2006, Delanty and He 2010, Petersson 2006, Benhabib 2002). However, at the same time as communication across cultures has become increasingly important, cultural differences appear overwhelming and tension between social groups often have cultural characteristics. This problem is particularly visible within multicultural societies and in the divide between majority and minority groups. Cultural struggles, visible in both the development of xenophobic tendencies in majority groups and processes of religious radicalization amongst minorities in European states can be said to rest on cultural premises. The xenophobic discourse often rests on argumentations about the importance to preserve the national, indigenous culture from foreign influence (see Djikstra 2001, Petersson 2006). The rhetoric associated with the evolution of “paralell societies” that is visible in some spectrums of multicultural societies and that create the fertile grounds for islamic extremism also build on cultural ideas and a contrasting between an Us and a Them (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larkings 2004, 2010). Addressing the problem of social segregation, policy makers in different states chose different strategies, often placing themselves somewhere on a continuum between particularist/ multiculturalist and assimilative nodes (see Borooah & Mangan 2007, Franz 2007, Ersanilli & Koopmans 2011). A common denominator of the various strategies is an idea of cultures as identifiable, autonomous entities, ie that cultures can be defined and distinguished from one another. This thesis aims to investigate whether policy makers put too much emphasis on cultural characteristics, in their search for similarities as well as in maintaining cultural particularities, when trying to bridge gaps between majority and minority groups.

1.1 Aim and problem formulation

The aim of this study is to contribute to the overall normative discussion on cultural identity and social integration of minority and majority groups. I think that a problematization of our outlook on culture is relevant, both in the area of integration policies, which is the focus of this thesis, but also within the larger context of communication on the international or macro level, between culturally different states and other political entities.

The thesis seeks to discuss the following two-part research question: *What is the role of culture in integration policies in multicultural societies? Is there an alternative to this political treatment of culture?*

The research question has three ambitions: first, to analyse the cultural integration practises at work and second, to make an evaluation about these practises from a chosen theoretical framework. Third, it seeks to discuss an alternative, in an abstract sense. In order to meet this objective, two different analyses, although largely interconnected, will be conducted.

1.2 Demarcation, definitions, disposition

Acknowledging the width of the area of culture and politics, this essay will focus on the ontological assumptions behind cultural integration policies. While many scholars within the research field of multiculturalism and integration are occupied with the bottom-up perspective, ie the cultural claims of minority and majority groups, this thesis will put its main focus on the top-down relationship between policy-makers and individuals. It will make use of a theoretical hybrid of critical and cosmopolitan ideas in order to discuss an abstract alternative to the two treatments of culture visible in multiculturalism and assimilationist integration strategies, respectively. I am aware of the difficulties in defining culture as a concept per se. This thesis will follow the loose definition of Bhikhu Parekh, who argues that culture is “a historically created system of beliefs and practises in terms of which a group of human beings understand, regulate and structure their individual lives” (Parekh 2000 p. 143). This covers a wide range of meanings, such as tradition, language, religion, history and experience, and enables an open discussion.

I am not entirely comfortable with the concept of integration, since it assumes a kind of linear progress and is akin to words such as command and control (Pettersson 2006 p.17). However, in comparison to its predecessor “assimilation” and because there is no consensus on a more neutral alternative, the concept of integration will have to do. In this thesis, integration refers to the state of society when majority and minority groups can coexist without greater friction and

structural conflict. This state also includes the absence of a skewed power relation in economic, social and political terms.

The thesis will depart from the ontological foundation that culture is “an irreducible and constitutive part of politics” (see Tully 1995). This is a somewhat contested notion that summarizes one side of an ongoing debate. However, the assumption is essential for this study: the call for a discussion on cultural politics would be obsolete if the thesis took departure from an ontological perspective that sees politics and culture as fundamentally separated spheres.

The concept of multiculturalism will be used both as a phenomenon and a discourse. In its non-ideological interpretation, it is used to describe the demographical situation in the societies that are examined. In other words, it is used as a prerequisite for the study. In its discursive, institutionalized form, the concept is used when analysing integration policies. It will then be incorporated into an ideal type, used for interpreting the case of the British integration policy design.

The disposition of the thesis is as follows. First, the political problem of cultural identity in integration policy is presented, through an ideal-typical analysis based on a comparative, least-likely design. Thereafter, the study will move upwards on the ladder of abstraction a new analysis based on the theoretical perspective of critical post-colonialism and liberal cosmopolitanism, aimed for a discussion on the merits of an alternative to the political treatment of culture illustrated in the first section, will be presented. This later analysis will be of a more normative nature, based on the logic of “normative analysis in the strict sense”, and it will also include an integrated discussion on the compatibility of the two theoretical perspectives. Lastly, the results are presented.

1.3 Method, material, limitations

The two analyses will focus on the role of culture in integration policies in multicultural societies. In order to create a valid argument, the analysis will be divided into two parts, with two different methodological orientations. The first part will focus on illuminating the practical political problem at hand, ie investigating the cultural policies aimed at integration in modern Western societies. Here, the normative function will be latent, and I will construct two ideal types in order to single out the different cultural integration strategies at work. Ideal types can be both theoretical and methodological tools. The construction of ideal types is often seen as theory formation, while the usage of them is regarded as methodology (Lundquist 1993 p.82). They are useful when trying to overcome the problem of validity in value judgements (see Teorell et al 2007 p.29). In this study, the author will construct the ideal types and they will serve the purpose of paving the ground for the main theoretical approach: the constructivism/cosmopolitan perspective. In the first section, the method is largely

comparative according to the “least likely” design. They will be applied to two societies that differ in their respective choice of integration strategy in order to investigate what unites them in the view on culture. The second part will then take leverage from the theoretical framework in order to create a valid normative discussion of a possible alternative to the political reality illustrated in part one. It will be inspired by the normative analysis in its strict sense as described by Badersten, where the writer departs from (a set of) values in order to justify or criticise a certain political phenomenon. In this type of normative analysis, it is important that the author presents and discusses challenging perspectives along the way (Badersten 2006 p.50). In the later part, the reasoning about a possible alternative will be extracted into a third ideal type.

The chosen material differs in the two different analyses carried out in this thesis, with the common denominator that they both build on secondary data. The first analysis will primarily focus on second hand empirics and the aim is to provide as neutral a picture as possible. Since I use the work of already established scholars, who might have their own agenda, I realize the difficulties in establishing a completely neutral presentation. However, through the use of the stylized ideal types, I hope to, at least to some extent, overcome this problem. The second analysis will be based on a critical theoretical perspective, and as the ontological and epistemological nature of theory suggests, this material is skewed in terms of ontology and epistemology.

A possible limitation of the material in this thesis is that it largely consists of cases where the “minority” groups are represented by Muslim cohorts, the reason being both that much of the current debate on integration has a tendency towards focusing on Muslim groups, and also that Muslim groups are the largest minority group in many European societies (See Franz 2007, Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larkins 2010). This might constitute a problem, since I want to create a picture of societies that are essentially multicultural, i.e. representing many different cultures. However, my aim is to use this material in order to illustrate a point that can be applied to all groups and societies where integration strategies have cultural characteristics. In this context, it is questionable whether religion is a synonym to culture. The concept of culture is hard to define and the vagueness may put the reliability of the analysis at risk. However, I am using a definition of culture that is wide and covers religious aspects and by employing this definition I hope to obtain validity and reliability.

The constructive ambition of the thesis has the implication that it is rather theoretical and abstract in nature. The only empirical illustrations are found in the application of ideal-types in section 2. More empirical material could perhaps offer a more specific and comprehensive picture. However, the subject and research question limits the study to a high level of abstraction, which motivates its theoretical character.

2 An ideal-typical assessment of the political role of culture

In this section, I will present the constructed ideal types and apply them to a political reality, in order to illustrate the practical political problem of cultural integration.

Often associated with German sociologist Max Weber, ideal types are theoretical models of a social reality where salient characteristics are illuminated and stylized. An ideal type is a construction of thought, heavily exaggerated in order to specify worlds of ideas. The aim is not to classify certain phenomena, but to compare an empirical reality to a theorized standard system of ideas. The ideal type should be approached as an analytical tool rather than an empirical description, which in its pure form not should be expected to exist in reality (Teorell et al 2007 p.42f). The ideal types help creating validity and neutrality in value judgements, a task otherwise proved difficult (Teorell 2007). In this thesis, the ideal types will be represented by the concepts of *assimilation* and *multiculturalism/particularism*, respectively. The idea behind constructing ideal types in this thesis is to illustrate two end points in a continuum, within which societies that practise cultural integration policy can be identified. It is possible to say that, at least in Europe, countries place themselves between the two polar nodes of assimilation and multiculturalism when choosing an integration strategy for majority and minority groups (see Koopmans & Ersanilli 2011, Franz 2007, Borooah & Mangan 2007). There is a point in investigating these nodal points, since the results can then be valid for all entities that are situated in between them. The reason why ideal types are useful in this context is that while it is impossible to single out countries as completely multiculturalist or assimilationist in nature, it is possible to identify certain elements that can provide for a normative stance on the two countries' respective strategies while avoiding essentialist pitfalls. Simply put, it is suitable for creating validity in a reasoning that can be said to include normative judgements.

The author constructs the ideal types in this thesis and they are built along five different dimensions. They will pivot around identified structural stipulations, norms and prescriptions. These three identification nodes are interconnected, the basic stipulation creates possibilities for a certain norm to evolve, and also an associated prescription or constructive imperative on what measures are required. The ideal types also aim to capture the materialisation of the respective norm, through two dimensions: immaterial and material expressions. While immaterial expressions means intangible ideas, principles and values, the latter includes more concrete, "hard" expressions of the ideal typical norm such as legal and institution design, respectively.

An important aspect of this analysis is the notion of the actor/structure dualism. Even though it is not included in the ideal type construction, it is an assumption that is essential for the two analyses. Societal actors are individuals or collectives with certain autonomy. The societal structure, on the other hand, is constituted by the actors but also affects them in their behaviour and decision-making. This thesis will depart from the notion that actors and structures are interconnected and both contribute to the evolution of societal norms, implying that the norms are not static but alterable and dynamic (see Lundquist 1993).

Two steps will conduct the following analysis. First, the ideal-types will be applied to the two states, France and the UK, in order to identify certain integration policies in the two states. Second, there will be an evaluative part that tries to establish whether the mentioned policies can be said to be successful or not. Integration, defined as the state of society where minority and majority groups reside together without structural conflict and with the absence of a skewed balance of power regarding societal, political and economic values, is the state to which the status of the two societies will be compared.

2.1 Ideal Type I: Assimilation

In assimilationist systems of ideas, there is hegemony of the majority culture that motivates practises of adaptation. Migration is regarded as an unavoidable phenomenon, but people that are entering the state must adopt its cultural traditions and practises. There is no room for particularities or diversity, and the idea is that groups of people need a common cultural ground in order to coexist. Immigrants are expected to adapt to the majority culture, and laws are aimed for the homogenisation of cultural traditions and practises.

The basic *stipulation* of this ideal type is thus that culture and cultural identity are strongly connected to nationality and citizenship. The associated *norm* is that a common culture is essential for a nation's survival and that different cultures create risks of societal unrest and instability. This norm can be concentrated to one concept: 'commonality'. The interconnected *prescription* is that the legal design of cultural politics must work towards adapting people of different cultures into the majority culture, through different measures dedicated to erasure of cultural differences. The *material expression* of assimilation is thus the designing of laws and institutions that promote the adaptation to the majority culture, while *immaterial* expressions are ideas and values about the shared national culture and its importance for the nation's endurance.

In the next section, the ideal type of assimilation will be applied to the case of France. The analysis is based on the distinction between the Muslim minority and the French indigenous majority.

2.1.1 Illustrative case: France

According to the French republican ideal, all citizens are equal. France does not collect or recognize statistics on inhabitants racial, ethnic or religious backgrounds and forbids businesses to ask for such information from job applicants or employees (Franz 2007 p.99). When it comes to cultural or religious practises, France is associated with the imperative of *laïcité* secularism, a concept that has been widely debated in recent years. The concept is often depicted as the very antithesis of ideological multiculturalism, contrasted to policies of more particularistic design in countries such as USA and Great Britain (Akan 2009 p.238).

In material terms, the assimilative nature of French integration policy can be seen as a chronological development from voluntarism to more coercive means. In 1998, the socialist Jospin government introduced the so-called *plate-forms d'accueil* (introduction platforms), voluntary half-day instructions for certain groups of newcomers, most often family migrants. This initiative was replaced in 2003 by the Gaullist Raffarin government's launch of the *Contrats d'accueil et d'intégration* (introduction and integration contract, CAI). Representing only a slight shift from voluntarism, the CAI included a full day of "civics instruction" followed by language classes. The CAI policy took a turn towards becoming obligatory in 2003 with the launch of the so called *Loi Sarkozy*, which drastically restricted the access to legal permanent residence and which made the receipt of a ten-year residence permit dependent on "Republican integration", defined in the law as "knowledge of the French language and of the principles that constitute the French Republic". More specifically, the bill means that foreigners will have to sign an integration contract where they commit to satisfy the following three integration conditions: commit personally to abide by the principles governing the French Republic, demonstrate that they are indeed complying with them, and have an adequate knowledge of the French language (Joppke 2007 p. 251f). Connected to the ideal type, the law is a clear material expression of the structural norm of commonality.

One area in which the secularism ideal and the "French Republican values" are confronted by the reality of cultural and religious diversity, is the so called headscarf-debate, starting in 1989 with the incidence of three veiled Muslim girls being abducted from their education, with the motivation that covering their hair according to the Muslim tradition was contradictory to the imperative of *laïcité*. This debate, too complex and extensive to be thoroughly covered in this thesis, resulted in the 2004 legislation on the donning of religious symbols in French public schools (Akan 2009 p.237). This too represented a slight shift in norms; under the Jospin government, the rule had been that manifestations of religious symbols did not necessary contradict the principle of *laïcité*, and the decision on whether or not to ban veiling in schools had been left to the respective school officials (Scott 2005 p. 107). While it is arguable that the law of 2004 concerned all religious faiths, it was specifically targeted to the problem of veiling of Muslim women and the project of emancipation of the same (see Akan 2009, Scott 2007, Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larkins 2010). Taking into account that the number of girls

wearing headscarves is still a very small percentage of the Muslim population in France, the headscarf ban can be seen as a material signifier of the norm of commonality. This norm relies on the stipulation that recognition of difference is antithetical to the unity of the nation. A closer look at the 2010 ban on public display of the burqa, worn by an even smaller number of women, offers the same line of reasoning (Scott 2005 p. 109ff)

Cultural uniformity can thus be said to be a part of migrant's efforts to integrate into the French nation. The structure of the society suggests an assimilative integration strategy in the field of integration. However, the gradual development of the coercive integration policies suggests that this has not always been the case. Seeing to the actor/structure perspective, the actors of recent years (Sarkozy and the CAI for example) have contributed to a slight shift in norms in the societal structure (see Joppke 2007).

While a normative evaluation of this type of integration model is complicated and demands a more extensive investigation, it is possible to look at some indicators to get a hint about the effects associated with the French assimilative type of strategy. Using my own definition of integration, there are indicators that points to the weakness of the French model. For example, large parts of the Muslim minority are considering themselves as being apart from France. According to Franz, few believe that it is possible being both French and Muslim (Franz 2007 p.100f). This development can be traced back to the deep-rooted discrepancy between traditional French republican values and the reality in the largely segregated areas in the suburbs of Paris. Many Muslims are socio-economically deprived, a fact visible in widespread discrimination in the labour market and racist violence. French Muslims are absent in top levels of politics, media, the judiciary, business, and the civil service (Franz 2007 p. 100f, see also Silberman et al 2007). Residential segregation is a fact, some speak of a state-sponsored ghettoization, and the living conditions in the more deprived *banlieus* of Paris have further worsened after policy decisions such as cutting subsidies to local associations and social workers (Franz 2007 p. 100ff). In these areas, unemployment rates are often the double of the national average, and incomes are often 75 percent below the average (Ford 2005). The social unrest amongst minority groups in general is visible in the incidents of late October 2005, when riots broke out in the suburbs surrounding Paris, Lyon, Lille, Toulouse and other larger cities. The social unrest was triggered by an incident where two young immigrants were killed when being chased by the police, and even though many of the rioters were Muslim, this outbreak was not about religion. They had their roots in the deprived living conditions in the suburbs where many minority groups reside, and they sprung from a kind of double exclusion, based on both ethnic and economic factors, that many North African and Muslim groups experience in France (Franz 2007 p.102). In a recently published survey conducted by the European Union, 88 percent of the respondents of North African descent considered themselves as discriminated in various social contexts (Ström Melin 2009 p.141).

In summary, by this brief presentation of the example of France, the assimilative model can be said to have obvious flaws. How, then, does the

opposite strategy work? The next step is to apply the ideal type of multiculturalism to the British integration strategy.

2.2 Ideal Type II: Multiculturalism

In the multicultural or particularist systems, the focus is on diversity and the active preservation of differences. There is a widespread apprehension amongst the political elite that society is enriched by housing different cultures. The basic *stipulation* behind the multiculturalism imperative is thus that culture and citizenship are disconnected to the extent that one needs not be a member in the “national culture club” in order to obtain full citizen rights. In similarity with the assimilationist model, there is one majority culture, with the crucial difference that minorities need not adapt to this culture. Different cultures are welcome and need to be actively supported in order to endure. Narrowed down to one word, a *norm* or concept that represents this line of thinking is particularity or tolerance, and the *prescription* is a legal design of pluralism that supports different cultures. The material expressions of multiculturalism as ideology are laws and institutions that are designed for the maintenance of cultural diversity, and are driven by rationales such as special treatment and political quotas. The very definition of a certain group as “minority” implies certain legal rights for this group. The immaterial expressions of multiculturalism are ideas of difference and tolerance.

Applying this ideal type to a political reality, it is possible to highlight the case of Great Britain as an example of a society where multiculturalism prevails as the chosen integration strategy. In this analysis, as in the treatment of the French example, Muslim groups are predominant as representatives of minority cultures in the British society.

2.2.1 Illustrative case: Great Britain

In the UK, the integration focus has been on multiculturalism and the policies have consisted of promoting tolerance and discouraging discrimination. Britain is often seen as having the most developed form of multiculturalism in that, under official policy at least, the British advocate a society that extends equitable status to distinct cultural and religious groups, with no one culture predominating. An immaterial expression of the norm, and maybe also the starting point of the strategy, was in the 1960's the then Home Secretary Roy Jenkins proclaimed that integration is ‘not a flattening process of assimilation but equal opportunity accompanied by cultural diversity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance’ (Borooah & Mangan 2007 p.35). While successive British governments since the 1970's have reiterated the multicultural ideal, its conceptualization and implementation

have largely been a matter for local governments and departments, a strategy of decentralization very different for example from the case of France (Brighton 2007 p.6). In the decentralized local authorities (found at metropolitan, county and district council levels) there are a variety of measures to recognize and assist numerous minority groups. The different institutions have been coordinated throughout Britain by the Commission for Racial Equality, and have the functions of simultaneous welfare advisors, legal watchdogs and policy advocates. The structures have been attempted as solutions to issues of combating discrimination and providing equality of opportunity (Vertovec 1996 p. 52f).

One material expression of the multicultural norm is that UK law that allows for the extension of legal recognition to specific minority groups such as Black, White and Muslim and also special legal protection for the members of these groups (Borooah & Mangan 2007 p.36). The decentralized politics are also visible in the political treatment of the decision on whether or not to allow veiling of schoolgirls in British schools. Despite the fact that the issue is very controversial and politically stigmatized, the decision has been left out from the political sphere and is taken by school officials instead of politicians (Franz 2007 p. 96).

Moving from description to evaluation, what can be said about the British example? Some argue that the integration policy has evolved into a “laissez-faire” attitude towards immigrants, where the question of integration has been largely absent from the political agenda (see Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking 2010, Franz 2007 p. 95f). Some argue that the multiculturalism strategy has resulted in too much emphasis being placed on maintaining individual or community identity, suggesting that this absence of unifying measures has resulted in the emergence and endurance of ethnic enclaves as well as xenophobic tendencies (Franz 2007 p.95f).

The socioeconomic status of many of Britain’s Muslims is inferior along the lines of the French example. Socioeconomically, the Muslim community is marginalized, with unemployment rates about thrice the number for the general population (see Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking 2010). Almost forty percent of British Muslims drop out of school without qualifications. There is a significantly higher concentration of Muslims residing in the most deprived areas. They are also disproportionately represented in prison: while Muslims only make up 3 percent of the inhabitants in Britain, 8 percent of the inmates are Muslims, out of which one in three reside in the most deprived areas. There is a development where many groups have started identify themselves with a sense of marginalisation and victimhood (Franz 2007 p.96ff). There is a clear distance between Muslims and non-Muslims in Britain, and surveys show that up to one third of the Muslim population describe themselves as having more in common with Muslims in other countries than with non-Muslim Britons (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking 2010 p.315f). There is a strong connection between this sense of alienation and the relative deprivation of the minority group; although better educated than their parents, many second-generation immigrants do less well than similarly educated white Britons (Economist 5 March 2011). The gap between these young individuals’ knowledge about their economic and political rights and the place in society that they actually occupy, is one of the key factors behind a

radicalization process amongst some Muslim groups in Great Britain, materialized in the process behind the 2005 London underground bombings (Kinnvall & Nesbitt-Larking 2010, Franz 2007 p. 99). The divide is also visible amongst the majority population. Political actors on the extreme right, such as the British National Party and English Defense League, voice xenophobic, and more concretely, islamophobic opinions. During the last decade, the stridently multicultural plan of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain (2000) was quickly tempered by public calls for 'Building Cohesive Communities' (2001) and a quest for 'Britishness' (Borooah & Mangan 2007 p.37).

In striking similarity to the French example, the distance between the majority and minority population is materialized in riots and incidents in residential areas inhabited by many people of non-British ancestry. In 2001, riots broke out amongst Asian youths in several deprived northern towns, as a result of provocations from white rightwing extremists. The events became known as the "Bradford riots", after one of the cities in which the riots took place. Economic, residential and social segregation, namely between the Bangladeshi and Pakistani minorities and the British majority, is highlighted as a key factor behind these events (See Economist 5 March 2011, Joppke 2004).

The British example clearly shows the difference between multiculturalism as a demographic fact and multiculturalism as ideology. One may argue that the policy which legally enshrines respect for individual cultures, may also provide a mechanism for separate development and a polarization of the population (Borooah & Mangan p. 35). As expressed by Kenan Malik : " [...] multiculturalism as a lived experience enriches our lives. But multiculturalism as a political ideology has helped to create a tribal Britain with no political or moral center...where many groups assert their identity through a sense of victimhood and grievance" (Malik 2005).

Summing up, one may argue that the models and illustrations described above do not correspond very well to the objective of integration, as defined in this study. For example, there seem to be obvious discrepancies between the immaterial expressions of the ideal types and the ones found in the illustrative cases, most notably in Britain where the multiculturalist expressions of tolerance and difference are not compatible to the political reality and the actual indicators of segregation in the British society. There are problems of segregation in both types of societies, and culture plays a significant role in this context. How, then, can we understand the respective weakness of different cultural integration policies? One way is to look at the concepts of culture and identity from a constructivist perspective. In the next section, the theoretical idea of cultural identities as non-static, fluid and hybrid is presented.

	Assimilation	Multiculturalism
Stipulation	Culture is closely tied to citizenship	Each individual has the right to his/her culture
Norm	Commonality	Tolerance
Prescription	Assimilative integration laws	Laws protecting cultural minorities
Material expression	Integration contract	Quotas given to cultural communities
Immaterial expression	Unity, Cohesion	Tolerance, Difference 'melting pot'

Table 1: Ideal types

3 Theoretical framework: the non-static nature of cultural identity

Postcolonial thinkers suggest that the picture of the West as modern and enlightened is created through a depiction of the East as traditional, mythical and backward. When the West is picturing the Other (a foreign people or continent) as dramatically different through a dichotomy, the West is associated with the more positive part of the dichotomy, for example the classical one of nature and culture. The focus is largely on cultural hegemony and the struggle for heterogeneity, and the relative, constitutive power of the subject vis-à-vis the object is central (Williams & Chrisman 1993 p.1ff). One area in which I find the postcolonial theory particularly interesting is the ontological definition of identity and culture, where the foundational assumption is the contextuality and subjectivity of both. This ontological notion is the aspect of postcolonialism that this thesis will focus on. In this area, the writings of Stuart Hall are particularly relevant.

Cosmopolitanism can be traced back to Socrates stating that he is “[...] not a citizen of Athen but a citizen of the world”. Often associated with authors such as Kant and in later days, Rawls, the cosmopolitan tradition is occupied with the idea of all human ethnic groups belonging to a single community based on a shared morality. The basic notion is that communication and deliberation is possible despite the differences (in terms of religion, politics etc) between groups of people around the world (Dryzek 2008, Benhabib 2002).

So how well do postcolonialism and cosmopolitanism fit together in a merged theoretical approach? In a later section, a metatheoretical discussion addressing this issue will be presented.

3.1 Post-colonialism: identity and culture

The concept of identity is central within the constructivist tradition. According to Stuart Hall, the concept of identity as a centrality in politics, which motivates the discussion and problematization of it. Identification is a never ending process, constructed on the back of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation. It is a construction, a process that is never completed, always “in process” (Hall 1996 p.2). Identity, then, is a meeting point, between on the one hand the discourses and practises that try to speak to us

and hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be spoken. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions, which discursive practises construct for us. They are the result of a successful articulation or “chaining” of the discourse into the flow of the discourse. They are constructed within discourses and they need to be understood as produced in specific historical and institutional sites, with the result that identities are increasingly fragmented and fractured, never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersected and antagonistic discourses, practises and positions (ibid p.4). The internal homogeneity, the unity within the term identity is not a natural, but a constructed, form of closure. Referring to the work of Laclau, Hall states that the constitution of an identity is an act of power, since it is always based on excluding something and establishing a violent hierarchy between the two resultant poles: man/woman etc: it is always constructed by differentiating the Self to the Other (Hall 1996 p 14ff).

This stance on identity also complicates the notion of cultural identity.

In the text *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, Hall looks into the Caribbean diaspora and the problems of identity formation in (and in relation to) this ”group” of people, settled around the world. He illuminates the problem of essentialist practises both in and outside the Caribbean, leading to an imagined collective cultural identity from within and a stereotyped, generalized picture from without (Hall 1990 p.396). He does, from his own perspective as part of the Caribbean diaspora residing in the UK, describe returning to the Caribbean as a shock of doubleness, of similarity and difference, illustrated in the difference in culture that prevails when comparing the two countries of Jamaica and Martinique. Despite this difference, there is a notion of ‘Caribbeans’, labelled as one group, one entity or identity, both by the West, that see the Caribbean as an entity in the periphery, underdeveloped - the “Other” - and by the people from the Caribbean themselves, wherever in the world they happen to have settled. “Difference” is a key word here. There are differences in the Caribbean cultural identities, and Hall describes them as the relative linkages to African, American, and European presence (Hall 1990 p.395ff). I interpret this as that these external presences have, from the very beginning, influenced the different Caribbean cultures into exactly that, different cultures. Hall recognises that the conception of cultural identity as reflecting common historical experiences and social codes that create “one people” (in the text the Caribbean people) is an important factor in all post-colonial struggles that have reshaped the world. The imaginative rediscovery and the construction of hidden histories lie behind many important social struggles such as feminism, anti-colonialism and anti-racism (Hall 1990 p. 393). However, because of the connected view of identity per se, there is no such thing as a static common culture. Identity is something that is constantly changing; it is non-static and largely subjective. Culture is dependent on who speaks or writes – the position of *enunciation* (ibid p. 392). Cultural representation is always frictional because the one who speaks and the one who is spoken to can never be identical or in the same place. Cultural identity is a positioning rather than an essence and therefore there is constant negotiation, a politics of identity with no absolute

guarantees (Hall 1990 p.395). Homogeneity in culture is thus impossible, because of the dependency on the subject who practises it.

Summing up, the post-colonial perspective can be said to question the possibility of cultural representation, through the argument that cultural identity, like any aspect of identity, is essentially subjective. The next step is to scrutinize the concept of culture from a cosmopolitan perspective.

3.2 Cosmopolitanism: hybridity and reflexivity

Cosmopolitan scholar Seyla Benhabib follows Hall's line of thought of culture and identity. She sees cultures as "[...] Complex human practises of signification and representation, of organisation and attribution, which are internally riven by conflicting narratives [...]" (Benhabib 2007 p. ix). The incorporation of new groups into a society implies mutual hybridization, i.e. a reciprocal influence between the interacting cultures. This process is part of the never-ending development of cultures and is a given, a part of the ontological reality (Benhabib 2002 p.ix).

Building on this ontological foundation, Benhabib argues that both conservative and progressive views on culture have historically been based on defective premises, the "reductionist sociology of culture". This notion includes the assumptions: 1) that cultures are clearly delineable wholes; 2) that cultures congruent with population groups and that a noncontroversial description of the human group is possible; and 3) that even if cultures do not stand in one-to-one correspondence, even if there are more than one culture in each group and more than one group that may possess the same cultural traits, this poses no important problem for politics or policy (Benhabib 2002 p. 4). Central in Benhabib's work is that much of the contemporary philosophical and legal debate is dominated by these (faulty) premises, leading to grave political consequences for how we think injustices amongst group should be addressed and how we think human diversity and pluralism should be furthered (ibid). The epistemological implication of this is that when analyzing culture, one has to begin by distinguishing the standpoint of the social observer from the social agent. Arguing in line with social constructionists, Benhabib means that cultural differences are not shallow or fictional, but that they are profound and real, partly because imagined realities guide people into action in their non-imagined realities. However, when studying human affairs, one should not take groups and individuals cultural behaviour at face value; rather, one has to try to understand the totality of circumstances of which culture is *one* aspect (Benhabib 2002 p. 7). In similarity to Hall, Benhabib suggests that one should view cultures as constant creations, recreations and negotiations of imaginary boundaries between "we" and "the others" (ibid). I

interpret this as the ontological claim that culture and identity are hybrid, the one does not produce the other, and as a call for a contextual approach to what culture is and how it affects our identities, practises and interactions. A representation of this stance on cultural interaction is the notion of *hybridity*. Stemming from a cosmopolitan worldview, hybridity is an ontological approach expressing that communities and cultures are always in flux, divided, contested; people are constantly escaping them as well as mobilizing to enforce them (Dijkstra et al 2001 p.58). Hybridity is, by definition, eclectic. As expressed by Benhabib: to be Muslim, Catholic, Greek or American is to identify oneself with some strands of collective narrative, through which the past is accounted for and the future anticipated. There is no single narrative on what it means to be a Muslim, Greek, American or Catholic, all cultural identities are under construction, subordinate to the condition of hybridity (Benhabib 2006 p. 385).

Deliberation is something central in the cosmopolitan worldview, traditionally linked to the notion of common moral strands. However, it is possible to nuance this picture and get to argue that deliberation is possible even without shared moral apprehensions. Recognizing differences in identity and culture does not mean that communication and deliberation cannot take place. Dryzek (2008) advocates discursive democratization or deliberative engagement across boundaries in transnational public spheres. Deliberation in divided societies demands a position of reflexivity, ie the realization of one's own position and of the influence of the surrounding environment and situation (see Dryzek 2008).

After having described the main elements of cosmopolitanism relevant in this thesis, the next step is to look at the compatibility of the two theoretical perspectives.

3.3 Metatheoretical discussion: a common ground?

There are obvious divergences between the post-colonial and the cosmopolitan approach, since while the former rests upon a critical foundation; the latter takes departure from a liberal perspective. While the postcolonial tradition takes a critical stance towards the norm-creating and problem formulating privilege of the western world and often argues that there are no universal values, cosmopolitanism is often criticized for defending the same universalistic claims, and imposing a standardized set of values and imperatives on a world that is essentially diverse and complex (see Delanty & He 2010). The reason why the two might go together after all is the similarity of the two ontological and epistemological ideas of what constitutes identity and the importance of an awareness of the constituting subjective. The position of enunciation, expressed by Hall, has much in common with the requirement for reflexivity and the notion of hybridity in cosmopolitan theory. Also, they complete each other on a descriptive/constructive level. Expressed differently, it is arguable that while postcolonial theory is useful in this thesis for identifying a problem, cosmopolitanism helps with the constructive imperative, the neutralizing of

culture and the reflexive position, and the idea that people do not need common norms and values in order to communicate, deliberate and coexist. In order to strengthen this notion that can be questioned from a traditional cosmopolitan perspective it is here suitable to introduce the concept of *critical* cosmopolitanism. Deliberation, as expressed by Dryzek above, creates opportunity to talk about a post-universalistic cosmopolitanism that is both dialogic and critical and that suits the globalized condition (Delanty & He 2010 p. 328). In this logic, cosmopolitanism evolves around a sense of universalism that is modified by relativism, and can be seen as expressed in the mixing and repacking of cultures and identities. Critical cosmopolitanism is then the self-problematization (reflexivity) and pluralisation that comes from the encounter with the Other (ibid p.329).

In order to create a foundation for the analysis in the next chapter, the next step is to extract a normative value from the theoretical perspective.

3.4 Normative value: subjectivity

For the following normative argumentation, it is suitable here to define and develop the normative value upon which the argumentation will be based. A normative value represents something that is good and desirable, and is often related to a particular relationship or condition (Badersten 2006 p.22). In the light of the theoretical perspectives described above, a value that is close to both traditions is the value of subjectivity. The definition of subjectivity holds that it is an adjective, *'characteristic of or belonging to reality as perceived rather than independent of mind [...] relating to or being experience or knowledge as conditioned by personal mental characteristics or states'* (Encyclopaedia Britannica).

Badersten describes normative values as being either intrinsic or extrinsic. While the intrinsic value is a "value in its own right", the extrinsic value gets its normative motivation when put in a specific context (Badersten 2006 p. 24). The normative value of subjectivity can be identified as an extrinsic value that gets its normative validation when put together with concepts such as "identity" "culture" and "integration". While it may not be a normative value in its own right, it can develop into one when associated to the concept of culture and inserted into the context of integration policy. Possibly, rather than being a pure normative value, it can be expressed as a *condition*. The post-colonial tradition suggests that the person who speaks constitutes reality, and each person has his or her own definition of the world around us. This constructivist apprehension related to culture means that *cultures are subjectively constituted*. The specific cosmopolitan view described above treats culture according to the same logic. In the context of integration policies, the condition of subjectivity is linked to the statement that the concept of culture should be treated with careful consideration, where generalizations based on cultural characteristics should be avoided.

In the following analysis, a discussion on the possibility and desirability of an alternative treatment of culture in integration policies will be presented. It will rest on the normative foundation of cultural subjectivity and the ontological assumption of the hybrid nature of cultural identities.

4 The alternative integration policy: a shift in political priority

This section will discuss the possibility and desirability in a different approach to culture in the integration-political sphere. It will use arguments in favour of the normative value of “subjectivity” and refer to the theoretical approach for validation.

The ideal-typical assessment presented in chapter 2 has one important implication. In both the French and the British case, it is possible to argue that the cultural integration strategies rest on the ontological assumption that minority and majority cultures are definable wholes. While in the French example minorities are expected to drop their cultural identities in favour of the French culture and value-base, immigrants in the British society have to categorise themselves according to certain cultural categories in order to claim special rights and entitlements. The problem with this kind of top-down perspective is that it often brings with it a sense of exclusion, of “Otherness”, that may not correspond to the desires and ambitions of the individual, and that hinders multicultural communication. Although multiculturalism in its ideological form aims to foster equality and better provision of social services, it assumes an understanding of cultures as a package of collective behavioural traits, founded in specific geographical spaces and unaffected by history and change of a context. This often serves to isolate members of minorities from, rather than facilitating their engagement with, the surrounding social, economic and political spheres (Vertovec 1996 p. 51f). Multiculturalism assigns individuals to membership in essentialized cultural categories, generating stereotypes, and the absence of homogeneity within cultures makes the construction of special rights to different cultures in society difficult if not impossible. Moreover, the project of cultural representation, meaning that certain individuals politically represent a cultural entity, is hindered by the earlier mentioned position of enunciation. If the person who speaks or writes (the social agent) constitutes the cultural identity of person spoken for (the object), then the object is inevitably being marginalized to the interpretative prerogative of both the representative of the minority cultural community and the representative of the majority culture. The problem caused by the position of enunciation is double: it concerns both the policy maker vis-à-vis the social minority group and the representative of the minority group vis-à-vis the minority individual being represented (see Hall 1990, Benhabib 2002, Vertovec 1996). Using the words of Joppke, multiculturalism politics “[...] tend to mobilize around involuntary and mutually exclusive statuses, and tend to render recognition a one-sided act of the majority society only” (Joppke 2004 p. 238). Expressed differently, by the political assumption that culture is a synonym to

identity, people are insensitively reduced to the cultural community with which they are being identified.

Seeing culture and identity through the constructivist lenses of post-colonialism and critical cosmopolitanism, it is thus possible to argue that the multiculturalism model creates and reinforces tension more than it facilitates integration. Trying to counter-balance biased pictures of the other by preserving special cultural needs by law enforcement risks to lead to cultural essentialism, since it requires a holistic definition of cultures that is impossible.

When it comes to the assimilative model, the same logic is applicable. Cultural conformity measures and adaptation ignores the very nature of the fluidity of culture. Assimilation ambitions, meaning the minority should adjust to the majority culture are likely to meet the same fate as multiculturalism strategies: they require adaptation to a cultural norm or homogeneity that does not exist, less so in the modern multicultural society than ever before. Asking the strange Other to abandon his or her cultural expression will inevitably create a sense of alienation, of Otherness and exclusion.

4.1 Neutralization of cultural identity

The globalized political reality of today, where cultures and people are constantly mixing, can be viewed as a new great transformation, similar to societal changes in the past such as the industrialization, urbanisation and the formation of the core family (Dijkstra et al 2007 p.61, Vertovec 2009 p. 21f). In such societies, it is important to move away from assumptions of the pure culture connected to the nation-state, and the idea that foreign influence generates a “loss” of the majority population’s “own” cultural identity, or the adjustment to “other” cultural identities (Dijkstra et al 2001 p. 60). It is time to address the problem of cultural reductionism, expressed by Seyla Benhabib, and recognise that within each cultural group there are significant differences, which makes generalizations upon cultures difficult and problematic.

The normative imperative is thus that cultural identities should not function as political tools in integration politics. This means that an uncoupling of law and culture - the abolishment of specific laws for protection of differences as well as legal enforcement for assimilation strategies - is necessary. In an essentially plural society, there is a need for all participators to identify themselves as strange and foreign to one another and recognize that there is no longer a cultural benchmark, which a cultural identity must meet (Dijkstra et al 2001 p. 76ff). Reconnecting to the actor/structure dualism, it is assumed that structures and actors are collaborating in the process of norm-creating. The recognition of the absence of a cultural benchmark is then required from all the actors in society, and forms the foundation for a possible alteration of the societal structure. Apart from the uncoupling of law and culture mentioned above, this scenario requires a neutralization of the relationship between the nation-state and the national culture,

as well as between the nation-state and “foreign” cultures. This change has to take immaterial form, i.e. start with people’s ideas and thoughts on culture and nationality.

4.1.1 Is the neutralization scenario possible?

One might question this constructivist approach to culture, especially to hybridity, by claiming that the fluidity and negotiability of culture creates obstacles for the very phenomena it tries to capture. If all cultures are fluid, permeable and ever renegotiable, then nothing empirical can ever conform to it - it would be nothing “out there” that could correspond to it (Kompridis 2005 p. 319). It is possible to state that hybridity hinders identification with a culture and that this renders people indifferent to its respective fate, its future possibilities and its past injustices (Kompridis 2005 p.340). If cultural characteristics cannot be identified then how can they possibly be maintained or questioned? This critique is a valid one, but it misses out one point. Hybridity is not presented as an “entity of all and nothing”, but as already mentioned; it is a set of narratives. There *are* different cultures with different characteristics, but they are not holistic or homogenous. Using the words of Stuart Hall, “culture is not just anything” (St Louis 2009 p.565). There is something out there, certain characteristics of each culture represented in modern multicultural societies. However, there are many narratives to every culture, and it is up to each and every one of us to identify with whatever narratives we choose (Benhabib 2006 p. 385). Again, this is why multiculturalism or assimilation measures risk not meeting their objectives. Neutralizing culture is possible, at least to the extent that the notion of “culture” can become less central in the political space of integration policy. In this way, hybridity offers an approach to culture that enables a shift in focus.

4.1.2 Is there a “laissez-faire” risk of cultural neutralization?

If culture was to be excluded in integration politics, one might argue that there is an obvious risk of falling into an assimilative trap, meaning the state-led reduction or erasure of the importance of cultures. If cultures are not politically recognised, then the risk of cultural frustration and intercultural clashes might be seriously heightened. A point that has to be made here is that the neutralization imperative is not a call for erasure of different cultures. It is simply an attempt to de-politicize cultural identity and to enable a slight shift in political priority. Cultural policies and state-sponsored support for different cultural expressions are not necessarily obsolete or unwelcome in the political sphere, but in the field of integration politics, there is a need to move away from the idea that cultural belonging is definable and determinant for the individual identity and its connected capacities and limitations, and recognize the polyvocal nature of each culture inhabited in

multicultural societies. This is exactly the implication of cultural neutralization within the integration-political sphere, and it enables a more equal relationship between different cultures. Political priority can be given to addressing social problems of the individual, instead of associating the problems with a certain group.

If we for one moment can assume that the cultural neutralization scenario is both desirable and possible, what, then, is the next step? Before we turn to suggestions for policy design, it is suitable to further develop the idea of reciprocal deliberation and reflexivity.

4.2 Deliberation and reflexivity in a post-cultural integration policy

The conditions of hybridity and reflexivity, described in the theoretical section above, provide a fertile ground for multicultural communication and deliberation. In a multicultural society, the individual will inevitably have to associate with people who have different ways of thinking and acting (Dijkstra et al 2001 p.76ff). Instead of trying to create commonality, it is necessary for each actor in society to embrace a position of reflexivity; to recognize the hybridity of identity and culture and try to move beyond the associated cultural limitations. Removing differences is both impossible and unnecessary. Instead society should regulate and thus recognize and appreciate the fact that people have different relations to societal norms and values. Decision-making and politics could be based on a foundation of deliberation that recognizes these differences. *Compatibility* is a condition for this objective. A commonality of cultures, values and lifestyles is not, nor is special treatment of cultural communities. The state and government has an important role in fostering deliberation, it should work towards the promotion and organizing of public debate – in which many groups and segments participate – on political and normative views, definitions and procedures. It should teach the individual citizen to recognize differences between standards and systems of values and to deal with them. In other words, it needs to stimulate contacts between groups of different identities, without asking these groups to develop a common system of values or norms. The building and supporting of different cross-cultural forums for deliberation thus has the function of satisfying the integrative value of equality in terms of political power.

The condition of compatibility also requires equality in economic and social power. While equality in values is not a prerequisite for communication, equality in power is, otherwise it is per definition domination. Therefore, policies aimed at reducing social inequalities are needed. In the next section, a brief argumentation about policy objectives and design is presented.

4.3 The shift towards socio-economic policies

As mentioned earlier, integration refers to a state of society where minority and majority groups reside together without structural conflict. The definition also entailed a notion of an equal power balance in terms of economic, political and social values. The policy design will then in an abstract sense be focused on addressing specific needs rather than generating common values (Dryzek 2006 p.68). In an industrialized western society where culture is essentially neutralized, integration evolves around the dimension of economics. More concretely, the values of economic and social power can be materialized into the concept of labour. The key to integration and participation in society is then *work*. In addition to enhancing economic conditions, work organizes people's lives and provides a system of concrete expectations and objectives for them (Dijkstra et al 2001 p. 78). Improving economic conditions for the marginalized and 'different' is more likely to reduce majority-minority tension than efforts aimed at cultural change. Attention and resources previously given to diverse cultural integration policies should therefore be shifted to address the big issue of poverty and unemployment amongst immigrant individuals. The key to work, consequently, is education. The greatest obstacle for the emancipation of minority groups is not within their culture but in their level of education (ibid). The problem of dropout rates amongst minority groups as illustrated in the British example above needs to be given political attention. The problem of education attendance in France is an example further deteriorated by the decision to expel pupils that wear religious symbols such as the hijab. Consequently, educational policies need to overlook this kind of cultural or religious manifestation.

Central in the state's obligation to create possibilities for deliberation is to create geographical proximity between the different groups in society. Therefore, housing politics is essential. It is questionable how much influence over the individuals settling choice should be given to the state, but the objective should be a society free from residential segregation.

4.4 A third ideal-type: compatibility

From the above reasoning, it is possible to construct a third ideal type within the context of integration policy. The question of whether or not it is possible to actually find societies that correspond to this third ideal-typical model is left out in this analysis. As in the previous sections, the aim of the construction of the ideal-type is not to state that this kind of society does or does not exist, but rather to suggest a theoretical alternative to the political treatment of culture in the investigated integration politics.

The basic *stipulation* in this third model is that cultural identity, just like other dimensions of identity, is subjective, negotiable and constantly changing. The

associated *norm* is then represented by the concept of compatibility, meaning that people or groups with different values and backgrounds are able to work together in everyday practise by progressively developing the necessary instruments to do so. People may design and observe rules for associating with one another, without it being necessary to base them on common ideas, values and norms. The connected *prescription* is therefore a legal design that is uncoupling law and culture and seeks to maximize social equality of people with different cultural identities, generating intersubjectivity. It is about uniting different groups in another way than on the basis of culture, and instead focusing on political problems such as housing, education, and labour. Establishing new and strengthening already existing institutions and forums for intercultural deliberation will facilitate this process. Other material expressions are labour market and education laws and policies that aim to provide support for the most marginalized, regardless of cultural identity. The immaterial expressions of compatibility are thus ideas and principles of deliberation, cosmopolitanism and equality in societal values and capacities.

Recalling the assumption of structural and actor-led norm creation, the mutual cooperation of the two dimensions enables a shift in norms. The different expressions of the societal norms, as well as the basic stipulations and prescriptions, are results of the interaction of the societal structure and actors, the perpetual encounter with the Other (see Delanty & He 2010 p.329). In this third model, it is suitable to reconnect to the reasoning about the respective importance of the actors and structures in society. Regardless of its desirability, it is questionable whether this type of vision for multicultural societies is practically possible. As mentioned earlier, this thesis has assumed a constant processing between actors and structures in society; they are mutually dependent and constitutive. Therefore, structural realities and norms are never constant but changeable. In a political reality, it is therefore valid to assume that it is practically possible to move away from the models of multiculturalism and assimilation towards an integration strategy of compatibility.

	Assimilation	Multiculturalism	Compatibility
Stipulation	Culture is closely tied to citizenship	Each individual has the right to his/her culture	Culture is subjective
Norm	Commonality	Tolerance	Compatibility
Prescription	Assimilative integration laws	Laws protecting cultural minorities	Laws uncoupled from culture
Material expression	Integration contract	Quotas given to cultural communities	Forums for deliberation, redistributing measures
Immaterial expression	Unity, cohesion	Difference, tolerance, 'melting pot'	Deliberation, Cosmopolitanism. Equality

Table 2: Ideal types, extended

5 Conclusions

In this study, the political problem of integration of majority and minority groups has been discussed. It has acknowledged the problem of integration policy built on the basis of cultural identity from a constructivist perspective. In the ideal-typical assessment, the results suggest that both assimilative and multicultural integration strategies build on an assumption that cultures are definable wholes, clearly distinct from one another. Moreover, in cultural integration politics, there seems to be a faulty assumption that culture is a synonym to identity. This ontological approach can be nuanced, and then a possible explanation to the weakness of cultural identity politics emerges. Cultural identity politics are likely to have weak results because cultures are not definable entities; rather they are interconnected, non-static and fluid. This is a weak foundation upon which to build policy. Multiculturalism often fails to acknowledge the hybrid nature of cultures and the constitutive power of the subject, with the result that the minority individuals are reduced to their memberships in essentialized cultural categories, generating stereotypes. According to the same logic, assimilative societies, where the minority is required to drop cultural traditions and symbols and adapt to the majority culture, are also likely to create tension and a sense of alienation amongst minority groups. In both types of societies, there are often wide gaps between minority and majority segments.

In order to bridge this gap there is a need for a shift in political priority. Instead of focusing on cultural similarities or differences, policy makers should create conditions for deliberation and intersubjectivity between majority and minority groups. The theme of this policy design is ‘compatibility’, as opposed to ‘difference’ or ‘commonality’. While a like-mindedness in terms of norms and values is not needed in order to deliberate, equality in terms of economic, social and political values is necessary. Therefore, a political shift in focus towards socio-economic factors and the utmost objective to reduce inequalities between majority and minority groups is called for. Here it is possible to object by stating that redistributive measures are already an established reality in many welfare-oriented European states. However, the point here is that such measures, along with efforts to create cross-cultural deliberation mechanisms, should be given the additional political priority currently given to cultural integration initiatives.

This study has investigated the status of culture in integration politics. A study with the same theoretical foundation but which could aim for analysing the relationship between conflicting cultural entities on a larger scale, e.g. the possibilities of deliberation between Israeli and Palestinian political groups, would be interesting to read.

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