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Jensen, Kristian Kriegbaum

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# **What can and cannot be willed: how politicians talk about national identity and immigrants**

**Kristian Kriegbaum Jensen**

**Department of Political Science and Government, Aarhus University, Denmark**

**ABSTRACT.** The ethnic-civic framework remains widely used in nationalism research. However, in the context of European immigrant integration politics, where almost all ‘nation talk’ is occurring in civic and liberal registers, the framework has a hard time identifying how conceptions of national identity brought forth in political debate differ in their exclusionary potential. This leads some to the conclusion that national identity is losing explanatory power. Building on the insights of Oliver Zimmer, I argue that we may find a different picture if we treat cultural content and logic of boundary construction – two parameters conflated in the ethnic-civic framework – as two distinct analytical levels. The framework I propose focuses on an individual and collective dimension of logic of boundary construction that together constitute the inclusionary/exclusionary core of national identity. The framework is tested on the political debate on immigrant integration in Denmark and Norway in selected years. Indeed, the framework enables us to move beyond the widespread idea that Danish politicians subscribe to an ethnic conception of the nation, while Norwegian political thought is somewhere in between an ethnic and civic conception. The true difference is that Danish politicians, unlike their Norwegian counterparts, do not acknowledge the collective self-understanding as an object of political action.

**KEYWORDS:** National identity, ethnic-civic framework, immigrant integration politics, Denmark, Norway

## **Introduction**

Despite being aptly criticised, the distinction between ethnic and civic national identity has retained a pervasive influence on studies of national identity.<sup>1</sup> The critique regards both analytical inadequacy (Brubaker 1999; Kymlicka 1995; Zimmer 2003) and normative connotations (Brown 1999; Brubaker 1999; Yack 1996). At the level of discourse, which this article focuses on, the ethnic-civic framework does not adequately capture the exclusionary drive of national identity or the many ways in which politicians seek recourse in and contest conceptions of national identity.<sup>2</sup> As Oliver Zimmer (2003) calls attention to, the framework is not sensitive to discontinuously occurring shifts in public redefinitions of nationhood, because it conflates two analytical levels: cultural content and the logic of boundary construction.<sup>3</sup> The ethnic variant combines ‘cultural factors’ (e.g., language and history) with deterministic logic of boundary construction, while the civic variant combines ‘political factors’ (e.g., political values and state institutions) with voluntaristic logic. The two logics differ on whether national identity formation is within the reach of human agency or determined by inalterable factors.

However, every kind of content or factor may be processed through either logic. This is effectively demonstrated in a recent article by Halikiopoulou et al. (2013) that shows how even radical right parties across Europe tap into the ‘civic zeitgeist’ and apply deterministic logic to liberal-democratic values in their

constructions of nationhood (see also Betz and Johnson 2004). Per Mouritsen (2006, 2013) describes how this civic turn is equally present in Danish, German and English immigrant integration discourse. For example, the Danish political discourse displays a strong focus on the genealogy of so-called Danish values such as equality, democracy and tolerance and ‘the imagined nature of identities and pasts ... is invariably lost in public discourse’ (2006: 84). Still, it is, more often than not, claimed that Danish politicians subscribe to an ethnic conception of the nation. Seemingly, this is caused by a lack of better concepts. The ethnic-civic framework has a hard time grasping how public redefinitions of nationhood centred on liberal-democratic values can be highly exclusive, because it does not separate the cultural content from the logic of boundary construction.<sup>4</sup>

I will return to the critique of the ethnic-civic framework and flesh out the alternative that I propose. This alternative builds on Zimmer’s article from 2003, with one crucial refinement: the distinction between a collective and an individual dimension on which the logic of boundary construction may operate in political discourse. First, however, I would like to note a second reason – specific to research on immigrant integration policies – why this alternative framework is more helpful.

Studies claiming causal significance of national identity for the shaping of integration policies tend to conflate the discursive level and the practical level of policy by inferring the national identity from the law itself. Restrictive or exclusive policy configurations are equated with an ethnic national identity, while permissive or inclusive policy configurations are equated with a civic national identity. This overlooks that liberal values may just as well be invoked in an exclusionary manner (Lægaard 2007: 48-51; Smith 2000: 18). To substantiate national identity’s explanatory leverage, we must be more specific on the core inclusionary/exclusionary

properties of the concept. This will leave us better equipped to systematically explore national differences in how the political elite use national identity to frame social phenomena as problems of integration and then trace the potential causal connection to the design of integration policies. The alternative framework that I propose focuses on the logic of boundary construction as the inclusionary/exclusionary core of discursive constructions of national identity.

In the following, I engage with and expand on the analytical critique of the ethnic-civic distinction. Building on Zimmer (2003), I construct an alternative analytical framework, which I test through an analysis of Danish and Norwegian parliamentary debates on immigrant integration in selected years.

### **Two objections against the ethnic-civic framework: the cultural component critique and the cultural content critique**

It is commonly assumed that a sense of shared distinctiveness is essential for the reproduction of social cohesion in a national community (Favell 2006). The ethnic-civic distinction describes two ideal-typical ways of thinking about national identity. They are typically presented as opposite ends of a continuum, with the claim that every national identity will mix both ethnic and civic elements but, nonetheless, lean towards one of them. On a strict interpretation, civic national identity is a purely political conception, in principle open to anyone (voluntarist). National membership is understood as nothing more than expressed consent to adhere by certain universal values embedded in the political institutions of the nation-state. Contrarily, a strict interpretation of ethnic national identity focuses solely on common descent and is

therefore pre-political, ascriptive and exclusive. Although the distinction is not understood this strictly in most research, it will serve as a good starting point for the following discussion. I will present two arguments for replacing or modifying the ethnic-civic distinction: the *cultural component* critique and the *cultural content* critique. I begin with the former.

Sociologically speaking, no nation can exist without the sense of shared distinctiveness that a common cultural imagination provides (Anderson 2006: 6; Brubaker 1999; Kymlicka 1995; Miller 1995: 25; Nielsen 1999; Smith 1991: 11, 2000: 18). The idea of a people with distinct and common characteristics is invoked in political debate through accentuation and dramatization of key national symbols. The problem with the strict definitions presented above is that this cultural component of nationalism is lacking.<sup>5</sup> The maximally universal construction of civic nationalism makes poor sense of particularism because ahistorical, universal political values cannot differentiate between national groups. Universal values are per definition unable to direct the loyalty of individuals towards particular communities (Bauböck 2002; Calhoun 2007: 136, 144-45; Joppke 2008). To separate national identity from particular cultural horizons is, in the words of Bernard Yack (1996), to propagate a myth. Similarly, the uniformly descent-oriented understanding of ethnic nationalism is equally mythical because it neglects the importance of a common cultural imagination in reproducing the very sense of common descent. The consequence of upholding these strict definitions is that no national identity can be categorised as civic or ethnic.

Most studies take this halfway into account by either making a tripartite typology adding cultural nationalism as its own type (Kymlicka 1999; Nieguth 1999) or simply understanding the ethnic variant as a nationalism focused on cultural

sameness (see e.g. Schulman 2004). However, if only one type of nationalism includes a cultural component, we invariably end up with all nationalistic argumentation in that category. In Western Europe today, the use of race and blood to establish national distinctiveness has been thoroughly discredited. Moreover, as Brochmann and Seland states on the particular ‘undemanding attitude’ of Sweden:

Even in the Swedish context, we would agree with Rogers Brubaker that it is impossible to define civic nationalism without involving ‘a crucial cultural component ... a strong sense of separate peoplehood’. Peoplehood is thus understood in terms of a common language, and a specific political culture, necessary to hold the civic nation together (Brochmann & Seland 2010: 440).

But if we relax both definitions, it becomes difficult to categorise nations at all if we are not somehow able to distinguish clearly between the political culture of civic nationalism and the non-political culture of ethnic nationalism. The central parameter of distinction, then, is not whether the national identity is state-centred or culture-centred but the type of culture it is centred on. However, as the following will show, I do not believe that we move forward at all by distinguishing types of national culture on the grounds of the cultural content invoked, if the goal is to identify the inclusionary/exclusionary properties of discursive constructions of national identity. This I term the *cultural content* critique.

Cécile Laborde proposes to understand political culture as a particular collective’s way of realizing universal values through ‘political institutions, practices, symbols, ideological and rhetorical traditions, and so forth’ while non-political culture is ‘the broad culture, language, ways of life and social customs characteristic of a particular community’ (Laborde 2002: 598–9). In this way, civic nationalism

maintains universal values and political institutions as its characteristics, while the culture of ethnic nationalism supposedly remains decoupled from universal values and political institutions. But how, then, are we to categorise political argumentation that targets ways of life and social customs in the name of realising particular conceptions of universal values? For example, when argued that the realisation of particular conceptions of equality and individual autonomy demands some form of intervention from the state in family life and religious norms and practices as is found in the Danish political debate (Mouritsen & Olsen 2011; Mouritsen 2006) or the feminist idea of the family as a school of justice (Okin 1989). The institutionalisation of particular conceptions of universal values may very well target citizen's personal beliefs, lifestyles and social customs. In this sense, the personal becomes political, and the pursuance of seemingly universal values may involve valuing cultural sameness in spheres such as the workplace, leisure activities, family life, friendship, sexuality or religion. In other words, it makes little analytical sense to distinguish between types of national culture or identities on the ground of the cultural content invoked, as the open-ended nature of any cultural idiom or resource makes it receptive to both inclusive and exclusive interpretations.

It seems like a cul-de-sac trying to adjust the ethnic-civic framework to these two critiques without removing cultural content as a central parameter of distinction. Whether the nation is understood predominantly in terms of political values, institutions, language, history, lifestyle, social customs, religion or geography, does not necessarily tell us anything about how demanding becoming a member of the nation is thought to be. This is also why the ethnic-civic distinction is causally ambiguous. If a civic national identity also involves a cultural component, then newcomers must, in any case, integrate or assimilate with the values and norms of a

culturally and historically particular national community. Hence, there is no ground for claiming that restrictive citizenship policies such as ‘nine years of legal residence and a formal test on language, history, culture, and political system’, as in Denmark, express an ethnic national identity in themselves (Brochmann & Seland 2010: 437–8). Such measures may just as well be based on the argument that it is demanding to learn and adjust to the meaning and practices intimately linked to the political values and institutions defining the nation. By making cultural content a central parameter in distinguishing types of nationhood, we obscure the fact that these are of minor importance for the exclusivity of the national self-understanding. In the words of Zimmer: ‘What matters with regard to the construction of national identities is less what resources political actors draw upon than how they put these resources to practical use’ (2003: 181). That is, we must analytically separate cultural content from the logic of boundary construction.

### **Making the logic of boundary construction the analytical focus**

Disentangling cultural content from the logic of boundary construction results in two levels of analysis. Having already dealt with the first level, different kinds of cultural content, the following focuses on the causally more significant level of logic of boundary construction.

The basic question here concerns whether national identity is thought to be transformable by way of human will and action or determined by inalterable factors (Smith 2000: 6-7; Zimmer 2003: 180-81). The former perspective subscribes to voluntaristic logic, the latter to deterministic logic.<sup>6</sup> Voluntaristic logic states that we

are capable of intentionally managing the sense of national identity we acquire. We can freely govern our own behavior and beliefs and choose to live by a certain code. Hence, there is nothing transcending the will of the individual members of the nation or inalterable about nationhood. Conversely, deterministic logic states that national identity is the product of factors outside the reach of intentional reconstruction. By way of naturalization, national identity is made a condition of human agency instead of an object and placed beyond personal or political decision-making (Zimmer 2003: 179). Treating these two logics as opposite ends of a continuum, we move closer to one of the ends when we change our perception of the role free will can play in national identity formation.

However, we need to refine the analysis on the level of logic of boundary construction by distinguishing an *individual* dimension from a *collective* dimension. Answering whether an individual have the ability to freely choose his or hers national identity is different from answering whether the national collective can choose to intentionally reconstruct how it identifies itself. How one conceives of human agency on one dimension is independent from the other, but combined they form a certain perspective on the process of national identity formation.

The individual dimension is concerned with the degree to which individuals are perceived to be in control of their own national identity formation. From a deterministic viewpoint, national culture is deeply rooted in the individual. Acquiring a new national identity, therefore, becomes an onerous project for a person who has not been raised within the institutional and cultural confines of the nation-state in question. To the extent personal change is even seen as possible, it involves extensive socialisation, since understanding and belonging can only evolve gradually as one internalizes national life through lived experiences. From a voluntaristic perspective it

is, contrarily, assumed that people can work creatively with their national identity. The national way of being is presented as something relatively easy for an individual to become a part of.

The collective dimension is concerned with the degree to which the collective self-understanding is presented as something that the national community can choose to intentionally reconstruct or as outside the bounds of democratic deliberation and political action. From a deterministic perspective, the national identity is outside the reach of a collective effort at reconstruction. This is akin to Suvarierol's (2012: 212) concept of nation-freezing which describes the discursive construction of national identity as fixed, stable, and closed for change. As such, national identity designates a fixed end-point of individual change and becomes a condition for political action. However, this is not the same as excluding new members to the nation. What it does preclude is entering into a dialogue with prospective and new members regarding how the cultural content is to be interpreted or perhaps substituted. From a voluntaristic perspective, the political character of nation-building is acknowledged. National identity is seen as constructed through intentional collective action, and political actors are seen as capable of intentionally affecting what it entails to be and become a member of the nation. This opens up the possibility of publicly debating dominant perceptions and scrutinising the role of institutions in reproducing them.

Together, the two dimensions constitute a conceptual space distinguishing national identity frames (see figure below). As we move towards the voluntaristic end on both dimensions the scope of agency increases, and the national identity, thus conceptualized, becomes potentially more inclusive of immigrants and their descendants.



Moving down to the bottom-left corner (collectively deterministic, individually voluntaristic), it is possible for an individual to choose to adapt to the expectations of a naturalised collective identity. That is, the demandingness of assimilation is vastly lowered. The idea of republican citizenship widespread in France is closest to this corner, as it firmly believes in the assimilability of individuals into a fixed, universally appealing political and cultural legacy given rise to by the French Revolution (Brubaker 1992: 111-12; Favell 2001: 43–5).

In the top-right corner (collectively voluntaristic, individually deterministic), the collective self-understanding is seen as intentionally reconstructable, but constituting a new national identity demands extensive socialisation of individuals. This perspective challenges what to demand from immigrants. Since national identity develops slowly and social cohesion must be preserved, one must demand some degree of *assimilation* today while trying to *integrate* everyone in society into a new sense of national identity for the social cohesion of tomorrow. The Norwegian parliamentary debates, in the years I analyse, largely unfold within this square of the framework.

Finally, in the bottom-right corner (collectively voluntaristic, individually voluntaristic), it is possible for both the collective and the individual to intentionally mutually adapt to each other. Becoming a member of the nation and accessing the political dialogue on national identity are not seen as demanding for the individual. If, in fact, this shows itself difficult, this frame will more likely direct attention to changing structures, institutions and the beliefs of natives in order to ease the access of immigrants.

I test the usefulness of this framework in the following analysis of selected years in the Danish and Norwegian parliamentary debates on immigrant integration.

These two cases are particularly interesting, because existing research suggests national identity as a driving force behind the differences in immigrant integration policies we can observe. However, using the ethnic-civic framework, these authors are having a hard time identifying how politicians in these two countries differ in their understanding of national identity.

### **National identity and Scandinavian immigrant integration politics**

From a functionalistic perspective, the Scandinavian countries seem like most likely candidates to converge on similar immigrant integration policies, because their similar, comprehensive welfare states creates a strong impetus to shape the market functionality of newcomers. The Scandinavian welfare states are small and open economies that combine universalism with generous support for low-wage groups or groups marginalised by the labour market. This is accompanied by a strong focus on full employment and the work ethic of citizens (Andersen 2004; Johansson and Hvinden 2007). Even though the degree of similarity is debatable, studies still conclude that in a European context they cluster in terms of low poverty rates, high gender equality, generous social and unemployment policies and expenditure on activation measures (Jochem 2011; Johansson and Hvinden 2007; Kautto et al. 2001).

This foundation is a strong vision or mobilising image in public debate (Ryner 2007). Yet, convergence on similar immigrant integration policies has not been the case. During the recent decades, Denmark has adopted some of the most restrictive immigrant integration policies in Europe – particularly in relation to requirements for permanent residence, citizenship and family reunification. In the same period,

Sweden has barely changed their (now) exceptionally permissive policies, while Norway has taken somewhat of a middle road (Borevi 2010; Brochmann & Hagelund 2010: 341–50; Brochmann & Seland 2010; Koopmans et al. 2012: 1226). Faced with these striking differences, some comparative studies suggest national identity as an explanation (Borevi 2010; Brochmann & Hagelund 2010: 35, 359–62; Brochmann & Seland 2010).

As is so often the case, these studies rely on the ethnic-civic framework to describe differences. Danish national identity is described as ethno-cultural, Swedish national identity as civic, with Norway somewhere in between. These differences, however, are often inferred from the policies in place. Moreover, other single-case studies show a different picture in which egalitarianism, the welfare state and democratic values are the central symbols of the nation in all three countries (Gullestad 2002; Hagelund 2002; Mouritsen 2006; Mouritsen and Olsen 2011; Stråth 2000; Trägårdh 2002). Hence, relying on the ethnic-civic framework, we are hard pressed to identify differences in how Scandinavian politicians talk about national identity and immigrants.

In the following, I analyze quite parallel periods in Danish and Norwegian immigrant integration politics. In both cases, the analysis starts from the proposal and passing of a new law that made attendance of an introduction program a condition of receiving permanent residence. In Denmark, a three-year program was proposed in November 1997 and passed in April 1998. In Norway, a two-year program was proposed in December 2002 and passed in June 2003. Furthermore, in June 2002 the new Danish centre-right government implemented a final language test that one must pass in order to complete the program and raised the legal residence requirement for

permanent residence from five to seven years. In Norway it has remained three years of legal residence and no final tests have been added to the program.

In Denmark, I analyse four parliamentary debates on immigrant integration in the period from November 1997 until April 1998. Furthermore, three parliamentary debates from March 2001 until October 2003 on permanent residence and family reunification are analysed. The 2001-election was dominated by immigration and integration issues and resulted in the centre-left government being replaced by a centre-right coalition consisting of the Liberal Party and the Conservatives. In the following years, a host of restrictive measures regarding family reunification, permanent residence and naturalisation was passed in Parliament.

In Norway, I end the analysis in May 2005 when the citizenship law was revised without allowing double citizenship even though recommended by all but one on the preparatory committee (NOU 32 2000). This period saw six parliamentary debates on the introduction program and naturalisation as well as the publication of a first-of-its-kind white paper in 2004, *Diversity through inclusion and participation*, devoted to the issue of what the national 'we' must consist of in a multicultural society and how it can be cultivated. A centre-right coalition consisting of the Conservatives, the Christian People's Party and the Liberal Party governed in this period.

Arguments in the debates are qualitatively coded as to whether they can reasonably be said to be nationalistic or not; that is, relying on and valorising a conception of the nation. Then, nationalistic arguments are coded more specifically as to whether they relate to the individual and/or collective dimension, and whether they are mainly based on a voluntaristic or deterministic outlook.

I focus the analysis on centre-left and centre-right political parties.<sup>7</sup> Even though a strong far-right party has been emphasised as a main driver of strict integration policies (Howard 2009), I exclude them here for three reasons. Firstly, the nationalistic discourse of the far-right has been analyzed extensively. We already know that they represent the nation as deterministically bounded on both the individual and collective dimension (Hagelund 2003, Halikiopoulou et al. 2013; Rydgren 2004). Secondly, they always need to cooperate with the larger traditional parties in order to influence policies, and how the traditional parties understand the nation has not received the same attention. Finally, even though Norway has had the strongest far-right party (the Progress Party) in terms of vote share, Denmark has adopted the most restrictive integration policies. This suggests shifting focus towards how the centre-left and centre-right reasons about these issues.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, I do not find noticeable differences in how Danish politicians talk about the nation between 1997 and 2003, despite this being the years that the strong voter appeal of the Danish Peoples Party became evident.

### **Norway: deep belonging to a dynamic nation<sup>9</sup>**

The Norwegian parliamentary debates on immigrant integration are characterised by both consensus and ambivalence regarding the national self-understanding. In fact, national identity never became a contested issue, despite the government's white paper from 2004 devoted to the question of national identity. Moreover, the issue of making permanent residence and citizenship conditional on completion of an introduction programme never divided the political parties, and only the Socialist Left

Party wanted to allow double citizenship. As Hagelund (2003) describes the situation in Norwegian integration politics at the time, the Progress Party was the ‘indecent other’ against which all other political parties positioned themselves, leaving little room for political disagreement.

The white paper straightforwardly states the political goal of guiding the development ‘of a new and more including understanding of what it means to be Norwegian’ (Norway 2004: 18). The opposition shared this goal but critiqued the lack of proposals for concrete action. As Signe Øye of the Social Democrats noted: ‘The problem is not what the white paper says, but what it does not say’ (Stortinget 2005: 2475).<sup>10</sup> It is therefore quite surprising, if not telling, that the parliamentary debates witnessed all parties mentioning the non-negotiability of the Norwegian societies’ basic values, while nobody reflected on a central point in the white paper: the intentional, dialogical reconstruction of the national identity along the lines of certain core political values:

What belongs to societies’ shared basic values, and what can be accepted and respected as part of the diversity in terms of lifestyle and moral standpoint, must be discussed in relation to specific issues and over time. Everyone must respect the rules of society in force. At the same time, everybody has the freedom to seek influence on the content of the basic societal values through political and civil processes. This content is not static (Norway 2004: 34).<sup>11</sup>

In the parliamentary debates, the basic values take on a self-evident, non-negotiable character, and considerable emphasis is put on the ‘will of the immigrant’ to adjust to Norwegian language and society. Conversely, the white paper mainly processes

political values in a voluntaristic manner, emphasizing broad dialogue on their interpretation.<sup>12</sup>

Still, all parties argue that public institutions must change and become more flexible in order to accommodate a more culturally diverse population and ease the identification of minorities with the national community. As the white paper states: 'Offering equal services that show consideration for citizens having new and other needs than the majority is recognizing the new diversity in practice. It shows that society is open to change' (Norway 2004: 12).<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the invigorating qualities of cultural diversity are often noted and described as something that must be actively incorporated into the national identity. Politicians picture themselves as responsible for guiding this process. However, this focus on nation-building shares the stage in the parliamentary debates with an understanding of integration as a two-way process between immigrants and institutions that leaves little to be expected of the majority population beyond non-discriminatory behaviour.

On the whole, there is considerable tension in how Norwegian politicians understand the national collective. Both a wish for assimilation into the existing way of being and integration into a new and more inclusive sense of national identity is visible. This tension, I contend, can be traced back to a combination of a voluntaristic perspective on collective self-understanding with a deterministic perspective on individual self-understanding. From a desire to uphold social cohesion such a perspective challenges one to strike a balance between assimilation and integration.

Regarding the individual dimension of boundary construction, the white paper also lingers on the 'mental and emotional depth of the integration process' (Norway 2004: 33). While the white paper states that no one can be demanded a close emotional relationship to Norway, it also states that:

All people 'integrate' in relation to society and the people around them. We connect with each other through extensive socialisation processes in the family, circle of friends, school and work. Through these processes, we learn to be people in specific communities (Norway 2004: 33).<sup>14</sup>

This leaves the impression that acquiring or cultivating Norwegian national identity is a question of lengthy socialisation processes. This highly deterministic view further reveals itself in three ways. First, the white paper differentiates between immigrants and their descendants when setting goals for belonging. Adult immigrants are not expected to develop a strong identification with Norway because they 'have been shaped in other societies than the Norwegian' (Norway 2004: 35).<sup>15</sup> Conversely, the ambition is much higher for descendants of immigrants because 'Norway is their most important frame of reference and the society that has shaped them' (Norway 2004: 37).<sup>16</sup> In this way, the success of descendants becomes the 'true touchstone' of integration (Norway 2004: 11).

Second, all parties direct attention towards the importance of descendants being extensively connected to society through friends, work, school, political participation and/or volunteering, which largely translates into being raised within the confines of public institutions (especially kindergarten and schools) and egalitarian and tolerant homes with independent mothers. The worry seems to be that the descendants risk not being able to function in Norwegian society if their families do not allow them to be shaped by the welfare state institutions. Hence, children must participate in all school activities such as excursions, parties and swimming classes (Norway 2004: 57; Local Government Committee 2005a: 2, 4), and mothers, in order to raise their children properly, must learn the language, become economically

independent and free themselves from a patriarchal culture. Particularly, employment and economic independence are emphasised as drivers of inclusion in terms of social levelling, social recognition, self-respect and mutual understanding. It is even linked to democratic participation of women in a statement shared by all political parties:

The development of the welfare state has laid a good basis for women's entry into the workplace and made women more economically independent. Participation in a democratic society presupposes freedom, equality and independence (Local Government Committee 2005b: 13).<sup>17</sup>

Finally, the cultural environment that descendants are raised in is also linked to freedom and social equality through the development of social competence. A need for extensive socialisation shows itself in the simultaneous emphasis on autonomous identity formation, social competence and social equality. In order to realise social equality, every immigrant descendant must be able to develop their identity as they choose to. This entails having the social competence to fluently shift between different social and cultural contexts, which is cultivated by socializing and having friends across cultural boundaries (Norway 2004: 30, 37, 63–4, 67). Hence, social equality is not just about equal opportunities through universal welfare schemes and a tolerant and non-discriminatory environment but *also* about having a deep understanding of each others' differences that can be utilised in one's own identity project(s). The white paper talks of 'harmonic co-existence' as predicated on a social and cultural interaction that connotes fear of cultural segregation and becoming too internally different (Norway 2004: 38, 55).

To sum up, developing a more inclusive national identity is hinged upon children of immigrants and natives growing up together within the right institutional

environment. Tension and ambivalence stems from the idea that a nation-building project is conditioned by the fact that national belonging presupposes deep socialisation, while upholding social cohesion demands continuity between generations. How Norwegian centre-left and centre-right politicians talk about national identity revolves around striking a balance between guiding a new sense of 'we' in new generations while safeguarding continuity. In other words, the use of national identity by Norwegian centre-left and centre-right parties gravitate towards a voluntaristic perspective on the collective dimension of boundary construction and a deterministic perspective on the individual dimension of boundary construction.

### **Denmark: multiculturalism as a tension field<sup>18</sup>**

In June 1998, Danish parliament passed a new integration law making permanent residence conditional on attending a three year introduction. Disagreement between the government and the opposition mainly arose on whether completion of the program should lead to permanent residence. The centre-right opposition wanted permanent residence to require seven instead of three years of legal residence. Their main argument was that refugees are, by definition, only supposed to stay temporarily, and the state should not make immigrants out of them. This argument was linked to the notion of Denmark not being or becoming an immigration country and the rejection of cultural equality in Danish society. Instead, Danish culture (encompassing Christianity) should be protected and continue to be the basis for legislation and public values and norms. Birthe Rønn Hornbech of the Liberal Party was candid:

Let me say that the Liberals are not in favour of a multicultural society where all cultures are treated equally in such a way that everyone should have equal weight with respect to Danish law and Danish values. We do not think so. Denmark has a long history with common values, a common faith and a common heart language, and this should of course still be emphasised in our set of norms and in our law (Folketinget 1998).<sup>19</sup>

It is presented as obvious that state policy must reflect a historically defined national identity instead of being an active ingredient in its reshaping. This essentialisation of Danishness was also evident when Anders Fogh Rasmussen<sup>20</sup> of the Liberal Party proclaimed that Danish culture is better than Muslim culture (quoted in Jacobsen 1997). He further criticised the cultural relativism that he believed to see on the left wing for being afraid to listen to the demand of the Danish people to prioritise the more valuable Danish culture.<sup>21</sup> He went on to state that Danish society only has an interest in Danish-speaking immigrants, rejecting any form of public support for mother-tongue education (Jacobsen 1997). Helge Adam Møller of the Conservative Party concurred:

We want the Danish society to remain characterised by the history, culture, religion, language and traditions that generations of Danes before us have helped create, shape and pass on. We want people living in Denmark to recognise that they and their families are part of Danish society (Møller 1997).<sup>22</sup>

Cultural diversity that challenges this continuity is pictured as troublesome. Residential pockets of mainly non-Western immigrants – so-called ‘parallel societies’ – are problematised as well as (arranged) marriages between a person raised in

Denmark (immigrant descendant) and a spouse raised in a non-Western (Muslim) country:

Not only is it difficult for newly arrived spouses to integrate, but the resident spouse, who is perhaps born in Denmark and well-integrated, is forced by the newly arrived spouse to live in an unhappy cultural tension field (The Liberal Party & the Conservatives 2001).<sup>23</sup>

Cultural proximity is presented as a critical parameter for foreseeable successful integration. The assumption is that cultural distance is proportional to the length of the journey the immigrant or descendant is on towards comprehending the nation. This line of thinking also forms the argumentation of the Social Democratic Party. Particularly revealing is the quote below from then Minister of the Interior, Thorkild Simonsen, in which tolerance is interpreted as patience and understanding for the long road of integration that immigrants confront:

We offer to help them adapt to society with its existing culture, norms and rules. Conversely, we expect that they work according to ability to become a thriving part of the Danish society. It is a lengthy process that requires tolerance (Simonsen 1998).<sup>24</sup>

Besides refraining from discrimination, the moral duties of the national community in relation to newcomers are limited to being patient and render the necessary assistance for them to understand – if not internalise – the national way of life and act accordingly. Consequently, the Social Democratic lead government did not include the fair regard for the culture of immigrants into the purpose clause of the integration law.

At no point did the Social Democrats contest the deterministic view of the national collective coming from the political right, and they only opposed restrictive policy proposals from a humanitarian perspective. Instead, they took share in the reverence for ‘the feelings’ or ‘the understanding’ of ‘the People’ as the foundation of political legitimacy; that is, as something that policy must reflect and not as something that policy must confront in a reconstructive manner (unless it is blatant discrimination). The problem is always to be found in the policy design and never in the general attitude of the population. ‘The People’ as a symbolic resource becomes the bearer of national authenticity.<sup>25</sup>

The Social Liberal Party did not express concern for Denmark becoming a multi-ethnic country, openly questioned demands going beyond what is needed for labour market inclusion, and at one point noted that Danish identity had developed under the influence of many different cultures and would continue to do so (Folketinget 1998). This was not, however, connected to the state being able to actively pursue such a development. It was not viewed as a matter for the state to concern itself with facilitating a multicultural perspective on society or the creation of a new, more inclusive national self-understanding. Instead, the Social Liberals were much more concerned with upholding human rights and the rule of law. The Socialist People’s Party shared these concerns and further stressed tolerance and a need for a system that offered immigrants real opportunities for succeeding.

Turning to the individual dimension of boundary construction, the problematisation of cultural proximity also rests on an assumption that national identity develops slowly through socialisation processes. In the parliamentary debates, this shows as a strong focus on the cultural cross-pressure that children of (non-Western) immigrants presumably face from their family and Danish society.

From the political right, it was demanded that immigrant parents adapt to Danish cultural patterns (The Liberal Party & the Conservatives 2001), that ‘young people who have grown up and gone to Danish schools [has] become more Danish than their parents recognise’ (Bertel Haarder in Folketinget 2002) and that it should be easier for descendants of immigrants ‘to adapt to the Danish society since they have probably been brought up by Danish norms to a greater extent’ (The Liberal Party & the Conservatives 1997).<sup>26</sup>

Cultural segregation is one of the central worries of the Liberal Party, the Conservatives and the Social Democrats. It is seen as detrimental to social cohesion because children of immigrants will grow up in homes where Danish is not spoken, and where family norms exist that oppose the independence of women, especially to seek work and education. In order to create fully integrated children, immigrant families should leave behind the norms that curtail gender equality and the development of autonomous individuals and adopt a Danish way of child rearing (Mouritsen and Olsen 2011, 8–9) and, not least, Danish as the household language. If not, their children will grow up divided between two cultures and will be denied a happy childhood and opportunities in their adult life. Similarly, it is important that descendants of immigrants do not create cultural tension in the home by finding a spouse raised in a non-Western country. As Social Democrat Sophie Hæstorp Andersen puts it:

Young people feel Danish but have a different ethnic background, and when they choose to marry with someone from their home country, a new first-generation immigrant arrives in Denmark, and then the integration must start all over. It makes it harder for the children to be well integrated (Folketinget 2003).<sup>27</sup>

Mixing with Danes and participating in public institutions (such as schools) is emphasised. Preferably, immigrants submerge themselves in activities involving them in Danish daily life, hereby showing a will to adapt and learn. From the perspective of the political right, and more implicitly also the Social Democrats, the linkage between the individual and the nation is largely deterministic. One does not simply choose to adapt to the national way of life; rather, it has to be ingrained through family norms and extensive participation in the major social institutions of the welfare state.

Whether the Social Liberal Party or the Socialist People's Party agreed with this line of thinking is rather unclear. However, they opposed the restrictive law changes, such as the controversial 24-year rule<sup>28</sup>, but they did so mainly from the perspective of human rights instead of challenging the conception of the nation laid forward.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this article has been to back up Oliver Zimmer's claim that disentangling cultural content and the logic of boundary construction enriches the analysis of the political use of national identity – at least regarding research on immigrant integration politics. By distinguishing these two levels of analysis, we are better equipped to understand why purported civic conceptions of national identity may turn out either exclusive or inclusive. That is, because a change in the cultural content do not necessarily accompany a change in the logic of boundary construction. It might even reasonably be hypothesised that politicians find it easier to replace the cultural

content of their arguments – for example, as response to the zeitgeist or the particular question or problem they confront – than to change the way they are used to imagine the boundaries of the nation.

This insight also provides an objection to the liberal convergence thesis within immigrant integration research (Joppke 2007a, 2007b). Research backing this thesis tends to focus on the level of cultural content; specifically, the increasing use of liberal-democratic values in West European states in order to delineate the national community (Joppke 2008). Interpreting this as evidence of the diminishing significance of nationalism neglects what really matters: how liberal-democratic values are used to construct national boundaries. On the level of logic of boundary construction, national differences might well persist despite convergence in cultural content.

Furthermore, this article has sought to refine Zimmer's analytical framework by differentiating between a collective and individual dimension on which the logic of boundary construction can work. Failure to do so impoverishes the conclusions of inclusiveness that one can draw and, perhaps most importantly, does not capture significant variation in how politicians discursively construct the nation.

The Danish and Norwegian cases exemplify this. Typically, they have both been described as ethno-cultural nations, or Norway has been categorised as somewhere in between an ethno-cultural and civic conception. This categorisation neglects that the political debate in both countries predominantly occur in civic and liberal registers. If we instead use the analytical framework developed here, we more clearly see how they differ. In the parliamentary debates analyzed, mainstream politicians in both countries tend to use deterministic logic on the individual dimension of boundary construction. However, on the collective dimension,

voluntaristic logic dominates in Norway while deterministic logic is pervasive in Denmark. That is, Danish politicians, unlike their Norwegian counterparts, do not acknowledge the collective self-understanding as an object of political action.

The next step – at least in a Scandinavian context – is to move from ideational differences to policy differences. How, if at all, do these different perspectives on the national community result in different integration policies? Do they shape how political parties compete on issues of integration? Do they compete with or work in conjunction with other non-nationalistic ideas? Do they sustain, stress or are they circumvented by existing institutional arrangements? Answering these questions requires tracing the path of national identity ideas in specific decision-making processes.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See Jayet (2012) for a critical discussion of quantitative studies using the ethnic-civic framework.

<sup>2</sup> A statement can sensibly be classified as nationalist if: (1) it operates with or relies on criteria constituting a people as belonging to a distinct nation, and (2) assigns some political significance to the reproduction of national distinctiveness. This is a slight modification of Sune Lægaard's definition (2007: 39) in order to better capture the relational character of national identity. A claim of national *distinctiveness* is only intelligible in relation to some 'Other'.

<sup>3</sup> Oliver Zimmer, however, talks about symbolic resources (cultural content) and boundary mechanisms based on different logics of boundary construction. I see it as redundant to talk about both mechanisms and logics as they describe the same thing.

<sup>4</sup> One could look towards other typologies of national identity instead of modifying the ethnic-civic framework. An obvious candidate would be Ernest Gellner's typology. However, its apolitical, functionalistic, and sociologically reductionist character makes it unsuited to analyze discourse (O'Leary 1998: 63-71).

<sup>5</sup> The term 'cultural component' designates that any notion of national identity assumes the existence of a national collective distinct in some way from other nations. This distinctiveness will ultimately be behavioural, and, thus, the political valorisation of national culture is basically about a particular way of being and becoming a citizen in the state or, one might say, standards for good citizenship (Wodak et al. 2009: 20-21). The analytical framework targets such notions as they appear in political discourse. I do not hereby claim that culture can be reduced to discourse, or that discursive constructions of national culture and behavioural regularities in the population are necessarily in alignment.

<sup>6</sup> Oliver Zimmer (2003) contrasts deterministic logic to constructivist logic. That is problematic; however, as constructivist logic does not involve an assumption about the human ability to control identity formation. Just because meaning structures are constructed do not mean they change easily or are any less determining of self-identification (Berger & Luckmann 1966: 79). Nieguth (1999: 158-59) also links the inclusiveness of a nation to the acknowledgement of it as a social construct.

<sup>7</sup> In Denmark, going from the political left to the right, these are the Socialistic People's Party (*Socialistisk Folkeparti*), the Social Democrats (*Socialdemokraterne*), the Social Liberal Party (*Radikale Venstre*), the Liberal Party (*Venstre*) and the Conservatives (*Konservative*). In Norway, they

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are the Socialist Left Party (*Sosialistisk Venstreparti*), the Labour Party (*Arbeiderpartiet*), the Christian People's Party (*Kristelig Folkeparti*), the Centre Party (*Senterpartiet*) and the Conservatives (*Høyre*).

<sup>8</sup> Minkenberg (2001) and van Spanje (2010) also show that it is in no way given how other parties respond to the success of a radical right party.

<sup>9</sup> All quotes are translated by the author.

<sup>10</sup> Original text: '*Det problematiske er ikke hva som står i meldingen, men hva som ikke står i St.meld. nr. 49.*'

<sup>11</sup> Original text: '*Hva som skal høre til samfunnets felles, grunnleggende verdier, og hva som skal aksepteres og respekteres som del av mangfoldet når det gjelder levesett og verdistandpunkt, må drøftes i forhold til konkrete spørsmål og over tid. Alle må respektere de regler for fellesskapet som gjelder. Samtidig har alle frihet til å søke innflytelse på innholdet i de grunnleggende samfunnsverdiene, gjennom politiske og sivile prosesser. Dette innholdet er ikke statisk.*'

<sup>12</sup> Ambivalence, however, is also visible in the white paper (Norway 2004: 11, 33, 55).

<sup>13</sup> Original text: '*Å tilby likeverdige tjenester som tar hensyn til at borgerne kan ha nye og andre behov enn flertallet, er å anerkjenne det nye mangfoldet i praksis. Det viser at samfunnet er åpent for å endre seg.*'

<sup>14</sup> Original text: '*Alle mennesker «integreres» i forhold til samfunnet og menneskene rundt. Vi knytter oss til hverandre gjennom omfattende sosialiseringprosesser i familien, vennekretsen, skolen og arbeidslivet. I disse prosessene lærer vi å være mennesker i bestemte samfunn.*'

<sup>15</sup> Original text: '*Voksne innvandrere som kommer til Norge har blitt formet i andre samfunn enn det norske.*'

<sup>16</sup> Original text: '*Norge er deres viktigste referanse og det samfunnet som har formet dem.*'

<sup>17</sup> Original text: '*Utviklingen av velferdsstaten har lagt et godt grunnlag for kvinners inntog i arbeidslivet og gjort kvinner mer økonomisk selvstendige. Frihet, likeverd og selvstendighet er forutsetninger for å delta og medvirke i et demokratisk samfunn.*'

<sup>18</sup> All quotes are translated by the author.

<sup>19</sup> Original text: '*Dér vil jeg godt sige, at Venstre ikke er tilhænger af et multikulturelt samfund, hvor man ligestiller alle kulturer på en sådan måde, at alle skulle have samme vægt med hensyn til dansk lovgivning og danske værdier. Det mener vi ikke. Danmark har en lang historie med nogle fælles*

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*værdier, en fælles tro og et fælles hjertesprog, og det må selvfølgelig stadig væk være det, som vi lægger vægt på i vort normsæt og i vor lovgivning.'*

<sup>20</sup> Anders Fogh Rasmussen became party leader in 1998 and prime minister from 2001 to 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Although it is often used rhetorically to accuse the left wing, cultural relativism or multiculturalism as an ideology has in fact never been an influential idea on the left wing.

<sup>22</sup> Original text: *'Vi ønsker, at det danske samfund - også i fremtiden - skal være præget af den historie, kultur, religion, det sprog og de traditioner, som generationer af danskere før os har været med til at skabe, forme og viderebringe. Vi ønsker, at mennesker, der bor i Danmark, skal vedkende sig, at de og deres familie er en del af det danske samfund.'*

<sup>23</sup> Original text: *'Ikke blot er det vanskeligt for nytilkomne ægtefæller at integrere sig, men den herboende ægtefælle, der måske er født i Danmark og velintegreret, tvinges af den nytilkomne ægtefælle til at leve i et ulykkeligt kulturelt spændingsfelt...'*

<sup>24</sup> Original text: *'Vi tilbyder at hjælpe dem med at indpasse sig i samfundet med dets eksisterende kultur, normer og regler. Vi forventer omvendt, at de arbejder efter evne på at blive en velfungerende del af det danske samfund. Det er en langvarig proces, der kræver tolerance.'*

<sup>25</sup> Hansen (2002) finds the same unquestionable positive role of 'the People' in her analysis of the Danish discourse on EU.

<sup>26</sup> Original text: *'De unge, som er vokset op og har gået i danske skoler og er blevet mere danske, end deres forældre aner...'* and *'...at 2. og 3. generationsindvandrernes efterkommere i et vist omfang vil have lettere ved at tilpasse sig det danske samfund, da de formentlig i større omfang vil være opdraget efter danske normer.'*

<sup>27</sup> Original text: *'Unge føler sig danske, men har en anden etnisk baggrund, og når de så vælger at gifte sig med en fra deres forældres hjemland, kommer der en ny første generationsindvandrer til Danmark, og så skal integrationen starte forfra. Det gør det sværere for børnene at blive godt integreret.'*

<sup>28</sup> The rule requires both the spouse residing in Denmark and the spouse residing abroad to be at least 24 years old for family reunification to be granted.

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