



## UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

### Stuck in a revolving door : secularism, assimilation and democratic pluralism

Jansen, H.Y.M.

**Publication date**  
2006

[Link to publication](#)

#### **Citation for published version (APA):**

Jansen, H. Y. M. (2006). *Stuck in a revolving door : secularism, assimilation and democratic pluralism*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

#### **General rights**

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

#### **Disclaimer/Complaints regulations**

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, P.O. Box 19185, 1000 GD Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

## 2

### **The New Liberal Sociology of Assimilation and its Pluralist Alternatives**

As a normatively charged concept, assimilation, in this sense, is opposed not to difference but to segregation, ghettoisation and marginalisation (Brubaker 2001: 543).

It is not ethnic, cultural or religious peculiarity that divides people into ethnic categories. Rather, it is social segregation (prohibition of communality and commerce, ritualization of intercourse, maintenance of symbolic distinction, refusal of social esteem, etc.) which leads to the self-construction and self-perpetuation of ethnic identities (Bauman 1988: 66).

#### **Introduction**

Why assimilation? Can assimilation be helpful if we want to oppose segregation, ghettoisation or marginalisation? Is 'integration' not sufficient or is it problematic in another way? Can we reconcile assimilation with difference while avoiding segregation? What is its relation to multiculturalism? And what is the relation of all these concepts to the practices related to them? In this chapter, I critically discuss two central contributions to a recently-developed position in immigration studies that I call a 'liberal sociology of assimilation'. I primarily discuss Christian Joppke and Ewa Morawska's programmatic introduction to *Toward assimilation and citizenship: immigrants in liberal nation-*

*states* (2003). But I will also reflect on Rogers Brubaker's reconceptualisation of assimilation (2001), on which Joppke and Morawska's reintroduction of the concept is founded.<sup>1</sup> In reaction to the view of the *liberal assimilationists*, I will argue that we need a pluralism with a greater critical, egalitarian and pluralising potential, to then try to contribute to such a concept in terms of what I call 'democratic relational pluralism'.

The major reason for Brubaker as well as for Joppke and Morawska to reintroduce assimilation is their claim that its use as a legitimate sociological and normative concept prevents us from focusing on differences only, as well as from theoretically endorsing or masking processes of social exclusion in terms of (desirable) cultural difference. They strongly criticise differentialism and multiculturalism for arguing that the actual cultural diversity produced by immigration in liberal societies should lead to the explicit recognition of immigrants as distinct ethnic groups or ethnic minorities. In this sense, their view is related to Noiriel's, whose work Brubaker (2001) mentions as an important source for his reintroduction of assimilation. Like Noiriel, they argue that assimilation is a concept that was rejected for the wrong reasons in the age of differentialism, and that it is necessary to reflect on its morally legitimate uses.

However, unlike Noiriel, they do not think that assimilation is necessarily a rather violent social process that forces migrants and their children to adapt to the receiving society at several levels. Instead, they argue that liberal societies have changed in such ways that a new form of assimilation, which is 'morally defensible as well as analytically complex', occurs on a large scale (Brubaker 2001: 531). This new assimilation does not imply a pressure towards cultural homogenisation; it only requires adaptation to the most general principles or core values of liberal societies and linguistic adaptation. It leads to a gradual cultural convergence within a few generations, but this convergence has clear limits, for the liberalisation and pluralisation of modern cultures imply that there will always be divergences: this is precisely the condition for the moral legitimacy of the new assimilation. The liberal assimilationists present their view as a 'new trend' (Joppke and Morawska 2003: 1) in immigration studies, which turns away from the three concepts that dominated most theories of

---

<sup>1</sup> In the article 'The return of assimilation? Changing perspectives on immigration and its sequels in France, Germany and the United States' (2001), Brubaker summarised a reconceptualisation of assimilation in mainly American sociology without explicitly linking it to a liberal political theory. This reconceptualisation of assimilation stands at the basis of the 'liberal assimilationism' outlined by Joppke and Morawska. Brubaker's article was reprinted in Joppke and Morawska's volume (2003) and also in the Swiss social scientific revue 'Impressum' (2003). I will also occasionally refer to an earlier text by Joppke that problematises multiculturalism, written together with Steven Lukes as an introduction to *Multicultural Questions* (1999).

migration from the 1990s onwards, namely integration, transnationalism and multiculturalism. Instead, they emphasise the importance of both assimilation and citizenship.

I present the new assimilationists' criticism of the dominant concepts from the 1990s in section one and their proposed alternatives in section two, delaying my critical comments until the last three sections. In section three, I problematise the ways in which the liberal assimilationists conceive of the reintroduction of assimilation and citizenship. In section four, I develop an alternative view in terms of democratic relational pluralism and transnationalism. Finally, in section five, I return to the concept of assimilation.

## 2.1 Critique of postnationalism, multiculturalism and integration

### *Postnationalism and multiculturalism*

The liberal assimilationists' analysis of what went wrong with the incorporation of immigrants in the 1990s underlies their view of the necessity to re-emphasise assimilation and citizenship. Most importantly, they criticise postnationalist and multiculturalist perspectives on global migration, because, in their view, these perspectives have played an important role in immigrants' exclusion from their host societies.

First of all, the liberal assimilationists reproach postnationalism for idealising sources of rights other than citizenship, particularly human rights, when it argues that, with the gradual decline of the importance of the nation-state under conditions of globalisation, citizenship has become less relevant because other kinds of inclusion, such as non-citizen membership or 'denizenship', have taken its place. The postnationalist idea was summarised by Yasemin Soysal when she argued that foreign labourers in Europe had not been integrated as 'citizens', but as 'persons', and that '(t)his new model, which I call post-national (...) derive(s) from transnational discourse and structures celebrating human rights as a world-level organizing principle' (Soysal 1994: 3).

The basic reproach against this view made by liberal assimilationists is that the trust placed in transnational institutions for the protection of immigrants is unfounded, because it is clearly insufficient. In Germany, for example, Joppke and Morawska argue, postnational membership has not been able to prevent the exclusion of foreign labourers and their children. Instead, the expectation that workers were visitors who were going to return home and who would not become citizens was for a long time tacitly extended even to their children born in Germany. This sometimes led to exclusionary measures, such as, for example, education in separate classes, and therefore to grave disadvantages for

their socio-economic integration.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, for example in the 1990s, the South-German Bavarian right-wing populist CSU government used the fact that immigrants' children had not acquired citizenship rights to justify 'sending back' youthful delinquents to their 'home countries', which had never actually been their homes at all.<sup>3</sup>

Next to postnationalism, 'multiculturalism' became an increasingly important concept in the 1990s. Joppke and Morawska distinguish between what they call the '*de facto* multiculturalism' present in all liberal states, which they endorse, and 'official multiculturalism', which they reject (2003: 8). *De facto* multiculturalism denotes two things. First, the actual cultural diversity we encounter in liberal nation-states precisely because they abolished assimilationist practices. Second, as far as *de facto* multiculturalism also designates certain policies, it implies a practical tolerance for many of the religious and cultural claims of immigrants, such as the right to wear religious clothing, to obey religious holidays, and to pass on one's maternal language. It is grounded in the 'principles of public neutrality, non-discrimination, and protection of individual rights' (2). In short, in the basic principles of liberalism.

*De facto* multiculturalism came up in all Western countries because policymakers had to deal with the multicultural character that societies inevitably developed as a result of migration. Following Martin Schain's analysis of incorporation policies in France (1999), Joppke and Morawska argue that even a country like France, with its strong assimilationist tradition and Republican discourse, developed practical multicultural policies combined with a quite common philosophy of *integration*, very much like other Western countries. For Joppke and Morawska, this common philosophy of integration basically implies a strategy designed to 'tolerate cultural difference in private and associational life, but refuse to give it public status' (2003: 7). Once again,

---

<sup>2</sup> Exclusion from citizenship had long been common because of the *ius sanguinis* definition of citizenship in the German legal tradition. This law was only changed into a *ius soli* notion of citizenship in 1999. Only from then on, did it become possible for migrants' children who had been born on German soil to acquire citizenship. The possibility of 'using' multiculturalism to exclude 'metics' (French *méteques*; from the ancient Greek word for 'stranger') or denizens from citizenship has not escaped multiculturalists and transnationalists. See, for example, Kymlicka (2002), who explains that multicultural rights are meant to supplement citizenship rights (and human rights), not replace them. I will return to this issue later.

<sup>3</sup> Not only delinquents were 'sent back', but also refugees from the former Yugoslavia, particularly Roma who had already been in Germany for years (see De Stoop 1996). In the Netherlands, after 2002, the mixed Christian-democratic (CDA) and conservative-liberal (VVD) government also 'returned' children that had grown up in the Netherlands for most or all of their lives to their 'country of origin'. Government-sponsored organisations that supported an artistic protest against these practices in the form of the television series '26.000 gezichten' ['26,000 faces'] were even reprimanded by one of the cabinet ministers for 'abusing' state funds.

this is a brief reformulation of the basic liberal way of dealing with cultural diversity.

'Official multiculturalism' goes one step further, and this is the multiculturalism that Joppke and Morawska oppose. It exists in those countries that define or have defined themselves as 'multicultural' at a political level and that advocate collective rights and more official multicultural self-definitions of the state. Although a contested concept from the beginning, countries like Canada, Australia, the Netherlands and Sweden officially declared themselves 'multicultural' in the 1970s and 1980s. They gave public recognition and collective rights to (certain groups of) migrants as distinct ethnic groups or 'ethnic minorities'. The European countries that had officially defined themselves as multicultural in the 1980s (the Netherlands and Sweden), abolished this self-definition in the course of the 1990s; only Canada and Australia still officially define themselves as multicultural.

Joppke and Morawska take Will Kymlicka's philosophy of liberal multiculturalism as the standard justification for official multiculturalism and consider it 'difficult to defend' at a normative level (Joppke and Morawska 2003: 10). In their explanation, Kymlicka argues that official multiculturalism should empower migrants to 'renegotiate' the terms of state-imposed integration, without being able to explain what that really means. 'For Kymlicka, individuals need "societal cultures" (which he defines, much like "nations," in terms of a shared language and territorial rootedness) as context for free and meaningful choices' (2003: 11). Because migrants need their cultures as a context for free choice, they should have the right to maintain them, and because the host country cannot be as culturally neutral as the standard liberal view suggests, and thus imposes itself on migrants unjustly, migrants should receive special collective rights to maintain their cultural practices.<sup>4</sup>

In 1999, Joppke had already aimed a lot of criticism at official multiculturalism. Here, he followed the criticism of official multiculturalism levelled in the name of an anti-essentialist, constructivist concept of culture. Briefly summarised, this criticism implies that multiculturalism departs from an incorrect, reified concept of culture that suggests that members of 'different' cultures can live together in one society, but nevertheless remain separate as in

---

<sup>4</sup> This is an incorrect interpretation of Kymlicka's view of migrant multiculturalism. What he in fact argues is that migrants cannot bring with them the social practices and institutions linked to the vocabularies that they do bring. Therefore, with regard to immigrants, a commitment to 'multiculturalism and *polyethnicity* is a shift in how immigrants integrate in the dominant culture, not whether they integrate' (Kymlicka 1995: 78). The problematic aspects of the concept of 'societal culture' have been criticised by several political theorists from within the tradition of multiculturalism (see, for example, Carens 2000).

a mosaic. The use of the image of the mosaic reveals a distorted view of what culture means, particularly in the context of global migration, where people cannot be considered the members of one or even two cultures, but constantly pick elements from diverse cultures, creating individualised and hybridised mixtures from diverse cultural sources. For example, following Salman Rushdie's concept of culture as 'hodgepodge', Jeremy Waldron has argued that in the cultures of global migration, 'meaningful options may come to us as items or fragments from a variety of cultural sources' (Waldron 1992: 783). In a similar vein, Homi Bhabha has said that multiculturalism is, in fact, a pleonasm, because culture itself always implies cultures in the plural (Bhabha 1994). This criticism also leads to a rejection of identity politics as founded on an overly closed view of culture (Joppke and Lukes 1999).<sup>5</sup>

With regard to Europe specifically, Joppke and Morawska identify another aspect to the problematic status of multiculturalism. The European context for multiculturalism is different from the one in Canada and Australia. These two countries introduced multiculturalism as an official self-understanding of the entire nation. For example, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988 required the government to

recognise and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and (to acknowledge) the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage (quoted from Joppke and Morawska 2003: 12; quoting from Kymlicka 1998: 185).

This understanding of multiculturalism implies that all members of Canadian society are supposed to consider their membership as 'multicultural' in some way. In Europe, by contrast, Joppke and Morawska argue, multiculturalism is usually only associated with immigrants, who are thus transformed into ethnic minorities *different* from the members of majorities: in this context, it leads to exclusion rather than recognition. Their argument is in line with Brubaker and Noiriél when they argue that, in France, for example, differentialism was quickly adopted by the Front National and helped legitimise those who did not

---

<sup>5</sup> Along similar lines, theorists from the 'inside' of the multiculturalist movement gradually developed the idea that the benefits enjoyed by minorities in the way of special rights and even of affirmative action were seriously outweighed by their drawbacks: a decline of attention to the socio-economic causes of marginalisation and a focus on culture that led to reifying identity politics, which confined people to 'culture' categories that had only developed in reaction to ascriptive classification (see for example Bauman 1996; Hollinger 1997; Benhabib 2001).

want migrants to belong to the French 'us' against the long French tradition of assimilation.<sup>6</sup>

With regard to the fate of multiculturalism in Europe, Joppke and Morawska frequently refer to its progress in the Netherlands. For them, multiculturalism was introduced mainly as an extension of the Dutch corporatist model of organising polity and society, also called 'pillarisation'. The *Minderhedennota* [Minorities Act] introduced in 1983 designated eight official minorities. In line with the tradition of pillarisation, these minorities received state funding for their emancipation, which they were expected to realise by developing 'separate institutions' such as 'religious schools and ethnic broadcasting' (2003: 14). According to Joppke and Morawska, however, multiculturalism did not lead to the expected emancipation. Instead, it fed only a 'small elite of ethnic activists, along with infights and factionalisms' (14) and did not improve the lives of ordinary immigrants. Moreover, multiculturalism introduced a form of pillarisation for the Muslims whereas the model had been left behind by the rest of Dutch society in the decades of secularisation in the late twentieth century. Thus, a new pillar was added while the others had already, at least partly, crumbled. Pillarisation, moreover, had always found an embracing element in the shared sense of 'being members of one nation' among the diverse cooperating elites, and this was precisely the element that was structurally underestimated in the ethnic minority policies. Following the analysis of the Dutch sociologist Han Entzinger, Joppke and Morawska suggest that consensus-building was neglected and that multiculturalism 'only yielded segregation and exclusion' (15, quoting from Entzinger 2000: 20).<sup>7</sup>

Summarising, the liberal assimilationists' central critique of both multiculturalism and postnationalism is that while these concepts and the practices based on them seemingly help migrants to integrate and find 'their way,' they actually lead to the exclusion and segregation of immigrants and even their children from the nation-states in which they live, both culturally and institutionally. For Brubaker, Joppke and Morawska, only stronger notions of citizenship and assimilation can help to counter these tendencies.

---

<sup>6</sup> However, Brubaker also argues that in the United States, segregation and ghettoisation remained great problems in the 1990s, and at some points escalated due to the segregating effects of multiculturalism.

<sup>7</sup> This is a contestable or at least *very* one-sided account of what happened in the Netherlands. Delaying my comments until section three, I just wish to underline here that Joppke and Morawska adhere to the explanation given by some politicians and sociologists and that there is no consensus among Dutch scholars about this diagnosis or about the effectiveness or justifiability of at least some of the new 'integration policies'.

*Integration*

The third dominant concept in migration studies criticised by Joppke and Morawska is 'integration'. Their criticism is two-sided. In the first place, it is directed against its introduction as a replacement of the morally reprehensible assimilationism that preceded it. In the 1970s and 1980s, integration was gradually adopted in most liberal countries because of the colonial and nationalist connotations of assimilation. In fact, however, 'whoever uses the word "integration" wishes to say what is allegedly not meant by it, "assimilation"' (2003: 4). Instead of replacing one concept with another, the old concept should have been redefined in such a way that it would no longer imply old-style enforced cultural homogenisation. A liberal redefinition of the concept would have prevented the forgetfulness of the legitimate, structural sides of assimilation, namely the 'socio-economic equalisation of the life-chances between immigrants and native population (in employment, income, education, etc.)' (6). Joppke and Morawska blame the discourse of integration, and particularly the 'abhorring of the old, culture-focused "assimilation" approach' (6) leading to the 'difference-oriented rhetoric' of the 1980s and 1990s, for causing a forgetfulness of that part of the vocabulary of assimilation.

This is not the only criticism of integration, however. Following Favell (2001), Joppke and Morawska also criticise the use of the concept of integration for the reason that, while it was introduced to overcome the legitimisation of violence and ethnic particularism inherent in the concept of assimilation, the concept of integration *itself* emphasises the necessity of social cohesion or even unity, even more so than assimilation. 'Integration' suggests the existence of an integrated society that can also disintegrate. It suggests the existence, in relation to immigrants, of specific and structurally different problems from those concerning already 'integrated' persons.

However, contemporary societies are not built as integrated wholes. They are differentiated into fields or systems in which some participate and others do not. Here, Joppke and Morawska follow macro-sociological theories like Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social fields and Niklas Luhmann's system theory. Both have argued that modern society is built up of different, relatively independently functioning systems or fields that all have their own mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. In this sense, from the first moment of arrival, everyone is similar to certain others participating in some field or system, for example in terms of the economy, housing, etc. This diversification into different fields or systems implies that we cannot speak of gradations of integration, let alone of 'integrated and non-integrated' persons. There is simply

no centre or integrated whole.<sup>8</sup> This perspective leads Joppke and Morawska to argue that the notion of 'immigrant' has a limited scope. This notion suggests that those entering a country for an extended period of time have a fundamentally different position from residents, while in fact this is only the case with regard to the political system, because only this system defines membership on a spatial, territorial, and therefore exclusionary basis (Joppke and Morawska 2003: 3).

Anticipating my later comments, I would like to remark here that a striking aspect of their critique of the three concepts of postnationalism, multiculturalism and integration is that while the liberal assimilationists' theoretical reproaches are two-sided, in the sense that they criticise both differentialism and 'integrationism', the central practical problems they wish to attack are segregation and socio-economic marginalisation. The liberal assimilationists reply to the latter problems by means of two related programmatic arguments. First, they urge the reintroduction of the concept of assimilation as a replacement of the concept of integration. They argue that, if we understand the liberalism of the contemporary nation-state correctly, this leads us to see that it has started to produce assimilation without assimilationism, leading to 'an emphasis on assimilation [that] can be used to conceptualise and normatively found inclusion' (Brubaker 2001: 543). Second, against postnationalism, the liberal assimilationists insist on the continued importance of citizenship. In the next section, I present these two central arguments.

## 2.2 The alternatives proposed by the liberal assimilationists

The central alternatives proposed by the liberal assimilationists to 'differentialism' are, firstly, a restructured concept of assimilation and, secondly, a new emphasis on citizenship. Their basic argument is that the normative charge of these concepts should be adapted to their changed empirical content. This content has changed because of the *de facto* multiculturalism and the increasing tolerance of dual citizenship in contemporary liberal societies. Basically, they suggest that the exclusive character that both citizenship and assimilation once had and which caused

---

<sup>8</sup> Joppke and Morawska provide an inaccurate summary of Luhmann here, removing the critical potential of his theory of functional differentiation. Luhmann recognises different scales of inclusion and, moreover, introduces the concept of 'negative integration', which denotes a strong integration in subsystemic zones of society caused by forms of radical exclusion from diverse social systems (see Luhmann 1995: 237-64; 1997: 618-34).

their moral illegitimacy, has been overcome in the new shapes these concepts have taken: they are no longer exclusive, but additional.

### *Assimilation without assimilationism*

In the heyday of nation-state formation, assimilation meant the loss and sometimes the abolition of the cultural practices of minorities under the pressure of the state and its culturally homogeneous majorities. This assimilation was based on the literal, physiological meaning of assimilation as complete absorption. For example, the old-style 'Germanization' of Poles habitual in Imperial Germany necessarily meant their 'de-Polonization', just like the French Jacobin Republic forced members of national minorities like the Britons and also colonial subjects to use French or to face contempt or even punishment (Brubaker 2001; see also chapter 1).

For the liberal assimilationists, contemporary assimilation, by contrast, is founded on the abstract meaning of assimilation. As such, it only entails 'becoming similar' (Brubaker 2001: 542). Assimilation used in this sense implies that people can assimilate to the host-country's culture, but that they do not have to abandon older cultural practices to do so. It implies that assimilation has become a gradual process parallel to the ethnic self-definitions of migrants that usually live on for a few generations:

Regarding the practices and adjustment of immigrants and their children there is no evidence that assimilation is not occurring. In fact, one can observe both: adaptation and use of host-society resources *and* the maintenance of 'transnational' linkages with the society of origin (Joppke and Morawska 2003: 2).

In connection with Joppke and Morawska's critique of integration, Brubaker argues that assimilation has ceased to mean a shift from one homogeneous group to another one. Instead, it now means a shift from 'one mode of heterogeneity—one distribution of properties—to another mode of heterogeneity' (543). Brubaker explains that this implies a shift from a holistic approach that conceptualised assimilation as a movement towards a 'taken-for-granted' reference population, to a 'disaggregated' approach that discards the notion of assimilation as a single process, considers multiple reference populations, and envisions distinct processes occurring in different domains. This means a shift from a 'monodimensional [analysis]—how much assimilation?—to a multidimensional one: assimilation in what respect, over what period of time, and to what reference population' (543). Furthermore, it

also implies that assimilation has become transitive instead of intransitive: populations of immigrants are no longer seen as mouldable objects, but as active subjects (543).

For the liberal assimilationists, this new, acceptable, even necessary use of the concept of assimilation is systematically different from the old, disreputable and discredited one. It is what Brubaker means by 'assimilation without assimilationism' (548). In the same vein, Joppke and Morawska argue that assimilation should be used to indicate that, in a contemporary society, everyone can be 'conceptually assimilated to other individuals and groupings with similar positions on some critical indices or indicators' (Joppke and Morawska 2003: 3).

The liberal version of assimilation is possible because of the general tendency in Western nation-states towards simultaneous linguistic assimilation and religious and ethnic pluralisation. With regard to language, assimilation is possible alongside pluralisation: although mandatory language acquisition is 'the small rest of distinctly cultural adap[ta]tion that every liberal state (...) demands of its newcomers' (Joppke and Morawska 2003: 9), it does not harm the *de facto* multiculturalism of the liberal state because learning a new language does not exclude the original language. Thus, people can linguistically assimilate by learning the language of their new country, while also retaining their mother tongue and passing it on to their children. With regard to religion, they argue, the separation of church and state in the liberal nation-state guarantees plurality and freedom of conscience. With regard to ethnicity, the increasing tolerance of dual citizenship and transnational or cosmopolitan identity formation also guarantees plurality. This is what constitutes the legitimacy of contemporary assimilation: it can exist without having to exert strong pressure on immigrants to shed their original cultural and religious backgrounds. (Once again, this is what Joppke and Morawska claim; my comments follow in the next section.)

For the liberal assimilationists, the legitimacy of contemporary assimilation depends on an interpretation of what culture means in the contemporary liberal nation-states that gradually developed after World War II. After the end of the war, these states profoundly changed their attitude with regard to culture. Aggressive nationalising practices had been definitively de-legitimised by Nazism and were left behind after its defeat. These kinds of practices were also no longer 'necessary'. Industrialisation, wars, and infrastructural incorporation by expanding welfare states led to the post-war phenomenon of Western states 'securely sitting on top of thoroughly nationalized societies' (Joppke and Morawska 2003: 4). The relaxation that this sense of security made possible led to a liberalisation which ensured that no substantive, homogeneous cultures that could be imposed on immigrants or minorities remained. Parallel to the

idea that social systems or fields are at least partly autonomous and that there is no centre to which we could 'integrate', it can also be said that there is no longer a substantive, general culture to which migrants could be forced to assimilate. The emergence of lifestyle enclaves and the general tendencies of individualisation have undermined homogeneous cultures in all nation-states. What, ask Joppke and Morawska, is the 'shared substantive culture of a hooligan, a homosexual, a New Age devotee, an anti-abortion activist?' (Joppke and Morawska 2003: 5).

This does not mean that there is no longer any shared culture at all. What remains is the shared culture of liberalism:

From a liberal point of view, which became *the* point of view in Western states in the second half of the twentieth century, it is a violation of the dignity and autonomy of the individual, citizen or immigrant, to force a substantive culture on her, except the thin and procedural culture of liberalism itself (Joppke and Morawska 2003: 5, their italics).

I would like to make two remarks here in anticipation of my further comments. Analysing this quote makes it possible to reveal a tendency in Joppke and Morawska's reasoning that contradicts their formal and empirical concept of assimilation to bring it back, albeit to a limited extent, to a form of assimilationism. Let us first note the ease with which Joppke and Morawska suggest that there is an unproblematic liberal point of view that makes it possible to distinguish between substance and procedure. This is not the case. Rather, liberals disagree about where the boundaries between substance and procedure can be drawn; it is even contested that we can draw them unambiguously at all (see for example Benhabib 1996). Now, I do not want to argue that a form of assimilationism with regard to core political and juridical values need always be unjust. However, I do want to note here that Joppke and Morawska pay surprisingly little attention to a reflection on the limits of this core liberal culture such as the one central to Rawls' political liberalism, which tries to formulate the necessary shared culture in as limited a way as possible (Rawls 1993; and in an even more restricted way in 1999).<sup>9</sup>

Secondly, the politically correctly designated 'her' on whom we forbid ourselves to force a substantive culture *can* be 'forced' to accept the thin and procedural culture of liberalism. Although it is not the force itself, but only the just limit of the force that is at stake here, Joppke and Morawska suggest perhaps a little too easily that force might be a necessary and efficient way to

---

<sup>9</sup> Joppke and Morawska's formulation recalls the definition of liberal assimilation by Habermas, discussed in the introduction. Habermas specifically bases his distinction on Brubaker's historical interpretation of different forms of assimilation.

make people adapt to liberalism. This suggestion may be a significant slip of the pen, for this small phrase leads us to question whether Joppke and Morawska's version of liberalism has entirely shed the heritage of its classical, Millean version.<sup>10</sup>

### 'De-ethnicised Citizenship'

With regard to their arguments for a return to citizenship in normative theories of immigration, the liberal assimilationists take a parallel step to the one they took with regard to assimilation. Instead of rejecting citizenship as a heritage of nationalism, as Soysal (1994) had done, they redefine citizenship in such a way that it fits the contemporary liberal state and loses its exclusionary character. This shift, they argue, is essentially symbolised by the recent increase in European countries of possibilities for dual citizenship and by the erasure of the nationalist and ethnicist heritages from the definition of citizenship, which have been exchanged for political ones. Immigrant-receiving liberal nation-states have largely realised what Joppke and Morawska call 'de-ethnicised' citizenship.

De-ethnicised citizenship means, first of all, that citizenship is conferred according to what we call *ius soli* [the right of the 'soil'], and hence follows a territorial definition. In this case, migrants can acquire citizenship rights based on their residency in a specific country for a certain amount of time, and their children acquire citizenship based on the fact that they are born in the country. Ethnic definitions of citizenship, on the other hand, rely on the *ius sanguinis* [the right of the 'blood'] rule.<sup>11</sup> This rule implies that we remain members of the same nation to which our parents or grandparents belonged, whatever the trajectories we make as migrants: in other words, those with parents from elsewhere must retain the nationality of these parents. All liberal nation-states have gradually started to opt for a convergence around *ius soli* with regard to citizenship (Joppke and Morawska 2003: 18).

A second aspect of de-ethnicised citizenship that strengthens its principle is dual citizenship. This makes it possible for migrants to retain official and political links with their home countries, while they can also acquire citizenship

---

<sup>10</sup> In an article with the title 'Decolonising Liberalism', Bhiku Parekh (1994) argues that one of the main problems with classical Millean liberalism was that it constructed an image of non-liberal peoples as 'illiberal peoples' that could only be forced to adapt to liberal norms because they were alien to them. I return to Parekh's view in chapter six.

<sup>11</sup> Take, for example, the frequently repeated distinction that suggests that Germany has a *ius sanguinis* definition of citizenship, while France has a *ius soli* one. The German law on citizenship has been changing gradually since the introduction of the Citizenship Act of 1999.

in the country of residence (18). Dual citizenship is the formal equivalent of the idea that one can fully function in the country of residence, without this having to imply that one is forced to become a member of a particular cultural community or that one is forced to leave behind the cultural practices and bonds of another one (19). Joppke and Morawska maintain that European countries have become increasingly tolerant of dual citizenship.<sup>12</sup>

With this convergence around its de-ethnicisation, citizenship, for Joppke and Morawska, has finally become the 'one domain where liberal states are finally getting serious about the "liberal" in their names' (20). With its transformation, citizenship has lost its historical ties to the development of nations as 'war-making bodies' that led to confrontations with 'hypostatized Others', and has become constituted by political values instead (20). The motor of this development was not so much immigration, but the fact that the North-Atlantic region has been transformed from 'a Hobbesian zone of war, into a Lockean zone of trade' (19). Hence, according to Joppke and Morawska, the boundary crossings of modern capitalism in particular have pushed the European states out of their nationalisms and into a globalised world where boundaries are highly relative. Both assimilation and citizenship have lost their association with an exclusive nation-state and with the group-thinking on which they were founded, which led to so much violence in European history. Instead, these concepts can now help to realise the necessary inclusion into European societies of immigrants groups that have suffered from exclusion.

### **2.3 Complications for a diagnosis: 'On their turf'**

#### *Exclusion and segregation*

Let us now scrutinise the accuracy of the liberal assimilationists' diagnosis of the problems that migrants and receiving societies have to deal with. We have seen that the liberal assimilationists think that the main problem inherited from the 1990s with regard to immigration in Western countries is the exclusion and segregation of immigrants and their children from the receiving societies, and that they blame this on the dominance of the concepts of multiculturalism, transnationalism and integration. What is missing from this analysis is, first of all, an acknowledgement that other, most likely more structural factors than the policies based on these three concepts may also play a role in processes of inclusion and exclusion. Another omission is a reflection on a way of

---

<sup>12</sup> They argued this in 2003. I am not sure they would still think this is the case today.

distinguishing between when we are dealing with exclusion or even segregation, and when we are dealing with forms of (institutional) autonomy.

With regard to the first omission, as Nancy Fraser and others have argued, an analysis of exclusion and segregation cannot be reduced to problems of recognition and cultural politics alone. Most importantly, the inequalities and exclusionary mechanisms resulting from the course of contemporary capitalism have to be analysed separately and debates should be redirected toward the necessity of redistributive policies (Fraser 1996; 2003; see also Bader 1998). The liberal assimilationists suggest that the concept of assimilation should lead to a focus on 'the socio-economic equalisation of life chances between immigrants and native populations' (Joppke and Morawska 2003: 6), but their failure to analyse the causes of exclusion in economic terms and instead locate them exclusively in cultural policies, reveals the neo-liberal aspect of their proposal. They also do not mention the necessity of concrete re-distributive measures to achieve more socio-economic equality.

Another structural factor leading to exclusion overlooked by the liberal assimilationists is the possibility that it can be caused by a lack of openness on the part of the receiving society, which is not so much the result of its ideologies of difference but rather of a heritage of cultural hierarchies and a resulting lack of social mobility for immigrants and their children. I will return to this issue when discussing the liberal assimilationists' thesis that the contemporary nation-state no longer requires cultural homogenisation.

Furthermore, their diagnosis also does not take into account the fact that some groups of immigrants may want to assimilate more than others, and that their definition of what is 'just liberal procedural' culture may substantively differ from that of cultural majorities. In that case, we have to be careful about replacing the concept of difference with segregation, for this would mistake migrants' agency in maintaining a certain distance from majority culture for an effect of multicultural policies by the receiving state.<sup>13</sup> The liberal assimilationists do not provide any norm for deciding when we are dealing with exclusion and segregation, and when we are dealing with actual differences between groups. Thus, when they mention ethnic broadcasting as an example of segregation, they do not take into account that different interpretations are also possible. Some people may want to argue that, for example with regard to Muslims in Western European countries or Roma in Eastern Europe, ethnic broadcasting can have an emancipating effect and can

---

<sup>13</sup> This would be the case, for example, when the existence of Islamic schools in the Netherlands is only discussed in terms of a segregation between 'black' and 'white' schools, so that the complex motives of the people who want to maintain or start such schools are not taken into account (see Bader 2006b).

empower members of ethnic groups also within their respective national societies.<sup>14</sup>

### *Cultural neutrality*

Systematically, my criticism of the liberal assimilationists' analysis of immigrants' exclusion is directed at a question that they avoid analysing, namely what it means when we conceive of the liberal state as a neutral state and of the public sphere as a culturally neutral sphere. At the basis of their optimism about contemporary societies, we have seen, stands a theory of the neutral liberal state, reinforced by a systematic theoretical emphasis on the pluralisation of contemporary societies. However, do the liberalisation and the differentiation of contemporary societies really imply that processes of cultural homogenisation have waned? And have they waned entirely? Have the involuntary, structural adaptation to nationalised institutions and the experiences of misrecognition by the members of majorities really disappeared?

Here, my critique of the liberal assimilationists advances in the opposite direction from my critique of Noiriel's view of incorporation. According to Noiriel, processes of homogenisation, with their networks of nationalised institutions, were central to any process of incorporation in modern societies. In my critique of Noiriel's view, I emphasised the differentiation that has occurred because of the pluralisation of contemporary societies. This caused me to criticise his Durkheimian thesis that full assimilation is the only possible outcome of the immigration process. I argued that Noiriel structurally underestimates the ability of liberal societies to organise a certain measure of ethnic and religious pluralism and to make allowance for people's agency in choosing certain (combinations of) identities. Yet I also found no reason to reject his view entirely and instead adopt the notion that the state, let alone society, is culturally neutral.

Therefore, while in the previous section I distanced myself from Noiriel's view of unified patterns of cultural value in French society, I would now like to introduce, *against* the liberal assimilationists, a more modest version of Noiriel's perspective that cultural homogenisation and the cultural hierarchies that produce it do still play a role in contemporary societies. At many levels it is simply not true that culture, and in particular nationalised majority culture,

---

<sup>14</sup> This, at least, is the official expectation of the European Union and many NGOs that finance ethnic broadcasting for the Roma in Central and Eastern European countries. And it indeed seems to be the case if, for example, we consider the success of the Roma Press Agency in Košice, Slovakia, where I stayed in the summers of 2002 and 2005 with journalist Huub van Baar, who is currently working on a dissertation on this topic.

remains within the borders of private and associational life.<sup>15</sup> Culture penetrates the public sphere in many ways: through the media, education, required language acquisition, daily experience of cultural hierarchies, and the heritage of earlier ethnically distributed power relations.<sup>16</sup> The suggestion that there is little relation between the distribution of (state-)power and culture should therefore be rejected. The basic insight of pluralism is not that there are *minorities*, but that there are *majorities*.<sup>17</sup>

Again, acknowledging this difference does not necessarily lead to the view that the preponderance of majority cultures leads to the inevitable full assimilation of immigrants. In the different societal fields, assimilation is not the only option; there is also cultural blending or even the disappearance of 'autochthonous' habits altogether (see Bader 2003b; Zolberg 1997). Yet, even if we can say that the pluralisation of Western societies has led to a general increase in processes of mutual accommodation rather than in full assimilation, we have to add, in Aristide Zolberg's words, that

although some deplore the 'give' by the hosts as leading to unmanageable cultural diversity, such an outcome is very unlikely because the hosts retain overwhelming advantages: incorporation is taking place on *their* turf, within an institutional framework which *they* control. Despite the critics' lamentations over the triumph of 'multiculturalism', the burden of change and adaptation remains squarely on the immigrants' shoulders (Zolberg 1997: 151, his italics).

---

<sup>15</sup> Here I just summarise the conclusions of the vast amount of research done in this area. For those not convinced, I will return to the effect of the heritage of earlier ethnically and religiously distributed power relations in chapter three. Marcel Proust had some very subtle insights into the continued force of these heritages while equal citizenship had already been realised.

<sup>16</sup> This has been a basic argument for many pluralists (see Bader 1998; Bauboeck 1998; Benhabib 1996; Fraser 2001; Honig 2001; Kymlicka 1995; 2002; Shachar 2001; Williams 2000; Young 1990; Zolberg 1997; for a summary of the basic arguments, see Kymlicka 2001). It is impossible to summarise the specificities of their arguments here, nor is this an extensive list of the many authors that have thematised the failure of the actual neutrality of the liberal state. I just give some indications of the focus of these authors, some of whose views I will discuss more extensively in what follows: Young, Fraser, Kymlicka and Zolberg concentrate on analysing the vicissitudes of cultural hierarchies and the exclusion of the members of minorities based on the suggestion of cultural neutrality. Williams concentrates on remedying the unequal place of minorities' voices in the liberal public realm. Bader, Shachar and Carens systematically develop institutional options for pluralism. Honig, in a discussion with Michael Walzer, emphasises that state-neutrality is not only a myth in European countries with their long histories as nation-states, but also in America's immigrant culture.

<sup>17</sup> Majorities in the sense of dominant groups. These do not have to be numerically dominant, but they can, for example, be politically, medially or economically overrepresented or powerful.

The penetration by culture of (semi-)public fields and institutions does not depend on a centralised context like that of France. In Britain, for example, historians and cultural scholars argue that at an institutional level, cultural homogenisation has become stronger rather than weaker since World War II. The state can afford to be liberal because so much has already been homogenised and because institutions penetrate into aspects of life that have never been so controlled before. With the gradually increasing socio-economic solidarity with the nation-state, many aspects of life that were previously less infiltrated by the state became nationalised (Marshall 1968; summarised in Kymlicka 2002).

We also have to take into account that, even if the state could ensure equality for the members of minorities, it would still be uncertain whether this would prevent strong pressures for cultural homogenisation in specific social fields within national cultures. The liberal assimilationists' own analysis of the differentiation of societal fields should have led them to suspect that at least in some of these different fields and their related (sub-)cultures, structural advantages for the members of majorities and related pressures for homogenisation may still be found, even if they have largely been extinguished in others. The assimilatory pressures exercised at school during people's adolescence, as discussed in chapter one, provide a clear example. Even if strategies are available to the people concerned for 'escaping', modifying, countering these pressures, or for turning them into advantages, and even if we *all* know these kinds of pressures, we are again dealing with matters of degree.

The construction of national histories plays a specific role in the non-neutrality of the state and of public cultures. A 'polity is always conceived as a transgenerational community and this makes it imperative to interpret its history', and because of its historical depth, every polity, whether liberal or not, will always build on certain culturally-specific stories. Thus, public cultures will inevitably tend to 'exclude some groups (and especially recent immigrants) who have not shared this history' (Bauboeck 1998a: 45). We have already seen that Noiriél sees the lack of openness of France's national history to the memories of immigration as one of the markers of the assimilationist republican tradition.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> The state's historical bias does not only concern immigrants, although it makes achieving a place in public history perhaps systematically difficult. Inclusion in 'public histories' is also difficult for the members of minorities in general, and specifically of those minorities that have suffered from exclusionary and assimilationist practices in the past (for example, for Jews and Roma it is sometimes still extremely difficult to acquire a place in public histories). With regard to the history of the Jews in France, for example, Birnbaum (1996) has analysed how difficult it was for them after the Second World War to acquire a place in French public history as a group with a special history of suffering. Perhaps the most interesting critiques such as those of Noiriél and Birnbaum, French history writing

with their recent arrival in France has become (a little) more difficult. Inclusion in 'public histories' is also difficult for the members of minorities in general, and specifically of those minorities that have suffered from exclusionary and assimilationist practices in the past (for example, for Jews and Roma it is sometimes still extremely difficult to acquire a place in public histories). With regard to the history of the Jews in France, for example, Birnbaum (1996) has analysed how difficult it was for them after the Second World War to acquire a place in French public history as a group with a special history of suffering. Perhaps the most interesting critiques such as those of Noiriél and Birnbaum, French history writing

In conclusion, there is little reason to think that the contemporary nation-state, particularly when it refuses to reflect on its own failing neutrality, has entirely overcome its cultural hierarchies and the related pressures to assimilate. With regard to this insight, Joppke and Morawska's arguments are not entirely consistent. When arguing *macro-sociologically*, they suggest that the differentiation of lifestyles and social fields or systems has become so overwhelming, and that cultures have become so differentiated into separate fields, that no homogenisation in a more general sense (overarching these separate fields), is taking place any longer. When arguing *political-theoretically*, they argue that, in the liberal state, culture can be restricted to private and associational life, while the domain of the state, or of law and politics, can be nearly culturally neutral. This implies that the limited public domain is at least to some extent homogeneous: they admit that we have to share a minimal political and linguistic culture, and they even suggest that people can be forced to live by this. A little later, when arguing *historically*, they add a third, less 'liberal' possibility in admitting that the contemporary state has only been able to become so liberal because, since the end of World War II, it is 'usually securely sitting on top of thoroughly nationalised societies' (Joppke and Morawska 2003: 4). This inconsistency is telling: the more they motivate their argument empirically or historically, the less the liberal presupposition of the minimal penetration by culture of the public sphere seems a defensible interpretation of society. Contemporary pleas for multiculturalism take precisely this observation of the non-neutrality of the nation-state as their starting point.

#### 2.4 Democratic relational pluralism

My main problem with Joppke and Morawska's interpretation of multiculturalism is that, by neglecting the problem of the non-neutrality of the nation-state, they overlook or even simply fail to address the basic problem that multiculturalism seeks to tackle. As we have seen, they think that multiculturalism depends on an overly territorial and mono-cultural conception of culture, as if in our globalised world something like coherent 'communities' could exist and as if the members of certain groups want to stick to their

---

more open to minorities' memories and their roles in French society. However, this openness is hindered by the fact that minorities' *memories* are often debated quite separately from *public history* (with regard to the problems faced by the Roma, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, see Kapralski 1997; Trumpener 1992; Van Baar 2006).

'identities' or 'cultures' quite independently from their position within the larger society (Joppke and Lukes 1999; Joppke and Morawska 2003).<sup>19</sup>

I leave aside the question here to which extent this is a just interpretation of all earlier versions of multiculturalism or only or mainly of what I, in chapter one, called 'top-down differentialism'. However, recent versions of multiculturalism, Kymlicka's included, have left these immediate justifications of pluralism or multiculturalism in terms of a communitarian defence of 'cultures' behind. They justify special rights and/or special attention to the openness of the public sphere for minorities' voices in a relational and dynamic way, with an eye on balancing power and achieving equality within nation-states rather than with the aim of 'preserving' cultures. These versions of multiculturalism interpret it as a response to nation building and, hence, as a response to the non-neutrality of the nation-state (Kymlicka 2002).<sup>20</sup>

The central focus, then, lies not with an aesthetic or even moral defence of cultural diversity, but rather with a criticism of the denial of the importance of cultural hierarchies in the public sphere, and of the pressures to adapt to them. The insight that these structural power inequalities cannot be remedied by equal citizenship rights alone has been the central stake for differentialism since Iris Marion Young argued for differentiated citizenship in 1989. Young argued that those groups that had experienced the 'epidermalizing of their world' should receive collective rights and were entitled to affirmative action. Pluralism was explicitly meant to fight 'racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, and ableism' (Young 1990: 123, 130).

Such a view is founded on a concept of justice that reflects the fact that formal neutrality hides from view the structural advantages of majorities. This does not mean that neutrality should not be striven for, only that we should understand it in a different way. With regard to political, legal and socio-economic opportunities, it should be understood in an 'inequality-sensitive,

---

<sup>19</sup> It reflects, for example, the Dutch adage about multiculturalism from the 1980s, which, literally translated, reads: 'integration with the conservation of own identity' [integratie met behoud van eigen identiteit]. This definition leads to conservative understandings of multiculturalism. It assumes that pre-existing identities need to be conserved and that everybody would want this. Interestingly, this definition leaves unclear whether we are speaking about the identity of individuals or of groups, by leaving out a qualifier of whose 'own' identity we are talking about. Moreover, it does not distinguish between culture as a condition for free choice and identity as the manifestation of this choice.

<sup>20</sup> It is a rather unjust rhetorical gesture when Joppke and Morawska quote Carens's critique of the thinness of Kymlicka's justification for cultural rights for voluntary immigrants without mentioning that these points of criticism were a reason for Carens to embark on a more pluralist path than Kymlicka's in 1995, instead of making him return to plain liberalism (Carens 2000; see also Bauboeck 1996). In his more recent work, Kymlicka (2002) takes these criticisms into account.

relational' way: 'prohibiting moral particularism and precluding injustice: sex, gender, "race", "ethnicity", state-membership, and religion should not matter when it comes to the distribution of resources and rewards' (Bader 2003a: 267). We should redefine the concept of neutrality so that it comes to mean 'relational neutrality' (267). This is not a requirement of which we can presuppose that it has been realised by formal equality and neutrality; instead, it should be deployed as a normative concept that can make us sensitive to actual inequalities.

With regard to cultural and religious diversity and inequality, striving to achieve neutrality in the sense of declaring differences irrelevant would deny particularities that cannot be overcome and that need not be overcome either. Instead, we should try to determine cultural fairness by trying to find balances between different particularities. This argument has been made most elaborately by Joseph Carens when he argues that 'evenhandedness' instead of a 'hands-off' approach should determine conceptions of fairness in liberal societies:

Instead of trying to abstract from particularity, we should embrace it, but in a way that is fair to all different particularities. Now being fair does not mean that every cultural claim (...) will be given equal weight, but rather that each will be given appropriate weight under the circumstances and given a commitment to equal respect for all. History matters, numbers matter, the relative importance of the claim to those who present it matters, and so do many other considerations (Carens 1997: 818; see also Carens 2000).

Adhering to this definition of fairness implies a lot of work and debate, and we may be too lazy to try to achieve it, but as a moral norm it takes into account that we do not all start from equal positions in our societies. Moreover, such a pluralism justifies special rights not as exemptions from civil rights and liberal values, but as supplements to them.

Specifically to counter the possibility that special rights may result in a restriction of the rights of minorities within minorities, multicultural policies should be realised *within* a—minimally defined—liberal framework. This implies that not all claims for minority rights are consistent with multiculturalism, but only those that '(a) protect the freedom of individuals within the group; and (b) promote relations of equality (non-dominance) between groups' (Kymlicka 2002: 342). These conditions should lead to the rejection of two kinds of claims being sold under the label of multiculturalism while violating the principle that multiculturalism should realise more equality instead of less. The first kind of claims that should be excluded are those that restrict the rights of individuals within groups, for example claims for a

tolerance of contested practices like female circumcision or the punishment of apostasy.<sup>21</sup> The second restriction regards those claims that fail to promote relations of equality between groups, such as, for example, the claims made by South-African white people wishing to protect their 'minority cultures' under Apartheid.

If we take into account that relational arguments are the central ones in contemporary versions of multiculturalism, then what Brubaker calls 'differentialism' is not a defence of a communitarian conservatism or an enthusiasm for cultural diversity at the expense of attention for equality, but precisely a philosophy of how to respond to inequality. It concerns the fact that 'de-ethnicised' citizenship reinforces existing power inequalities in many ways.

I propose to qualify the concept of pluralism discussed here as 'democratic relational pluralism'. I do so because in many discourses multiculturalism has become entirely associated with the communitarian defence of relatively closed-off 'cultures' for their own sake. On that basis, it has lost a lot of its appeal as a political philosophy of how to deal with cultural diversity. Democratic relational pluralism should be understood as a response to the power inequalities between members of different cultural groups and also within cultural groups.

It is precisely this version of pluralism in the name of a more equal distribution of power that is neglected by both Noiriel and the liberal assimilationists, and that is hardly ever considered in the French context in general, which has nearly always understood differentialism as a wish to conserve certain traditions against their eradication by (capitalist, Western) modernity. This explains the ubiquitous use of the term *communautarisme* in today's debates about pluralism and *laïcité* in France (see chapter one; I will return to this in chapter six).

With regard to ethno-religious groups specifically, I would like to anticipate my arguments to be made in the chapters on secularism by explaining the relevance of relational arguments also just for *understanding* the intercultural dynamics related to ethno-religious claims. This is relevant when we discuss justifications of multicultural policies with regard to *nomoi* groups, i.e. those groups whose ritualised practices, most often explicitly orthodox religious, have implications for their conception of law, as is the case with orthodox Jewish and Islamic groups (Shachar 2001). *Nomoi* groups may not feel entirely at home in a state like Joppke and Morawska's liberal state, because it does not recognise the extension into the public realm of their religious practices and

---

<sup>21</sup> For examples of balancing acts of multicultural reasoning in relation to the position of 'minorities within minorities', see Verhaar (1999; 2004), Shachar (2001) and Bader (2003; 2006).

requests their assimilation to liberal values by asking them to fully secularise their conception of law.<sup>22</sup>

Requiring such assimilation, Shachar signals, may drive these groups into a more rather than a less culturalist and defensive explanation of their claims: it may lead to a 'religionisation of cultural claims' (Parekh 2000: 199) or to an increased stubbornness in maintaining religious claims. In this view, the sometimes quite reified self-identifications of *nomoi* groups are at least partly the effect of their position within the larger community and are thus not thought to have existed intact prior to joining this community. Shachar argues that the processes of self-segregation ensuing from assimilationist pressures may result in the internal repression of internal minorities.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, it is not certain that a pressure to assimilate to liberal values will help prevent violence against minorities within minorities.

Only those who think that immigrants bring along their identities and cultural values fully intact may want to argue that forcing them to adapt to 'our' norms will encourage them to abolish internal inequalities. Things, however, are more complicated than this. Some forms of internal inequality may be inherited from cultural or religious values themselves, but others may be encouraged by (rather than overcome through) outside pressures to assimilate to mainstream culture; most probably, we are nearly always dealing with a mixture of both.<sup>24</sup> If this is so, it is very important to try to organise ways of mediating between the wishes of the *nomoi* groups and the larger society, instead of simply arguing that their religious concept of law is wrong or backward. Relational pluralism, therefore, starts from an analysis of minority-formation within the nation-state and does not take the cultural claims of minorities as 'claims of cultures' in any absolute sense (see Shachar 2001; Bader

---

<sup>22</sup> Precisely on this point the Stasi Committee advocates Franco-Judaism as a model for contemporary orthodox religious persons (see introduction and chapter six).

<sup>23</sup> Such mechanisms and their complexities may also have played a role in the treatment of Uriel Acosta brought up in the introduction. Robert Menasse, writing about the way Acosta is mistreated in *Die Vertreibung aus der Hölle*, adds another layer to this relationality when narrating the thoughts of Manasseh Ben Israel at witnessing Acosta's punishment. Menasse imagines Manasseh Ben Israel thinking that the rabbis punishing Acosta are re-enacting the experiences of previous generations of Jews under the Spanish Inquisition. Here, the relationality acquires further historical depth through layers of remembered experiences (Menasse 2001).

<sup>24</sup> This is particularly the case with regard to the treatment of women. Ieme van der Poel (1998) has explored these intercultural dynamics in relation to the 'politics' of women's bodies in an interpretation of Assia Djebar's novels about the position of women in Algeria under colonial rule (for layered interpretations of the claims and interpretations surrounding the headscarves, see Göle 1996; Boer 2004).

2003b).<sup>25</sup> In such a complex analysis, *liberal-democratic* reasons lead us to be careful about imposing secularist requests on ethno-religious minorities. I consider this relational view of the *emergence* of religious claims of great relevance for an analysis of the confrontation in France between the defenders of *laïcité* and the supposedly communitarian Islam that they encounter.<sup>26</sup>

### *Transnationalism*

With regard to transnationalism, as with regard to multiculturalism, Joppke and Morawska pick an opponent that is too easily refutable. They offer strong arguments against a postnationalism that denies the relevance of nationality and citizenship. Their consistent emphasis on the importance of citizenship represents a more realistic approach to immigration than the postnationalist suggestion that 'guest workers' and other people without passports derive enough protection from human rights. Being a member of a specific state is crucial to migrants, and so is the possibility of becoming a member of one's state of residence.<sup>27</sup> Those who can travel freely are the people whose passports indicate that they have the correct membership. The 'sans papiers' or 'illegals' symbolising 'humanity' and 'personhood' encounter borders on every corner of every street, if they are not stuck in a centre for asylum seekers at the border of a country.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, the liberal assimilationists' enthusiasm for citizenship

---

<sup>25</sup> In this sense, the relational view of multiculturalism is also connected to Jacob Levy's (2000) 'multiculturalism of fear', based on Judith Shklar's 'liberalism of fear'. A multiculturalism of fear is grounded in the reality of inter- and intra-ethnic evils and focuses on minimal goals such as trying to prevent interethnic civil wars, cruel practices within certain communities, and state violence against ethnic and religious minorities.

<sup>26</sup> We do not have to restrict this insight into the dynamics of minority formation to what happens within democratic nation-states. We may, for example, look for the causes of women's plights in the Middle East in other places than religious tradition: it may result at least partly from the disempowerment and chaos resulting from the destruction of cultures and religions, instead of solely from a deep-rooted religious (Islamic) heritage (see, for example, Mahmood 2004).

<sup>27</sup> This is what Hannah Arendt (1979) foresaw for the stateless in 1948, when she argued for the 'right to have rights'. This view has been further explored by, among others, Seyla Benhabib and Giorgio Agamben. Bader (1997; 2005b) explores this issue from an institutional point of view.

<sup>28</sup> Recently, Eduard Nazarski, the president of the Netherlands Foundation for Refugees *VluchtelingenWerk Nederland*, proposed speaking about 'asylum ghettos' instead of 'asylum centres' (In Corduwener 2004). For anybody contesting the appropriateness of this term, please try to visit the 'Uitzetcentrum' [expulsion centre] in Ter Apel, East-Groningen, close to the Dutch-German border. The Dutch adjective 'troosteloos' [dreary, literally 'without consolation'] can be fittingly applied to this expulsion centre, situated between a highway, a closed penitentiary institution, and a B-road called the 'Nulweg' ['Road zero'].

and particularly for dual citizenship is a welcome antidote to the legacies of the diverse European nationalisms. However, even though they acknowledge the importance of dual citizenship, the liberal assimilationists, by their wholesale rejection of ethnic aspects of citizenship, downplay the ethnic identifications that migrants may have with the countries in which they previously resided.

Not all transnationalist views of immigration simply neglect the importance of citizenship. The liberal assimilationists could have discussed transnationalist proposals that do not evade citizenship, but that instead develop differentiated models of citizenship and options for extending it outside the nation-state (Bauboeck 1994; 1998a; 1998b; Bader 1999; 2005b; 2006a). These models explore the possibilities for a transnational concept of citizenship, while at the same time acknowledging that citizenship, in order to safeguard it from becoming meaningless, cannot lose its restrictions entirely. Such a transnationalism will not pit de-ethnicised, either territorial or republican conceptions of citizenship against ethnic ones, or stay within the confines of the nation-state of residence. Instead of replacing ethnic citizenship with de-ethnicised citizenship, transnationalism seeks to differentiate citizenship itself, acknowledging its residential, cultural (ethnic or national) and political (republican) aspects (Bauboeck 1998a).

These aspects of citizenship have actually always been intertwined in various ways with European political thought and practice. We can see this if we very briefly trace the intertwinement of the concepts of the citizen and the *bourgeois* in European political thought and if we understand that the focus on citizenship as 'de-ethnicised' nation-state membership is the heritage of a specifically modern conception of citizenship that could be pluralised in the age of globalisation.<sup>29</sup>

The Aristotelian *politai*s actively participated in governing the *polis*, the republic. In the Roman Republic, too, participation in government was decisive for being defined as a *civis*. In the 'Constitutio Antoniana' (212 A.C.), conquered peoples were for the first time admitted to the *civitas*. This implied a simultaneous process in which, on the one hand, the distance between citizen and non-citizen decreased (because being a *civis* was no longer reserved for those actively involved in government), while, on the other hand, a gradual convergence of the citizen with the '*subject*' in the sense of the '*subjected*' occurred.

The word by which 'citizen' is translated in Germanic languages is related to the French *bourgeois*: 'Bürger'. In the Middle Ages, this word denoted the members of corporations formed by the inhabitants of the cities. The '*burgari*'

---

<sup>29</sup> In this brief genealogy of the concept of citizenship I draw on Bader 2006a. For a detailed account of the transitions in the active and passive elements of the definitions of citizenship and the ways in which they have been debated in the twentieth century, see de Haan (1993).

(old German) or *burgware* (old English) actively participated in government. In the Germanic countries, and also, for example, in Denmark, the 'participatory' meaning of citizenship long remained the central one, while in France and England the mixed terminology of *citoyen* (citizen) and *bourgeois* (English 'burgess') testified to the early fusion of the 'active' and 'passive' meanings of citizenship.

In early modernity, the development of state absolutism caused the immediatisation of the relation between citizen and state at the expense of intermediate levels of association. The citizen became the subject of the state and the 'burger' became the *bourgeois*, operating in society but not involved in shaping general rules or laws. Eighteenth-century modern democrats like Rousseau and Kant protested the reduction of the citizen to the subject and demanded participation as free and equal *citoyens*, as authors of law in the state. Yet they still did so within the framework of the immediate relation between citizen and state: Kant and Rousseau showed little interest in the Aristotelian or, in their view, medieval concept of the citizen, which was related to privileges and immunities, and hence, to inequality.

The democratic Revolutions went together, at first, with exclusions from citizenship that had been inherited from the republican definition of citizenship, such as the exclusion of women and slaves. These exclusions were only gradually overcome, but ultimately nearly all residents were included in formal definitions of citizenship. Yet, as the overcoming of internal exclusions proceeded and the internal universalisation of citizenship as 'Staatsbürgerschaft' [literally 'state-citizenship'] succeeded, a rigidification of the nation-state's external boundaries occurred, which led to increased exclusion at these boundaries.

The modern nation-state turned out to be a 'jealous' state that wanted to see all the political energies of its subjects concentrated on itself. Moreover, it excluded the 'stranger' more strictly than was usual before. Internally, this concentration on national boundaries resulted in the politics of assimilation, and externally, it gave rise to the introduction of the passport, state-organised border controls, and the construction of the 'foreigner' (see Noiriel 2001). Consequently, the ambivalence of the process of immediatisation between citizen and nation-state lies in the way it on the one hand brings about universalisation and equality on a specific territory, but on the other hand implies a rigidification of state-borders and a neglect or distrust of associations smaller and bigger than the nation-state itself.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> In the nineteenth century, the borders of the nation-state were the only relevant borders. Today, we can see a similar process unfolding around the borders of Fortress Europe.

Transnationalism wants to return flexibility to this focus on national citizenship. It does not want to do this by effacing ethnic, national, linguistic or other boundaries simply because such boundaries would divide or separate people—this is what some critics have argued for in terms of ‘postnationalism’. Instead, transnationalism argues for the recognition of boundaries at many levels at once *and* for their mutual flexibilisation (see Bauboeck 1998a). Such transnationalism is based on a multi-level understanding of relational pluralism. It tries to build upon actual practices of power distribution, pluralisation and mediation, which have never been as ‘dead’ as modernist political theory declared them to be. Today, for example, pluralisation is taking place within the process of unifying the European countries into the EU, in regionalisation, and in internal pluralisation as multiculturalism, when this is understood in a non-reifying way that allows for multiple identifications and dual or perhaps even triple citizenship. Thus, transnationalism focuses on the gradual permeation of boundaries, in particular those of the nation-state, by ‘remediating’ political relations while preserving the democratic achievements of the modern state, for example, by providing citizens with options for having a voice and for exiting (having the freedom to leave), as well as by providing a reasonable number of aspirant citizens (‘illegal’ residents or ‘metics’) with the option of entering.

The nineteenth-century concept of assimilation was crucially related to the immediatisation of the relation between citizen and nation-state I have just briefly discussed. I will scrutinise this history more closely in the chapters to follow, but let us now return to the proposal for reintroducing a concept of assimilation in the present-day context.

## 2.5 Return to assimilation

### *Performative effects*

If processes of cultural homogenisation are likely to be more complex and more intrinsic to incorporation in the contemporary nation-state than the liberal assimilationists suggest, what does a transformation of the concept of assimilation along the lines they propose lead to? Can policies based on such a concept lead to the required result of countering exclusion and segregation? What are the unintended effects of the use of this contested concept? Here I want to distinguish between the actual contents of the policies that are advocated by the emphasis on assimilation and citizenship, and the performative effect of making even a ‘slightly’ normative use of the concept of assimilation in debates about incorporation.

First of all, the kind of policies the liberal assimilationists actually argue for, are founded on a reinforcement of the classical liberal model that tolerates and recognises difference as long as it stays outside the public sphere. The emphasis on assimilation leads us back to a version of liberalism that is less wary of the use of force than, for example, Rawls' political liberalism, and more self-assured about its potential to realise the religious and cultural neutrality of the state. Moreover, the emphasis on citizenship drives this liberalism in the direction of a republican version of it, specifically with regard to immigrants.

It is quite unlikely that such a brand of liberalism can provide us with the answers to the problems of exclusion and socio-economic inequality that the liberal assimilationists are most concerned with. Purely de-ethnicised notions of citizenship and a 'neutral' concept of assimilation will most likely not lead to equality, but rather to a perpetuation of inequalities, for they do not help to analyse the causes of inequality at a sufficiently structural level. They exclude the consideration of cultural hierarchies and their concept of citizenship, which remains blind to difference, prevents a sufficiently in-depth analysis of socio-economic, political and legal inequalities, and also undermines effective policies against such inequalities, most notably affirmative action (see Young 1990; Bader 1998). If we go back in the direction of a politics of redistribution alone, we will only revive the old competition between culture and economy, instead of finally starting to analyse the relations between both. It should not be a question of either/or but of aiming at both and of cleverly analysing how cultural hierarchies and economic chances are entangled (see Fraser 2003).

Another problem concerns the performative effects of reintroducing assimilation and a 'neutral' notion of citizenship. My primary concern here is not even that this may not have the desired results and will probably only lead to a perpetuation of existing inequalities. Rather, it is that I suspect that their reintroduction in the context of 'fighting segregation' may actually enhance these inequalities. Advocating assimilation and citizenship specifically for immigrants, even if we do so in a liberal version, may actually have marginalising and even exclusionary effects.

First of all, there is a certain risk that nationalist groups and political movements will deploy the scholarly use of the concept to legitimise a politics of assimilation in a more literal sense. We cannot control the meanings of the concepts we use, particularly not the meanings of concepts with such painful histories. Making assimilation into a normative concept, we run the risk that the larger public will make links with earlier 'hegemonic assimilationist practices that linguistic minorities, Jewish communities and Roma and Sinti, have had to suffer from' (Prodolliet 2003: 25). We not only risk stirring up these memories

but also legitimising the politics of those who seek a perpetuation or revival of assimilationist practices.<sup>31</sup>

When the liberal assimilationists argue that we should shed the cultural connotations of assimilation and only use it in the sense of its 'structural' understanding, i.e. as 'the socio-economic equalization of life chances between immigrants and native populations' (Joppke and Morawska 2003: 6), we can ask the question why they would want to use the concept of assimilation at all, since it is precisely this aspect of incorporation processes that has been associated with 'integration' over the last twenty years. For this reason, the social scientist Matteo Gianni has argued that Brubaker's new concept of assimilation only delivers a dubious new denominator for what is now common practice in European countries under the heading of integration (Gianni 2003: 20-21). Joppke and Morawska's argument as to why assimilation is preferable to integration is not very convincing here: they argue that integration suggests an emphasis on unity that a formalised and disaggregated concept of assimilation does not. However, both concepts are associated with unity and processes of unifying, and if we wanted to avoid that connotation we could choose a concept with a less tainted history and abstain from encumbering it with normative expectations.

For these reasons, I sympathise with Gianni and Prodoliet's reluctance to use the concept of assimilation. However, I do not think that we should criticise the construction of a liberal concept of assimilation merely by proposing to restrict ourselves to using the concept of integration instead. The risk that reintroducing the concept of assimilation could legitimise assimilationism is not the only one. The other problem has been addressed before: assimilationism cannot be entirely absent from liberal definitions of assimilation under the condition of the non-neutrality of the nation-state; pressures for cultural homogenisation exist to a greater degree than the liberal assimilationists acknowledge.

Instead of rejecting the use of the concept altogether, I think we should therefore scrutinise in what sense the memories of assimilationism are not altogether 'foreign' to contemporary processes of assimilation, even when these are called 'integration.' What we should problematise is the idea that we can neatly distinguish between political citizenship and legitimate assimilation on the one hand, and ethnic citizenship and nationalist assimilation on the other. The continuities and discontinuities between both concepts and both historical forms of assimilation are precisely what can bring us to a more nuanced view of

---

<sup>31</sup> See for example the ultimatum that the extreme right-wing Vlaams Blok directs at migrants in Belgium: adapt or depart.

the contemporary 'reality' of assimilation, which entails neither purely organicist assimilationism nor purely liberal 'free' assimilation.

### *Spillover*

Such a problematisation of the abstract distinction between culturalist assimilationism and liberal assimilation finds an empirical motivation in the fact that they quite easily transform into each other. For example, in the Netherlands, some of the policies which initially seemed to fall under the heading of encouraging liberal assimilation or de-ethnicised citizenship, and which are therefore mentioned by Joppke and Morawska (2003) as examples of new ways of dealing with incorporation, have by now been depreciated into more literally assimilationist ones. Indeed, we may question whether some of the new Dutch policies with regard to immigrants can be justified from a liberal standpoint. Some policies that could stimulate the development of mixed identities are actively discouraged, such as, for example, special education in the mother tongue for young children, but also self-comprehension in terms of hybridity, shared identities, etc., for first-generation immigrants.<sup>32</sup> This may not only impair people's choices to participate in two cultural surroundings and to blend them as they wish, but it is also highly questionable that it meets the requirements of Joppke and Morawska's new definition of assimilation, i.e. the 'equalization of life chances'. For example, with regard to suppressing lessons in the mother tongue, it is questionable that 'equalization' will be the result.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, some of the measures may only contribute to exclusion and socio-economic marginalisation. Generally, when citizenship is specifically advocated for immigrants, they risk being burdened with the obligation of being (much) better citizens than long-time residents, which clearly contradicts the equality that is sought.<sup>34</sup>

In public debates, too, a new assimilationism has emerged that is more clearly an old-style assimilationism than Joppke and Morawska report. In these debates, dominated by feminists and right-wing liberals, it has become habitual

---

<sup>32</sup> Consider, for example, a remark that is often made not only by the extreme right wing but also by liberal politicians in the Netherlands, namely that migrants should make a choice between their two countries and not keep travelling back and forth to their home countries.

<sup>33</sup> A friend of mine, Jantien Smit, who is a primary school teacher in Amsterdam, reported that everyone in the field knows that economic downsizing has led to the suppression of mother tongue lessons, even though these lessons tend to enhance migrants' children's participation in education.

<sup>34</sup> Many people have argued that the mandatory civics courses in the Netherlands, which are endorsed by Joppke and Morawska, demand more from immigrants than is ever asked of long-time resident citizens.

to link emancipatory arguments with contemptuous treatment of Muslim immigrants.<sup>35</sup> Many participants in the debates, like the feminist and former Muslim Ayaan Hirsi Ali, insist on Susan Okin's liberal critique of multiculturalism. Yet Hirsi Ali's concerns about minorities within Muslim minorities coincide and even overlap with a changed political climate with regard to immigration, particularly Muslim immigration. Right-wing talk of the Netherlands as 'the drain of Europe' (Euro-commissioner Bolkestein in 2000) came to be seen as legitimate by more and more people and Muslims were increasingly described as possible or even probable members of a (future) 'fifth column' (Pim Fortuyn) that ought to 'integrate' more seriously and that should make a clear decision on Dutch citizenship.<sup>36</sup> Although 'assimilation' as a normative concept was not often mentioned, Paul Schnabel, the director of the *Sociaal-Cultureel Planbureau* [Social and Cultural Planning Office of the Netherlands], did advocate it in a booklet entitled *The Multicultural Illusion; Plea for Adaptation and Assimilation* (1998). A quote from this booklet that is in no need of comment reads: 'Niemand wil Turkse opvoedingsmethoden in Nederland introduceren en niemand staat te juichen bij de Marokkaanse visie op de vrouw' [Nobody wants to introduce Turkish methods of upbringing to the Netherlands and nobody applauds the Moroccan view of women] (Schnabel 1999: 15, my translation). Some basic anti-essentialism may do some good in this context.

The class aspect of the actual problems is usually only taken into account in an inadequate manner. In 2001, I took part in a conference on ethno-religious pluralism organised by Veit Bader. One of the Dutch attendants told the participants in a workshop that in the 1960s, guest workers from Morocco usually had low education levels. Those who could hardly speak French and were therefore not welcome in France—as the attendant literally said, 'we did not have first choice'—were welcomed into the Netherlands. It was suggested that this was done not only because the better-educated Moroccans chose to go to France but also because the lower-educated migrants were considered good candidates for the available jobs, which only required a little education. David Hollinger, an American historian of African-American history, commented as follows: 'so you have *created* an ethnic underclass'.

---

<sup>35</sup> For example when Ayaan Hirsi Ali argued in a large op-ed piece in the quality newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* that the abuse of immigrant women with an Islamic background could be attributed to the 'culture' of these immigrants. She suggested that integration be perceived in terms of a 'civilisation process'. According to her, 'the migrant' should realise that he finds himself at 'a certain level of development and can advance by behaving according to the morals and values of the country of residence.' His 'pre-modern' culture with its 'sedimented religious perceptions' must be shaken off and he should voluntarily assimilate to the Dutch culture of 'deliberation and negotiation' (Hirsi Ali 2002, my translation).

<sup>36</sup> Prins (2004) has written a precise reconstruction and rhetorical analysis of these debates.

Just like their defence of liberal assimilation conceals a return of assimilationism, the liberal assimilationists' suggestion that de-ethnicised citizenship has actually come into existence conceals the return of nationalistic and nationalising tendencies in citizenship policies in many European countries. While before September 11, it was already a little idealistic to suggest that dual citizenship had become less problematic and that the 'liberal state was finally getting liberal,' it has increasingly become so afterwards. Dual citizenship has become less popular after September 11, and countries where this concept was being experimented with often abolished those policies. The North-Atlantic Lockean 'zone of trade' is penetrated by small Hobbesian zones of war at its borders and inside it. Examples of acute assimilationism and exclusionary mechanisms that portray or treat aliens as 'others' instead of as negotiators, abound.

A general concern about the loyalty of Muslims has been at stake in many European countries from September 11 onwards. This is not unreasonable for security reasons, but it does gradually lead to an imaginary of war; precisely the kind of imaginary that Joppke and Morawska suggest has waned. This merely proves that the liberal state cannot keep its promises in the contemporary historical context.

In conclusion, we need a subtle concept of assimilation to analyse those forms of assimilationism that cannot easily be uncovered as such precisely because they are called liberal. When we refuse to speak about assimilation, these tendencies are likely to remain unnoticed. In that sense, I support the use of the concept of assimilation, only with a critical perspective in mind and without a 'normative charge'.

## **2.6 Ingredients for a critical concept of assimilation**

In conclusion to the first two chapters, I want to argue that a critical concept of assimilation has three main levels: a sociological, an (inter-)subjective and a historical one.

(1) In relation to the non-neutrality of the nation-state and the need to analyse the occurrence of processes of cultural homogenisation at a sociological level, we need to use assimilation in a more sober empirical sense than both Noiriel and the liberal assimilationists propose. They turn it into a 'normatively charged' concept by using it as the central concept for designating the direction of incorporation policies in general. Instead of suggesting that we should 'forget' about assimilation's older sense of cultural homogenisation and shift away from it, we should stick to this older sense but strip it of its normative use. That way, it can be used as an empirical concept to try to grasp the degree of

voluntariness or force actually occurring in processes of cultural homogenisation (Bader 1998).

Such a definition of the concept is not founded on the assumption that assimilation is necessarily undesirable; this depends, as Bauboeck (1998a) has argued, on the question of whether it takes place voluntarily. This voluntariness has at least three conditions. It requires, first, that people are not pressured to shed cultural practices just because they are not those of the majority. Second, that majorities abstain from denying the existence of cultural boundaries to which the members of minorities may be more sensitive. And third, an openness on the part of majority populations to revising their own views of their culture, a requirement to which I will soon return. The norm of voluntariness is not unproblematic: as we will see in the next chapters when analysing Proust's view of assimilation, the actual degrees of voluntariness and involuntariness in processes of assimilation are difficult to distinguish. This should not only complicate our understanding of what assimilation means, but also our normative view of what legitimate policies of incorporation are. A further question should be whether we should keep calling a process of voluntary adaptation 'assimilation'.

With regard to assimilation's relation to exclusion and segregation, it is furthermore crucial to recognise that a concept of assimilation should not only help to analyse the process as it appears from the point of view of the person that assimilates, but also as it appears from that of the majority. It is crucial that the members of majorities recognise the person who assimilates as 'one of them' in order to achieve a legitimate form of assimilation. Therefore, we have to consider the majorities' reactions if we want to distinguish a legitimate form of assimilation from one that immediately implies exclusion (Bauboeck 1998a).

The extreme case that should be avoided—and remembered, as I will argue in the following chapters—according to Bauboeck, is what he calls 'the nightmare' of Jewish assimilation. This concerned assimilation as a 'double bind' that the Jews were forced into: many of them voluntarily assimilated in order to be recognised as full citizens, but once they had done so and had lost much of their former identities and institutions, they were nevertheless rejected by many of the old-time members of the national culture (Bauboeck 1998a: 42).<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> This development is represented, a little schematically but still in a moving way, in István Szabó's movie *Sunshine - Ein Hauch von Sonnenschein* (1999). The film narrates how, within four generations, the Jewish-Hungarian Sonnenschein family fully assimilates into the Hungarian national culture by first, around 1900, changing their name into the Hungarian (and Latin) 'Sors', and subsequently, one generation later, shedding the traces of their religious belonging by becoming liberal Catholics. Before World War II, they are unable to answer the growing threat of anti-Semitism and Nazism by departing from the land with which they had identified so strongly and which they had come to trust, notwithstanding the many confrontations with anti-Semitism that they lived through. After the war, the only surviving son identifies with

For Bauboeck, this is a reason to stress the necessity of preventing a mechanism that could lead in such a direction, leading him to argue that 'the state should tie its own hands' and accept anyone who wants to assimilate and become a member of the cultural majority (42).

(2) What the liberal assimilationists systematically avoid analysing, aside from their sociological complexities in the context of the nation-state's non-neutrality, are the subjective aspects of processes of assimilation, in particular the deep psychological pressures exercised upon individuals that Noiriel considered essential for the process of assimilation. Compared to Noiriel, the liberal assimilationists lack a sensitivity to experiences of cultural hierarchy, such as experiences of social exclusion, of longing for respect, of adaptation out of longing for respect, or of taking a distance because of an experienced lack of respect. They neglect both theories of recognition such as Honneth's (2001a; b) and analyses of the imprint of cultural power on subjectivities, ranging from Bourdieu (1979) to Butler (1997).<sup>38</sup> In the previous section, I argued, against Noiriel, that these experiences may have undergone changes due to the pluralisation of contemporary societies, particularly since struggles for recognition have taken place as a result of all kinds of social movements and cultural organisations. Yet it is highly questionable to suggest that experiences of cultural hierarchy have ceased to exist; as I already mentioned in chapter one, what is at stake is a complicated interaction between cultural power and agency.

This unawareness of the subjective aspects of processes of cultural homogenisation may relate to the focus of the liberal assimilationists. Although they do address the topic at several disciplinary levels at once (macro-sociologically, political-theoretically, historically), they avoid a focus on individual experience. We have seen that Noiriel came to his view of the psychological costs of the process of assimilation thanks to his interest in individual narratives and literary accounts of what it means to be treated like someone who does not (entirely) belong. The liberal assimilationists, however, evade the perspective of the individual. Brubaker justifies this choice by writing that a concentration on assimilation as a process at a subjective level is not necessary any longer, because the relevance of assimilation as a 'conscious activity' (2001: 543) was dependent on the brand of assimilationism practised

---

assimilation once more by adhering to communism. Only after the communist deception does he start to rediscover his Jewish background. This is when he changes his name back into Sonnenschein.

<sup>38</sup> For all the differences between these scholars' theories of the ways in which subjectivities are structured by existing power relations, they all clearly debunk the liberal myth that free choice is the result of the liberalisation of societies. In the chapters on Proust, I will return to the subtleties of cultural power and our abilities to negotiate them.

prior to World War II. For contemporary historians and social scientists, he writes, assimilation is an 'emergent tendential property of social processes at an aggregate level, rather than something that happens (consciously or unconsciously) at the level of individual persons' (543). Its ideal type is the contemporary legitimate concept of assimilation, which does not designate a process undergone by one person but by a multi-generational population, a process that can occur without any individual-level assimilation.<sup>34</sup>

However, it is at least plausible that assimilation at a subjective level, consciously but also unconsciously, has not been overcome entirely—if only because of the fact that, as Noiriél argued, assimilation is a social process that has some specificities for migrants, but that, due to its link with modern (educational) institutions, also has more general characteristics that no one in modern society can escape from. Since Brubaker admits that assimilation as an activity at a subjective level can have tragic ambiguities and ambivalences, I propose we evaluate the usefulness of trying to learn more about these ambivalences, particularly as we cannot be sure that this process no longer exists. Brubaker mentions the ambivalences of Jewish assimilation in Europe prior to World War II as a specific example. I propose to scrutinise what the memory of these ambivalences of assimilation could still teach us by discussing the work of Marcel Proust. An additional reason for analysing the occurrence of assimilation in his work is related to the last aspect of a critical concept of assimilation, which is the historical one.

(3) The liberal assimilationists can deny the relevance of the old concept of assimilation for contemporary societies by constructing two analogous conceptual oppositions and then projecting them onto history. First, they create an opposition between what assimilation means in a culturally homogeneous state and what it means in a pluralised liberal state, and, second, an analogous opposition between ethnic citizenship and de-ethnicised citizenship. They project these abstract theoretical oppositions onto history by contrasting pre-World War II assimilationism with the new liberal assimilation, and, analogously, pre-World War II ethnicised citizenship with contemporary de-ethnicised and dual citizenship.

I start from the thesis that it might be crucial to consider the memory of Europe's assimilationist past and its vicissitudes more seriously if 'we' want to act differently this time around. In the construction of the abstract opposition of de-ethnicised citizenship and ethnic, nationalist group-identifications that I have just tried to unravel, the narcissism of contemporary liberalism is complemented by a projection of its imagined perfection onto the counter-

---

<sup>34</sup> The example of this, for Brubaker (2001), is the fact that the use of language can change within a few generations without any person consciously choosing to stop speaking one language and speak only the language of the country of arrival.

image of the culturally homogenous nation-state in the past. Both images deny deep inequalities and tensions inherent in actual, but perhaps even more in past societies. While the image of the contemporary liberal state denies cultural and social conflicts by exaggerating its achievements in overcoming them, the myth of the homogeneous past denies them by simply forgetting them. If we only think of France's past, it is clear that homogenising policies have existed, but homogeneity has not. '*La fièvre hexagonale*' even drove pre-World War II France into conflicts of dimensions that we can hardly imagine, if only because of the amount of deaths they caused.<sup>40</sup> Both images should be nuanced, and this can be achieved by thwarting the neutral self-image of Europe in a confrontation with its own complex history of assimilation.

Particularly in Europe, such a pluralising turn in cultural memory is crucial. Joppke and Morawska rightly signal that European countries have not defined themselves as multicultural in general, but only with regard to their minorities. But they draw a very hasty and, in my view, inaccurate conclusion from this observation when they argue that this should lead to a reintroduction of assimilation. Instead, I think it is necessary for European countries to start thinking about ways of extending multiculturalism to their majority cultures, particularly in how they conceive of their respective histories. As Bauboeck has argued, 'multiculturalism has emphasized rights and autonomy, but side-stepped the more difficult task of changing established conceptions of nationhood among native majority populations in such a way that immigrants can come to share common identities without having to fully assimilate' (2001: 10). Particularly in Europe, with its assimilationist and simultaneously exclusionist histories, it is important to start remembering these histories, for it might be a necessary condition for a pluralisation of European societies in general.

In the next two chapters, I want to contribute to such a programme of memorial self-reflection. I will do so by scrutinising the vicissitudes and complexities of nineteenth-century assimilationist France as it was perceived and narrated by Marcel Proust. Through our reading of his work and its contextualisation in nineteenth-century France, we will be able to explore his subtle account of one of the most important European experiences with assimilation. The French Jews were not regarded as a minority in Republican

---

<sup>40</sup> This is the title of a book by the French historian Michel Winock (1987) in which he analyses six revolutionary and very violent moments in French history between 1886 and 1968, which is precisely the period of which Joppke and Morawska claim that it was the heyday of the homogeneous nation-state. In the Netherlands, the historians Leo Lucassen and Wim Willems have argued that the romantic projection of a homogeneous nation that would have existed before immigration reveals the short-term memory of contemporary alarmist views of immigration.

France and, during the nineteenth century, the members of this group for the most part assimilated by their own wish and belief in the ideals of the Republic, which had promised them precisely a 'de-ethnicised' (and, for that matter, 'de-religionised') and equal membership. This exploration may also help us to nuance the caricatural view of pre-World War II assimilationism. As I argued before, it is too easy to suggest that we have left behind its practical and moral problems. It is precisely the link between republican, universalist citizenship and assimilationism as it has existed in France that Joppke and Morawska fail to address when they locate the causes of assimilationism exclusively within explicitly ethnic definitions of citizenship.

The memory of the complex relation between assimilationism and republican citizenship may help us to grasp what is necessary to find a *via media* between a 'rough' concept of assimilation as a necessarily violent process of national homogenisation (whether of a republican or an ethnic brand) and an overly idealistic concept of assimilation that suggests there exists a natural balance between assimilation and multiculturalism in contemporary liberal societies. What is the relation between expectations with regard to assimilation and mechanisms of exclusion and marginalisation? At the very least we have to get a better grasp on the gap between the promise of de-ethnicised citizenship and the practices with regard to the distribution of ethnic and religious power in the real world that it encounters. In Transit I and the next two chapters, I will try to forge an understanding of assimilation, exclusion and the dynamism between the two as it is explored in the work of Marcel Proust.

