



## UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

### Epilogue: Shaping the Nation through Civic Integration: A Postcolonial Perspective on Paradoxical Policies

Bonjour, S.

**DOI**

[10.4000/remi.17349](https://doi.org/10.4000/remi.17349)

**Publication date**

2020

**Document Version**

Final published version

**Published in**

Revue Europeenne des Migrations Internationales

**License**

Article 25fa Dutch Copyright Act (<https://www.openaccess.nl/en/policies/open-access-in-dutch-copyright-law-taverne-amendment>)

[Link to publication](https://doi.org/10.4000/remi.17349)

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

Bonjour, S. (2020). Epilogue: Shaping the Nation through Civic Integration: A Postcolonial Perspective on Paradoxical Policies. *Revue Europeenne des Migrations Internationales*, 36(4), 135-142. <https://doi.org/10.4000/remi.17349>

**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.

*UvA-DARE is a service provided by the library of the University of Amsterdam (<https://dare.uva.nl>)*

# Epilogue: Shaping the Nation through Civic Integration: A Postcolonial Perspective on Paradoxical Policies

Saskia Bonjour<sup>1</sup>

Civic integration policies shape migrants' pathway to residence and citizenship in Europe and North-America. These policies invite or oblige migrants to learn the customs and language of their new country of residence. Either by inculcating migrants with certain skills and knowledge, or by barring certain migrants from accessing national territory and citizenship, civic integration policies are instruments through which states purport to shape their nations. In this epilogue to the thematic dossier on civic integration policies in France and Canada, I explore this state endeavour to shape the nation through civic integration, highlighting paradoxical features that are common to civic integration policies in Canada, France, and elsewhere in the "Western" world.

The paradoxical nature of civic integration policies has been noted by scholars in this thematic dossier and beyond. Civic integration policies appear to vacillate between civic education and selection: aiming to emancipate, assimilate, and exclude migrants — all at the same time. Civic integration policies emphasize the *national* values that found the *national* identity — but these values are defined very similarly in all countries which introduced civic integration policies. Civic integration policies impose a legal obligation on migrants to prove their will to integrate — as if free will were compatible with compulsion.

In order to elucidate these paradoxes in civic integration policies, I propose to draw parallels with the colonial governance and production of ethnoracial difference. In drawing these parallels, I take to heart the warning of Sayad (1994: 10) that "while the comparison between the colonial situation yesterday and the immigration situation today is very illuminating" it cannot and should not "mask the essential difference, difference in nature, between these two cases." Indeed, while racial hierarchies persist in contemporary European and North American social structures and informal state practices and discourses, they are no longer laid down either in law or in official state ideology, as was the case in colonial contexts (Hajjat, 2012: 35). However, in colonial governance then as in civic integration policies now, states regulate and thereby (re)produce national, cultural and racial boundaries. Paradoxes that were once inherent in colonial governance, continue to characterise civic integration policies today.

---

<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor, University of Amsterdam, Department of Political Science, Postbus 15578, 1001 NB Amsterdam, The Netherlands; s.a.bonjour@uva.nl

## **First Paradox: To Integrate or to Exclude?**

First and foremost, there is a parallel in the ambiguity of the *aims* of both civic integration policies and the colonial governance of ethnoracial difference. The aim of civic integration policies is highly ambiguous: it vacillates between a better “integration” of migrants on the one hand and excluding “undesirable” migrants on the other hand; between helping newcomers cross the boundary to national membership on the one hand, and building stronger, higher walls around that national membership on the other.

### **Integration vs Exclusion: The Paradox of Racialised Civilisation and Assimilation Projects**

The contributions to this thematic dossier show that one of the primary goals pursued by French and Canadian governments in implementing civic integration policies is to affirm “national identity”. This confirms the scholarly consensus that the “civic integration turn” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is part of states’ renewed commitment to “the rejuvenation of nations and the maintenance of cohesive societies” (Kostakopoulou, 2010: 933). Authors in this dossier show that civic integration policies construe both the Nation and its Outsiders in part, and perhaps increasingly, along ethnoracial lines. Thus Fargues (in this dossier) argues that the particular scrutiny of Muslim candidates’ economic integration represents the introduction of an “ethnocultural lens” in French naturalisation procedures, as it assesses not just candidates’ desire to be independent of social security, but their “emancipation from their culture of origin or religion (where the two are generally confounded).” Hachimi-Alaoui and Pélabay (also in this dossier) emphasize that in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 2015, French politicians advocated an “unyielding” preservation of French values “crystallised around the well-established idea of an ‘incompatibility’ between Islam and the [French] Republic.” Hachimi-Alaoui and Pélabay also show that 70% of the immigrant subjects to civic integration policies in France come from Morocco, Senegal, Tunisia, Mali and Turkey — that is from countries with a majority Muslim population. Nakache, Stone and Winter (in this dossier) find that “most permanent residents who are failing or denying citizenship uptake are women and former refugees (who tend to come from African and Asian countries)” and point to the risk “that lower naturalization rates are creating a feminized, racialized underclass.” The more the Nation is defined along ethnoracial lines, the harder its boundaries become. Thus, while civic integration policies centre on civic education that should ease migrants’ way into the nation, at the same time they project an image of the Nation that excludes the possibility of racialized Outsiders ever truly belonging.

This ambiguity is reminiscent of the colonial civilizing mission. Bhabha (2004) uses the concept of “mimicry” to describe colonial governments’ endeavour to make colonials subjects “more European”, that is to make them adopt European religion, worldviews, and lifestyles. Thus, “mimicry” is “a strategy of power” as it “works to consolidate hegemony by inducing its subjects to imitate the forms and values of the dominant culture” (Moore-Gilbert, 2000: 459). However, “this strategy can never fully succeed because it also always requires the subordinate to remain sufficiently different from the colonizer in order that the latter can continue to have subjects to control” (*ibid.*). The colonial subject

could never become fully “civilized” because that would make her equal to the European — and then European colonialism would no longer make sense. Indeed, the colonial enterprise was premised on the belief that European civilization was superior and that this superior civilization was necessarily tied to white, European bodies. Indian subjects of the British Empire could be Anglicized but they could never become English. Thus, Bhabha argues, “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (2004: 122, emphasis in the original).

Bhabha’s notion that colonial subjects are pushed to assimilate while at the same time being denied the possibility to ever belong or be equal, is mirrored in Sayad’s reflection on the paradox of integration. Sayad (1994: 14) writes that from the perspective of migrants and their descendants, integration policies and discourses are first and foremost a constant reproach that their integration is lacking, a reminder that integration is “‘impossible’, never complete and never completely and definitely acquired.” Sayad argues that “integration” can be compared to an “asymptote” in mathematics, “where the quality of Frenchness is like the curve that one can prolong to infinity without it ever touching the axis” (*ibid.*). Both Bhabha and Sayad warn us that no matter how “civilized” (then) or “integrated” (now), the racialized Other is condemned to be eternally “almost the same, but not quite.”

Authors in this thematic dossier present nuanced perspectives on how these ethnoracial, exclusionary policy tendencies relate to the republican and multi-cultural ideologies of nationhood and citizenship that dominate in France and Canada respectively. Hachimi-Alaoui and Pélabay (in this dossier) point out that French republican conceptions of citizenship have always included a “thick [national] identity”; that is a “dose of communitarianism” (Fargues, in this dossier). Rather than a “rupture with preceding policies”, Hachimi-Alaoui and Pélabay observe “a certain continuity.” Harder (in this dossier) argues that “in the Canadian context, multiculturalism remains a key feature of the national identity and attitudes towards migrants are considerably more favourable.” She also points out that unlike in Europe, Muslims are not necessarily Othered more than other racialized groups in Canada. However, Harder observes similarities between Europe and Canada in that “the use of liberal democratic values as a tool for boundary marking and race-defining is similar.” Moreover, “multiculturalism in Canada, as elsewhere, relies on a national normative whiteness and liberality against which racial and cultural difference is articulated.” In a multicultural setting where Whiteness is the norm, perhaps integration is not bound to fail, as Sayad argues it is in the French Republic. However, equality still remains out of reach: a racialized migrant may be perceived as perfectly integrated into the multicultural society, but as long as the implicit racial hierarchy persists, she or he will be valued less than white people.

### **Integration vs Exclusion — A Gendered and Classed Paradox**

The vacillation of civic integration policies between integration and exclusion is not only ethnoracial: it is also gendered and classed. To begin with the class aspect, authors in this thematic dossier concur that civic integration policies aim to increase the economic productivity of immigration in two ways that are not easily compatible: by inculcating migrants with the skills they need to be

“productive” on the one hand, and by keeping “unproductive” migrants out on the other hand. Hachimi-Alaoui and Pélabay (in this dossier) affirm that besides reaffirming national identity, controlling immigration is another core goal of French civic integration policies. The category to be restricted is family migration, not labour migration: 75% of the population subjected to civic integration programs consists of family migrants, and less than 5% of labour migrants. Indeed, French civic integration policies were introduced in the 2000s as part of “president Sarkozy’s overall strategy to limit *l’immigration subie* – i.e. family migration – in favour of *immigration choisie* – i.e. labour migration” (Bonjour, 2011: 305). Very similarly, Nakache, Stone and Winter (in this dossier) note that in Canada, the citizenship test is disproportionately affecting refugees’ and family migrants’ access to citizenship, while economic migrants are much less affected.

Besides this selective function, French civic integration policies also aim to educate admitted migrants into “employability,” through two compulsory six-hour sessions on how to “access employment in France” (Hachimi-Alaoui and Pélabay, in this dossier). Haapajärvi (in this dossier) also notes that civic integration programmes for migrant women in France place an increasing emphasis on access to paid work and entrepreneurship, which is seen as the “principal axis” of their integration.

Economic rationales in civic integration policies are not separate from the rationales that emphasize national identity or ethnoracial belonging (Bonjour and Chauvin, 2018). Scholars in this dossier show that politicians and policymakers perceive economic productivity as an inherent part of both cultural belonging and political membership. Hachimi-Alaoui and Pélabay (in this dossier) argue that the inclusion of labour market training in French civic integration programs reflects “the idea that being economically active is part of the civic responsibility which characterizes a ‘good citizen.’” Likewise, Fargues (in this dossier) shows that in French naturalisation procedures, stable employment has long been taken as evidence of a candidate’s “moral aptitudes: steadfastness, perseverance, pursuit of independence” and is increasingly also seen to reflect a candidate’s “assimilation to a supposedly shared national way of life.” Nakache, Stone and Winter (in this dossier) observe that in Canada, “good citizenship” is redefined “in neoliberal terms: individual self-reliance, economic self-sufficiency, investment in one’s cultural capital and marketable skills.”

Class also intersects with gender in civic integration policies. Policymakers seem to assume that oppressive gender norms coincide with lack of economic productivity. When Dutch parliamentarians describe the target group of civic integration policies, they assume that low education levels and poor labour market prospects coincide not only with traditional gender norms, but even with a propensity to domestic violence (Bonjour and Duyvendak, 2018: 894-895). Similarly, Fargues (in this dossier) observes that in French naturalisation procedures, the labour market integration of Muslim candidates is subjected to particular scrutiny: because all Muslims are assumed to hold traditional gender values, Muslim women are suspected to be unwilling to engage in paid work, and Muslim men are suspected to be unwilling to allow their wives to engage in paid work. Thus, dominant discourses present economic productivity and progressive gender norms as two sides of the same coin: two inherent, related features of “modern,” “Western” citizenship which civic integration policies are deemed to protect.

The gendered aspect of civic integration policies once again brings to the fore their paradoxical vacillation between integration and selection, between helping out and keeping out. Civic integration policies are presented as means to achieve gender equality for migrant women, helping them to emancipate from the traditional and oppressive gender norms and practices that supposedly characterise their cultures and communities (Thapar-Björkert and Borevi, 2014). This is particularly explicit in France, where migrant women are represented as the main beneficiaries of civic integration policies. Minister of the Interior Nicolas Sarkozy argued that participation in civic integration classes had to be compulsory, because otherwise migrant women would not be allowed to leave the house (Hachimi-Alaoui and Pélabay, in this dossier). Likewise, the creative writing classes for migrant women which Linda Haapajärvi (in this dossier) observed aim at extracting women from their supposedly closed and traditional familial and cultural environments, to introduce them to an emancipated feminine citizenship that is imagined to characterize French public space and political culture.

However, authors in this dossier are sceptical about the actual impact of French and Canadian civic integration policies on migrant women's emancipation, as they note that in practice, tests and requirements make it more difficult for migrant women to access secure residence status and citizenship rights. Nakache, Stone and Winter (in this dossier) find that in Canada, "women were refused citizenship for language or knowledge reasons at almost twice the rate of men" between 2007 and 2016. Hachimi-Alaoui and Pélabay (in this dossier) note that female family migrants from the African continent are overrepresented among those subject to obligatory civic integration programs. This resonates with findings by Kirk and Suvarierol (2014), who found that Dutch civic integration policies failed to realise their stated goal of emancipating migrant women, because these policies focused entirely on alleged "cultural" values and practices of migrant women. As a result, they neglected to tackle the structural factors that make the combination of care responsibilities and paid work difficult for all women in the Netherlands, such as the lack of flexible and affordable child care. Thus, also with regard to migrant women, civic integration policies vacillate between emancipation and exclusion.

## **Second Paradox: Universal or National?**

Mouritsen (2008: 23) notes that in civic integration discourses, "universal values" are often "presented as accomplishments of distinct national histories and circumstances." In debates about the "values test" in Québec, the governing CAQ party emphasized that the gender equality norm laid down in the Charter of Human Rights and Freedom was *not* "a universal value" but rather "a Québécois value", while the opposition party rejected this reinterpretation of universal "rights" as national "values" (Laxer, in this dossier). This vacillation between framing norms as universal or as specifically national echoes the colonial civilisation project, which represented European civilization as universally valid and applicable, but at the same time as unattainable for racialized Others. For instance, Christianity was presented as the faith for all of humankind, but also as the European faith, which proved the superiority of European civilization (Bhabha, 2004). In a similar manner, contemporary discourses present human rights simultaneously as universal and as proof of national, European,

or Western superiority. Sayad (1994: 11; Guénif-Soulaimas, 2006: 23) notes that French politicians claim “a monopoly on ‘universalism’” without realizing “how chauvinistic and even imperialist” this claim is.

Supposedly “national” values are defined very similarly in different countries’ civic integration policies, with gender equality taking centre stage in the civic integration turn wherever it occurs. Linda Haapajärvi (in this dossier) argues that “the politicisation of immigration and integration through gender is one of the main elements of convergence between European countries in the 2000s.” Thapar-Björkert and Borevi (2014) note that in British and Swedish civic integration discourses, gender equality is mobilized to define what national identity is, and why national identity is in a need of protection through civic integration policies. This is also clearly visible in Canada, where the national citizenship guide “insists on the importance of respecting ‘Canadian values’” which are contrasted to “barbaric cultural practices” which migrants allegedly bring with them, such as honour killings, female genital mutilation and forced marriage (Nakache, Stone and Winter, in this dossier). In the values test introduced in Québec in January 2020, same-sex marriage and gender equality are included as central elements of Québécois culture, which migrants are not expected to share (Laxer, in this dossier). Likewise in France, gender equality is among the core “national values” being tested and taught in civic integration courses and examinations (Hachimi-Alaoui and Pélabay, in this dossier; Fargues, in this dossier; Haapajärvi, in this dossier). This resonates with Nacira Guénif-Soulaimas’ (2006: 26-27) observation that in French debates about immigration and national identity, Frenchness is equated with gender equality, as the French are assumed to have achieved “peace in the war between men and women.” In this representation, “the only surviving remnant of patriarchy” in France is to be found among migrants and their descendants living in the banlieues. Guénif-Soulaimas emphasizes that while the mechanisms of boundary drawing in contemporary integration discourses may be new, “the labelling is neither new... nor unfamiliar: it echoes the labelling of the civilized and the uncivilized in the colonial empire”, in that it “evaluates the sexual behaviour of men of immigrant and colonial descent and the way they act towards women.”

### **Third Paradox: Desire or Obligation?**

A third and final paradox shared by the colonial civilizing mission and contemporary integration discourses is the tension between desire and obligation. In colonial ideology, European civilization was represented as the best and most desirable, and adhering to European values and customs the surest way to anyone’s happiness. Colonial subjects were therefore expected to be enthusiastic and grateful about being “civilized.” In colonial practice however, a great deal of violence was exercised to force European civilization upon the colonized. This paradox is mirrored in contemporary civic integration policies. Merolli (2016: 961) argues that the problem which civic integration policies are designed to solve is migrants’ “absence of desire to be part of society.” Integration courses and exams serve to “both stimulate and test desire and love for the state (and nation)” (*ibid.*: 964). Similarly, the French participative neighbourhood policies which Haapajärvi (in this dossier) observed aim to enable migrant women prove their “willingness to act autonomously and responsibly to improve their integra-

tion process." If they fail to "seize this opportunity", women risk being "judged as passive, backwards, opposed to equality and *communautaristes*." Hachimi Alaoui and Pélabay (in this dossier) point to "a paradoxical concurrence of personal will and legal obligation" in France. On the one hand, the "choice to live in France" is assumed to imply the "will to integrate and to accept the fundamental values of the Republic" (*Preamble to the CAI*, cited in Hachimi Alaoui and Pélabay, in this dossier). On the other hand, newcomers are under the legal obligation to sign a contract in which they commit to making an effort to "integrate". Thus, migrants are assumed to have chosen France out of a desire to participate in its values, while at the same time they are assumed to only make an effort to "integrate" if they are legally obliged to do so.

Merolli (2016) points out that migrants are blamed both for their attachment to their ethnocultural identity seen which is as irrational, and for being *too* rational and calculating, in that they are seen to seek citizenship for instrumental reasons. Thus, in France in the 1990s, handicapped migrants were suspected of applying for French nationality only to gain access to certain types of social security reserved for French citizens (Fargues, in this dossier). In Canada, politicians represent foreign women who give birth in Canada as bad mothers and profiteers, rather than looking at women "who intentionally seek a desirable citizenship for their children" as "highly devoted (moral) mothers and model neoliberal subjects whose entrepreneurial chutzpah and financial means have enabled them to mitigate future risk" (Harder, in this dossier). It is striking that while (perceived) economic instrumentalism is abhorred in migrants, it is unapologetically embraced by national governments striving to maximise the economic benefit of immigration.

## Conclusion

Civic integration policies are loaded with paradoxes, which echo the paradoxes of the colonial civilisation project. Both government projects push towards *both* assimilation *and* exclusion; present their norms and values as *both* universal *and* national; and assume *both* a desire to integrate *and* an unwillingness to integrate which can only be overcome by state force. Perhaps these paradoxes serve to win support from different political fractions, where social-democrats or liberals can highlight the facilitation of emancipation, while conservative parties emphasize the protection of Nation and Civilisation. At a more fundamental level, these paradoxes reflect the double face of Western modernity, which has proclaimed equality for all without ever giving up the belief in the superiority of White/Western nations and civilisations.

## References

- Bhabha Homi K.** (2004 [1994]) *The location of culture*, New York, Routledge.
- Bonjour Saskia** (2011) Between Integration Provision and Selection Mechanism. Party Politics, Judicial Constraints, and the Making of French and Dutch Policies of Civic Integration Abroad, *European Journal of Migration and Law*, 12 (3), pp. 299-318, [online]. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1163/157181610X520382>
- Bonjour Saskia and Chauvin Sébastien** (2018) Social Class, Migration Policy and Migrant Strategies: An Introduction, *International Migration*, 56 (4), pp. 5-18, [online]. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12469>
- Bonjour Saskia and Duyvendak Jan Willem** (2018) The “migrant with poor prospects”: racialized intersections of class and culture in Dutch civic integration debates, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41 (5), pp. 882-900, [online]. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1339897>
- Guénif-Souilamas Nacira** (2006) The other French exception. Virtuous racism and the war of the sexes in postcolonial France, *French Politics, Culture & Society*, 24 (3), pp. 23-41.
- Kirk Katherine Margaret and Suvarierol Semin** (2014) Emancipating migrant women? Gendered civic integration in the Netherlands, *Social Politics*, 21 (2), pp. 241-260.
- Kostakopoulou Dora** (2010) The anatomy of civic integration, *The Modern Law Review*, 73 (6), pp. 933-958.
- Merolli Jessica L.** (2016) Manufacturing desire and producing (non-)citizens: integration exams in Canada, the UK and Netherlands, *Citizenship Studies*, 20 (8), pp. 957-972.
- Moore-Gilbert Bart** (2000) Spivak and Bhabha, in Henri Schwarz and Sengeeta Ray Eds., *A companion to postcolonial studies*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, pp. 451-466.
- Mouritsen Per** (2008) Political responses to cultural conflict: Reflections on the ambiguities of the civic turn, in Per Mouritsen and Knud Erik Jørgensen Eds., *Constituting Communities: Political Solutions to Cultural Conflict*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1-30.
- Sayad Abdelmalek** (1994) Qu'est-ce que l'intégration ?, *Hommes & Migrations*, 1182, pp. 8-14.
- Thapar-Björkert Suruchi and Borevi Karin** (2014) Gender and the “integrationist turn”: comparative perspectives on marriage migration in the UK and Sweden, *Tijdschrift Voor Genderstudies*, 17 (2), pp. 149-165.