

Review - European Multiculturalisms

Written by Elise Rietveld

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ELISE RIETVELD, APR 6 2013

European Multiculturalisms: Cultural, Religious and Ethnic Challenges
Edited by: Anna Triandafyllidou, Tariq Modood and Nasar Meer.
Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012.

Political heavyweights such as David Cameron and Angela Merkel have recently proclaimed that multiculturalism has failed, underlining the tension between the securitisation of migration and the on-going need for integration, or the incorporation of minorities into society. *European Multiculturalisms: Cultural, Religious and Ethnic Challenges* offers an assessment of the different ways in which European countries have dealt with diversity. Multiculturalism is one such 'mode of integration' that recognises that 'social existence consists of individuals and groups, and that both need to be provided for in the formal and informal distribution of powers' (p. 4). While the presumed crisis of multiculturalism has given it an air of obsolescence, the authors argue that in fact, multiculturalism remains the best way to conceptualise citizenship in the globalised and diverse societies of Europe.

The book presents findings from a large international research project (EMILIE) and consists of two parts that reflect the twofold aims of this interdisciplinary study: the first part contains theoretical and conceptual reflections and refinements; and the second part focuses on the empirical and comparative exploration of the political responses

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developed during the alleged crisis of multiculturalism in seven case studies: five in Northern Europe, where immigration has been on the political agenda for some time now (Belgium, the UK, Denmark, France and Germany); and two in Southern Europe, where immigration has become an issue only relatively recently (Spain and Greece). Two countries in Central Eastern Europe, which face emigration rather than immigration, are also sometimes referred to (Poland and Latvia). Together, they help to both grasp and evaluate recent developments in the accommodation of minorities, and particularly Muslims, and contribute to our understanding of the 'crisis of multiculturalism' as well as the variety of multiculturalisms present in Europe.

It is this explicit and thoughtful combination of theoretical and empirical work that sets this book apart. Despite the efforts of a number of scholars, notably and not coincidentally including the editors of this volume, scholarly work on multiculturalism and migration remains mostly bounded by disciplinary traditions that focus either on theory or on empirical analysis. Yet there is an important opportunity for the insights of these two lines of inquiry to inspire and enrich each other's research programmes in a more systematic manner. This book presents a key example of what that may look like. The most significant chapters in this respect are chapters two, three and four. In chapters two and three, Modood and Meer devise an intellectual framework for assessing and comparing the policies, institutions and discourses that European states have developed in response to the tensions surrounding multiculturalism. They then apply this framework to several cases. After surveying a number of models of citizenship found in both normative political theory and social science they offer a typology that is based around eight categories to conceptualise the differences in engagement with post-immigration diversity. This typology includes neutrality towards diversity (yes/no), emphasis on national identity (high/low) and the recognition of difference (high/medium/low). This theoretical framework is then applied to the above five north-Western European and two South European countries: by analysing policies, institutions, history and discourse for each country, the authors classify the cases according to the categories developed. This classification shows that although there are similarities between the cases, most importantly with regards to the securitisation of (particularly Muslim) immigration, 'national models remain an important means of conceptualising developments in political orientations toward migration-related diversity' (p. 61). This example illustrates how the book uses theoretical insights to illuminate the case studies.

In chapter four, Mouritsen presents an interesting conceptual engagement with empirical information and highlights differences and similarities in the citizenship discourse that has taken hold in Denmark, Germany and the UK. These developments are used to draw out different dimensions in the current conceptualisation of citizenship, such as its reinvigorated (albeit already significant) importance as a social, legal and economic status (which contradicts some predictions that national citizenship would lose its importance for the provision of rights and entitlements); as well as its infusion with normative ideals of civic virtue. It is argued that the increased requirements for access to membership (such as citizenship tests comprising language proficiency and cultural knowledge) express a desire on the part of the state to mould immigrants into 'good' citizens, a practice that should not be considered liberal but rather exclusive (although the UK in this respect is more benign than the other cases).

Overall, the book explores the different dimensions of debate that have become salient as part of the alleged crisis of multiculturalism, such as fragmentation, secularism, Muslims and women. These are taken up throughout the different chapters, which are structured by topic rather than country and include education policy (Gropas and Triandafyllidou) and the concept and policy of integration (Miera). These two chapters in particular underline how the theoretical and empirical dimensions of the book are not as separate as the two-part structure might suggest. They combine the description of policy responses with conceptual analysis and theoretical evaluation in a way that challenges any strict distinction. The empirical chapters are strongly theoretically informed and do not only provide insight into the particular ways countries have devised specific political responses to diversity but also engage with the central questions of the book, which pertain to how difference and diversity are perceived in the different countries (or where the lines between groups in society are drawn), how that impacts on policy responses, and how they are related to ideas of national cohesion and change.

The theoretical argument the book makes is spelled out in chapter two and alluded to in (some of) the later chapters. It holds that the renewed emphasis on national unity and citizenship that has been characterised as the 're-nationalisation of various citizenship regimes' (p. 34) does not necessarily conflict with the idea of multiculturalism. Citizenship cannot in fact avoid particularity, but such particularity can still be open to diversity as long as its content

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is pluralised. Particularity is not necessarily reprehensible, and a multicultural approach to diversity and particularity (as one model in the typology offered in chapter two) would be the best way of pursuing equal citizenship. Rather than aiming for unattainable universality or neutrality, then, states are better off accepting and recognising difference and allowing it to feature in their self-conception.

The collection of essays points out how countries respond differently to similar challenges – even if policies may seem similar, their exact meaning depends on context; and argues that multiculturalism still provides useful insights for conceptualising political orientations to cultural diversity. The empirical information is presented in a sensible way: rather than discussing full country profiles, the discussion focuses on the most relevant elements. However, there is a slight imbalance in the comparative dimension of the book, as not all chapters compare the same cases.

The book's main novelty and strength lie in the interdisciplinary combination of theoretical and empirical rationales; but herein also lays its main drawback. The comparison of the different countries and their specific approaches to particular policies might tend too much towards the notion of national models for integration, which in itself presents too coherent a picture of political orientations and glosses over inconsistencies and internal conflicts. But the real issue is that these models are taken as different starting positions, from which the countries are assumed to move – albeit through asymmetrical pathways – towards a more multicultural approach to citizenship. This assumption however somewhat conflates the descriptive notion that some countries have indeed in the past moved in this direction with the normative prescription that they should continue to do so. The discussion of the two Southern European countries in chapter three for example shows how the authors consider the approach to diversity taken here to be not just different but underdeveloped – or in their words, remaining 'at an early stage' (p. 78). This seems to slip into a slightly unwarranted teleological view of the development of political ideas inspired by the authors' commitment to multiculturalism. There is of course no guarantee that any later stage will look more like their favoured model; which casts some doubt on the use of comparing present realities to an ideal end state.

To conclude, the volume presents a timely and important contribution to both empirical and theoretical literatures on multiculturalism, migration and integration. It offers clarifications of the ideas and policies that have been at the centre of the perceived crisis of multiculturalism – or, what states have actually been doing – and contributes to our conceptual understanding of these developments. It offers the reader the information and the tools to both comprehend and evaluate the tense political climate surrounding multiculturalism, immigration and Muslims.

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