



Max Planck Institute for the Study of
Religious and Ethnic Diversity

Max-Planck-Institut zur Erforschung multireligiöser
und multiethnischer Gesellschaften

MMG Working Paper 20-04 • ISSN 2192-2357

STEVEN VERTOVEC

Considering the work of ‘integration’



Steven Vertovec
Considering the work of 'integration'

MMG Working Paper 2020-04

Max-Planck-Institut zur Erforschung multireligiöser und multiethnischer Gesellschaften,
Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity
Göttingen

© 2020 by the author

ISSN 2192-2357 (MMG Working Papers Print)

Working Papers are the work of staff members as well as visitors to the Institute's events. The analyses and opinions presented in the papers do not reflect those of the Institute but are those of the author alone.

Download: www.mmg.mpg.de/workingpapers

MPI zur Erforschung multireligiöser und multiethnischer Gesellschaften
MPI for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen
Hermann-Föge-Weg 11, 37073 Göttingen, Germany
Tel.: +49 (551) 4956 - 0
Fax: +49 (551) 4956 - 170

www.mmg.mpg.de

info@mmg.mpg.de

Abstract

The concept of immigrant integration has been contested by academics for a long time. There have been at least twenty grounds for objection to the concept. After a brief look at these objections – such as, that integration asserts a linear and teleological process, integration is based on a ‘groupist’ understanding of immigrants, and integration is founded on an assumption that national societies comprise singular, pre-existing, historically unchanging, ‘integrated’ wholes – I go on to probe the question: “if it’s so bad, why is ‘integration’ so successful in the public sphere?” My answer is based on an observation that, for many policymakers as well as members of the public, ‘integration’ works. It works as a cognitive organizing principle in people’s heads, and it thereby, subsequently, works as an organizing or central reference concept for a set of public policies and practical mechanisms. Therefore, the concept is especially hard to displace in the public sphere, despite all of the problems associated with it by academics. The paper concludes with some thoughts about moving toward ‘thicker’ or more complex understandings of processes surrounding newcomers to societies.

Keywords: Integration, immigrants, groupism, social imaginary, polysemy, complexity

Author

STEVEN VERTOVEC is Director of the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity (MMG), Göttingen, and Head of its Department for Socio-Cultural Diversity.

vertovec@mmg.mpg.de

A revised version of this paper will appear as the Afterword in *Digesting Difference: The Anthropology of Migrant Incorporation in Europe*, K. McKowen and J. Borneman (eds), Basingstoke: Palgrave, in press.

Contents

The problems of 'integration'	7
The work of 'integration'	10
Conclusion.....	17
References.....	19

Regardless of their academic discipline, many scholars really do not like the concept of migrant integration. Nevertheless, many begrudgingly employ it – often, with some kind of disclaimer – for the purpose of engaging policymakers or gaining grants (e.g., one current EU Horizon 2020 research funding stream is entitled ‘Inclusive and innovative practices for the integration of recently arrived migrants in local communities’). Other academics are less abashed, using the concept in a seemingly unquestioning manner, accompanied with quantitative indicators. Debates around the subject of immigrant integration are certainly nothing new. Some twenty years ago, I was involved in a commissioned review of the concept of integration across 3,200 academic works and grey literature between 1996-2001 (Castles et al. 2002). Not surprisingly, we found no consensus on the term’s meaning, no fundamental idea of scale or scope, no agreed theoretical underpinnings, no common approach to indicators nor methods for acquiring them. The fact that so many different disciplines utilize the term does not help. Even at that time, we identified numerous competing concepts, each with arguable pros and cons: these include assimilation, segmented assimilation, structural assimilation, acculturation, accommodation, adaptation, incorporation, inclusion, insertion, participation, and settlement.

Academic doubts and debates notwithstanding, the concept of integration remains ubiquitous and pervasive in the non-academic public sphere, comprising the stuff of political utterances, government institutions, policy measures, media representations, civil society organizations and everyday discourse. [Here, I place in quotation marks ‘integration’ when referring to this concept in the public sphere.] In this Afterword, after noting several academic critiques of the concept, I go on to probe the question: “if it’s so bad, why is ‘integration’ so successful in the public sphere?”

The problems of ‘integration’

First, the problems with ‘integration’. Kelly McKowen and John Borneman (in press) skillfully lay out ‘issues that plague thin concepts of integration’. These hold for both academic and public uses, and include the observations that *‘integration’*...

1. ...asserts a linear and teleological process, assuming a common startpoint and a known endpoint;
2. ...is something ‘done to’ immigrants by authorities and their programmes;

3. ...offers only a partial account of sites where relevant processes unfold (such as the labour market or education system);
4. ...emphasizes citizenship, rights, and obligations that should filter down to the realm of individual tastes and habits;
5. ...is framed almost exclusively in terms of membership to a nation-state;
6. ...is based on a 'groupist' understanding of immigrants (i.e., that they inherently belong to externally bounded groups that homogeneously share 'culture', values, and status; cf. Brubaker 2004).

These issues – considered problematic by social scientists because they convey false or unfounded or normatively undesirable phenomena – are just a few in a long litany of academic criticisms of 'integration' (see, among others, Favell 1998, 2003, 2019; Bertossi 2011; Finotelli and Michalowski 2012; van Reekum et al. 2012; Schinkel 2017; Korteweg 2017; Rytter 2019; Meissner and Heil 2020). Such further critiques include the points that '*integration*' also...

7. ...regularly fails to answer the question 'integration into what'? The term's vagueness means that – as many immigrants themselves have stressed – no matter what one does by way of education, employment, language competence, social interaction... it is ever possible that one can be deemed 'un-integrated' by a member or institution of the 'native/host' society;
8. ...is founded on a structural-functional assumption that national societies comprise singular, pre-existing, historically unchanging, 'integrated' wholes (but again, without specification of the elements comprising such a whole);
9. ...is premised on the idea that aspects of (or milestones on the road to) integration are measurable, countable and comparable (again, for whole entire groups as the units in question);
10. ...implies, following the previous point, that the White, middle class 'native' is the yardstick for measurement (some critics therefore propose that the concept is fundamentally racist and neocolonialist);
11. ...conveys the idea that (racial/ethnic and/or cultural) 'difference', as an outcome of migration, is inherently problematic – an idea of 'not fitting' – if not an explicit threat to the assumed functional whole of the nation-state;
12. ...assumes, following both the structural-functionalist model and the threat narrative, an understanding that society is normally stable, and that immigration causes a condition of instability that must be remedied to return to a steady state;

13. ...insinuates the prospect of 'failed integration', the implications of which run from a drag on the social welfare state to an active threat to the nation-state society;
14. ...links, also by way of threat, the assumption of mis-fit to aspects of security (underlining a narrative that the un-integrated are vulnerable if not prone to radicalization, crime, violence and terrorism);
15. ...entails, through its groupist thinking and indicators, an inherent ranking of migrant populations along a scale of 'good/more integrated' to 'bad if not dangerous/not integrated' groups;
16. ...leads to a 'blaming the victim' orientation (i.e., that immigrants are responsible for their own predicament, social standing, economic outcomes; group stereotypes often ensue, from those considered too lazy or intellectually challenged to integrate, to those who purposefully resist due to cultural intransigence. In Germany, this gives rise to the specific term *Integrationsverweigerer*, meaning someone who is considered to be actively holding out against becoming 'integrated');
17. ...is usually only identifiable by its absence (as in poor education attainment, unemployment, continued adherence to pre-migration cultural habits; this is the same problem as identified with integration's conceptual bedfellow, 'social cohesion'; see Vertovec 1999);
18. ...is underpinned by the tendency for zero-sum thinking: in this case, that migrants-as-outsiders intrinsically take-away something (welfare, healthcare, school places) from natives and therefore leaves them undercut, such the whole will only be restored and once again evenly distributed if the outsiders become indistinguishable citizens;
19. ...reinforces the role of the nation-state and its institutions as tools of social engineering;
20. ...seems to address certain aspects of inequality (e.g., lack of good jobs) while doing nothing about the sources of them (including power differentials, discrimination, etc.).

This list of problematic features of the immigrant 'integration' concept is not intended to be exhaustive, but arises from a brief survey of relevant academic literature.

Deeply embedded in, or central to, practically all of these problematic features of 'integration' is the assumption of a singular, homogeneous whole (imagined to be comprised of a certain national ethnicity if not race sharing a common language and culture). This, of course, goes hand-in-hand with groupist thinking. And as

Robin Cohen (personal communication) significantly points out, this assumption and mode of thinking among members of the receiving society actually gives rise to four divisions by way of groupism and 'integration': groupism 1, the 'we' of the nation-state people; groupism 2, the 'them' of outsiders who wish to enter into the nation state and become part of 'we'; groupism 3, the outsiders who enter and (presumably) refuse to become part of 'we'; and groupism 4, the outsiders who enter but are incapable of becoming part of 'we' (presumably due to their uncompromising and un-integratable culture). Aspects of this cognitive division is evident throughout several of the conceptual issues listed above.

Clearly, as denoted by a variety of social scientists, the concept's continued use can and does reproduce negative views of immigrants in many ways. For some social scientists (often depending on their politics), such negative outcomes are considered to be purposefully produced by a racist state apparatus (and its unwitting accomplices, namely fellow social scientists). My purpose here is not to agree or disagree with such a reading, but rather to ask: with so many problematic features, why is 'integration' such a successful public concept in the first place, and why is it so widely used and effectively reproduced?

The work of 'integration'

My basic answer to the previous question is that, for many if not most people (outside academia), 'integration' *works*. There are several senses of how 'integration' works: it works as a cognitive organizing principle in people's heads, and it thereby, subsequently, works as an organizing or central reference concept for a set of public policies and practical mechanisms. To say that 'integration' works does not mean it is therefore a normatively desirable term: I merely mean that it functions effectively, for many, as an accepted conceptual and organizational tool. The concept is able to do this through various means by way of which it is socially constructed and reproduced, repeatedly, within given social and political contexts. These include the following:

'Common sense'

'Integration' is a common sense notion, that is, a kind of down-to-Earth, taken-for-granted (albeit social constructed) knowledge, a practical way of perceiving or understanding that is widely assumed across a public. Here, it is based a presumed natural

process whereby something from outside of a bounded unit joins, becomes part of, or gets absorbed. With such a common sense basis, most people ('natives' and immigrants themselves) will say that society is broadly a cohesive entity and that newcomers obviously have to learn a lot of things to start new lives for themselves and their family and to become successfully established (regardless of what that might entail and look like to them). In this way supports a kind of folk structural-functionalism. Such common sense notions are constantly reproduced in media representations, political utterances, symbols, recurrent rituals and everyday practices – in ways akin to the banal nationalism described by Michael Billig (1995). Like many forms of 'common sense', this premise is overly simplistic and underpins the 'thin' notions of 'integration' outlined by McKowen and Borneman.

Social imaginary

Beyond a common sense understanding of outside elements coming in, 'integration' is also part of and reinforced by a social imaginary. Mikkel Rytter (2019) employs Charles Taylor's (2007) concept of social imaginary specifically to understand the ways 'integration' is embedded in Danish discourse (similarly to what I did with the broader rise of the concept of 'diversity'; Vertovec 2012). Taylor describes social imaginary as a set of presumptions that people have about their collective social life (usually within the confines of a nation-state, giving rise to all kinds of methodological nationalism in public as well as academic thinking). Taylor (2007: 23) states that a social imaginary entails unarticulated, unquestioned and largely nonconscious "ways that people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations". He considers that a shared social imaginary enables "common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy" (ibid.). In this way, the social imaginary also presents a moral order, a sense of how we ought to live together. 'Integration' discourses, policies, programmes and indicators both draw from and serve to comprise the social imaginary: a sense of how society works, how people should relate to each other, what they should have in common and what they collectively should seek.

Framing, heuristics, logic

The common sense understanding and social imaginary underpinning of 'integration' is regularly reproduced by the concept's regular use as a sense-making tool. This is

accomplished in part by serving as a framing device, a fundamental style of representation that influences perception, interpretation and public discourse surrounding a social issue. 'Integration' is also a heuristic instrument, a manner of reasoning especially for the purposes of decision-making and solution-finding. In the case of 'integration', the task what to do about immigrants' socio-economic outcomes: this can be framed as either a problem for government and society – how do we help newcomers adjust? – or a problem for immigrants – why can't they just adjust themselves? According to respective framings, the concept of 'integration' also entails a mode of logic, a causal sequence purporting how one thing effects another in a chain-like manner. Together, these sense-making attributes help the work of 'integration' by presenting it as a concept that is 'good to think with' when – as members of the general public, as policymakers and practitioners, as journalists and often as members of migrant groups themselves – people try to figure out what the impacts of migration are and normatively should be.

Polysemy, multivalence and performance

Despite the ways that all of the above attributes might point to a singular meaning for a concept like 'integration', it is in fact marked by polysemy and multivalence – different senses of multiple meanings across multiple audiences. For instance, through vague and polysemic uses of 'integration', government authorities can assure multiple publics that they are doing something about a significant social issue, immigration. It will simply be understood variously by different publics. By way of the multivalence of 'integration', the concept can be strategically deployed in a number of ways. That is, with one or another take on 'integration', the government can address anti-immigrant xenophobes by saying 'look, we're making the immigrants do this and that so they won't disrupt us'; they can address pro-immigration citizens by saying 'look, we're all in this together, our accommodating programmes and dialogues show that we're not anti-immigrant'; and they can address migrants themselves by saying 'look, we are welcoming and extending a helping hand through our integration courses, social services and more.' Beyond government, immigrant organizations themselves can point to all of the 'integration' initiatives they undertake and the results they produce in order to demonstrate that they are worthwhile participants in society; members of the public who are pro-diversity (a lion's share, as most European polls show) can rest assured that their views are justified by iterating how 'diversity and integration' sit well together; heterophobes who fear the diversification of society can urge politicians to ensure absolutely that newcomers are non-threatening by insisting

on 'integration' measures (especially concerning societal values); and xenophobes who simply dislike if not hate foreigners can point to 'integration' concerns – particularly examples of what they deem 'failed integration' – as reasons for restricting immigration.

The polysemy and multivalence of 'integration' goes hand-in-hand with the ways that 'integration' is used as a kind of performance by different actors as well. Each such constituency uses a slightly different interpretation of 'integration' – albeit sharing certain underlying understandings (as per common sense, social imaginary, etc.) – for their own discrete purposes. Such polysemy, multivalence and performance underline keys to the 'integration's' success as a publically embraced concept and way of thinking.

Social commentator Max Czollek (2019) describes the pervasiveness of such *Integrationsdenken* (integration-thinking) as played out in various acts in a public *Integrationstheatre* (theater of integration) comprising a variety of actors. Such acts take many forms, from national state- to municipal government- to citizen-driven policies and practices.

Practical integrationism

For example, in Germany, such policies and practices – and especially the traits of polysemy and performance -- can be seen at the overarching level of the federal state. Here, the Interior Ministry plays a major role in promoting notions of 'integration'.¹ On its website, the Ministry declares that "*Deutschland ist ein weltoffenes Land. Die Integration der auf Dauer und rechtmäßig in Deutschland lebenden Zuwanderinnen und Zuwanderer ist eine der wichtigsten innenpolitischen Aufgaben. Ziel von Integration ist es, alle Menschen, die dauerhaft und rechtmäßig in unserem Land leben, in die Gesellschaft einzubeziehen.*" ("Germany is a cosmopolitan/liberal-minded country. The integration of permanent and legal migrants is of the highest domestic political tasks. The goal of integration is to incorporate/include/engage/involve in(to) society all people who live permanently and legally in our country.") Elsewhere on the site, it is stated that "*Dabei betrifft Integration uns alle – Alteingesessene ebenso wie Zugewanderte.*" ("In this way integration affects us all – long-established residents as well as immigrants."). This is almost a kind of doublespeak: 'integration' is about immigrants *and* it's about everyone. The federal

1 See <https://www.bmi.bund.de/DE/themen/heimat-integration/integration/integration-node.html>

government directly funds numerous integration projects² -- almost entirely directed at immigrants, however. Germany also has a Federal Integration Commissioner (*Integrationsbeauftragte*) who promotes a National Integration Action Plan³, again mainly directed at immigrants.

While the above federal instruments appear rather top-down, the Chancellor also convenes an annual *Integrationsgipfel* (integration summit). This entails government officials meeting some 100 migrant and minority-based organizations.⁴ It is highly likely that many participants may well share several of the academic critiques of 'integration', but are willing to engage in broad discussions with government representatives for a greater good. In 2020, the integration summit was focused on measures to combat racism, especially following racist murders in the city of Hanau. This was actually, indeed, a discussion about, and directed at, the German general public rather than immigrants.

At the municipal level, every large German city has an explicit integration strategy (e.g., Munich⁵, Stuttgart⁶, and Hamburg⁷). Stuttgart's, for instance, highlights that "*Integration ist eine Gemeinschaftsaufgabe*" ("Integration is a community task.") It would seem that, from the federal to the city level, the government has taken on board the criticism that 'integration' should not just be for immigrants. But a look through the various German sites shows consistently that practically all focus remains on immigrants.

In London, by way of a different example, the not-just-migrants approach is stated even more strongly. Indeed, immigrants are not even mentioned in its vision statement and key policies. The Mayor's social integration strategy asserts:

At its core, social integration means shaping a city in which people have more opportunities to connect with each other positively and meaningfully. It means supporting Londoners to play an active part in their communities and the decisions that affect them. It involves reducing barriers and inequalities, so that Londoners can relate to each other as equals. It is about our bonds as citizens, and how we interact with one another.

2 <https://www.bamf.de/DE/Themen/Integration/TraegerLehrFachkraefte/TraegerProjektfoerderung/Integrationsprojekte/integrationsprojekte.html>

3 <https://www.nationaler-aktionsplan-integration.de/napi-de>

4 <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/vor-integrationsgipfel-1726982>

5 https://www.muenchen.info/soz/pub/pdf/399_integrationconcept.pdf

6 <https://www.stuttgart.de/integration>

7 <https://www.hamburg.de/integration/service/115238/integrationskonzept/>

The usual definition sees social integration as being simply about interactions between people of different nationalities, ethnicities or faiths. The Mayor's approach goes beyond this. The story of London, shaped for centuries by the movement of people, art, food and ideas, is much more complex. In the Mayor's 'all of us' approach, social integration is a matter for everyone, which involves and benefits us all. (Mayor of London 2020: 4, 6)

The approach that all in society – not just immigrants – are responsible for integration is the basis of the claim that integration is 'two-way street'. It is certainly a slogan not only voiced by governments, but by migrant organizations as well (e.g., Migrant Voice, a British grassroots organization led by and for migrants⁸). Yet the 'all of us' approach is arguably more than cliché in many quarters, as is born out in the ethnographic description of Norwegian parents self-organizing what they consider everyday 'integration work' to help children from immigrant families (Bendixsen and Danielsen, in press) and accounts of neighborhood-focused services and projects that the Antwerp municipality and community work organizations jointly create to promote living-together (Vollebergh, in press). Similarly, Maria Schiller (n.d.) observes an 'emic mobilization of an integration discourse' when local residents of a German city discuss the pending arrival of asylum seekers. While one set of local residents point to the state's responsibility to integrate foreigners, another set is comprised of people who take it upon themselves. Schiller typifies the latter as "'keep calm and do it yourself' integrationists". For both sets of residents, "there was little emphasis on integration as something that only migrants have to perform" (Ibid.).

In Germany (at least), another complication for the criticism that 'integration' is just something migrants have to do is the fact that 'integration' is also a key concept in other spheres. It has been used to assist disabled people in accessing schools and the labour market. Here, too, there is a government *Integrationsamt*⁹ (Integration Office) promoting disabled people's rights, issues of physical access, combatting discrimination, providing support in training and education. Here, the same means of common sense, framing/heuristics/logic, polysemy and performance reproduce certain ways of thinking with and through 'integration'. Somehow, government agencies, NGOs and members of the general public seem to be at ease in considering immigrants, disabled people and 'all of us' as variably addressed by a common notion of 'integration'. Further, the German model of the *Integrierte Gesamtschule* (integrated comprehensive school) is based on the idea of having children of many learning levels

8 <https://www.migrantvoice.org/home/headlines/integration-is-a-two-way-street-060117151302>

9 <https://www.integrationsaemter.de/Fachlexikon/Integrationsamt/77c4391p/index.html>

– including disabled children of various kinds – within the same school. Finally, the German Lesbian and Gay Association (LSVD) also refers to the integration of the gays and lesbians. In this way, again, ‘integration’ is not just a matter of immigrants in German public discourse and thinking – but it is a concept that nonetheless rests on some of the same underlying premises (of common sense, social imaginary, etc.).

Across Western Europe, given the proliferation of integration ministries, national integration plans, municipal integration departments, integration officers and integration projects, it is certainly easy to get the impression of a wholly top down directive aimed at immigrants. Indeed, Rytter (2019: 692) concludes that “*Integration* is solely the vocabulary of power, a prerogative of the nation-state and the indigenous majority population that, intentionally or not, tends to objectify, stigmatise and exclude Muslim immigrants from the Danish social imaginary of the nation-state and its population.” Although in many ways and in some quarters this may well be true in Denmark and many other contexts, for me this sounds too state-centred. As I have described in this brief essay, ‘integration’ is ubiquitous and successful because it entails several deep-seated cognitive and communicative functions across a range of actors and members of the public. If it were just a state prerogative, it could and would be more readily contested. Top-down decisions and initiatives are certainly prominent, as evidenced in German federal policies. But ‘integration’ is also practiced and reproduced horizontally if not bottom-up, in a manner that works by being persistent and banal. The fact that the concept – indeed, an entire paradigm – works for so many – including those towards whom ‘integration’ is aimed – presents it as something far more difficult to dismantle and replace.

People who employ or work under the aegis of ‘integration’ should not (as insinuated by critics like Schinkel) automatically be considered as dupes of the state, as closet racists or neocolonialists, or as working under a kind of false consciousness. To suggest or imply so is elitist, unbecoming and insulting. It reminds me of an earlier era, when Terence Turner (1993) castigated anthropologists who criticized the concept of ‘multiculturalism’ without trying to understand what ‘multiculturalists’ were trying to do.

There are untold numbers of people – as volunteers, activists, members of civil society organizations and indeed officers of the national or local state – who are seriously helping newcomers gain educational credentials, jobs, access to healthcare, family support, language competence and a clear pathway to legal status, rights and entitlements, alongside trying to combat racism, xenophobia and discrimination. Their efforts should not be rebuked because they might tend to invoke or at least

work with the almost inescapable concept and language of 'integration thinking'. As Kelly and Borneman (in press) rightly suggest, "identifying the limitations of a concept is not meant to discourage study of the phenomena it seeks to describe."

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the forms of good that might be accomplished by various actors working with the concept of 'integration', serious problems with the concept – as summarized at the outset of this essay – remain. Although I tend to think that his state-centred conclusion is rather narrow, I do agree broadly with Rytter (2019: 692) when he says that "*Integration* is not the solution, it is a significant aspect of the problem, and therefore more talking, thinking and 'writing against integration' is needed." In order to do this, however, one needs a better understanding of the modes of thinking, processes and outcomes purportedly encompassed by 'integration'. There is also a need to study the concept's variable meanings, uses, impacts and reproduction. It is not a singular notion, although it purports to be one.

Because it works in so many different ways, the concept of 'integration' cannot be done away entirely within public discourse. Therefore, a productive way forward is for social scientists to follow Kelly and Borneman (in press) by offering 'thicker' ways of conceptualizing modes of migrant incorporation into new societies and localities. Among the ways they suggest this might be done through a kind of conceptual adjustment regarding processes involving immigrants, Kelly and Borneman emphasize that:

- social processes should be understood as uneven, fluctuating, intersubjective and multiscalar;
- identity should be appreciated as multiple, nested and situational. This includes acknowledging other affiliations with a local city and neighbourhood, unions, occupations, religious groups (and, I would add, transnational affiliations of the same kinds) – in ways that decenter the nation-state. Such a conceptualization reflects an attempt to deflect a groupist understanding (while recognizing that people categorize in these terms much of the time);
- belonging should be a notion open to understandings of the ways that newcomers bring meanings, goods, practices and habits into their own performative repertoire, as refashioned co-productions together with longstanding residents.

For the kind of reasons suggested earlier, it is very difficult to dismantle ‘integration thinking’ in the public sphere. Through better engagement with public debate, however, as social scientists we might be able to nudge it into recognizing that, yes, a newcomer can become an engaged participant in a new context... but not just in one way, through a unitary process, into a singular socio-cultural entity. Ideally such nudging should be in the direction of fostering a kind of ‘complexity thinking’ that is able to consider the presence of newcomers – indeed, all manners of ‘difference’ – in terms of non-groupist understandings, non-linear trajectories, diverse and overlapping networks and identities, complex modes of stratification and power differentials and multiple modes of belonging.

This kind of call is certainly not new – indeed, it is evident in policy shifts concerning immigrants that were already identified by Rogers Brubaker back in 2001. This includes ‘a shift from thinking in *homogeneous* units to thinking in terms of *heterogeneous* units’, ‘a general openness to cultural diversity,’ and ‘a shift from a *holistic* approach... 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’ (Brubaker 2001: 543-4, emphasis in original). In Germany, again by way of example, such shifts have been evident in the emergence of policies and government approaches recognizing modes of incorporation vis-à-vis the diversity of immigrants – a kind of policy framework described by Schönwälder and Triandafilopoulos (2016) as ‘the new differentialism’. Such a view of immigrants and receiving contexts is also taken by a wide range of scholars invoking ‘super-diversity’ as a device for describing new complexities of immigrant characteristics, social formations, identities and belongings, and patterns of incorporation (see Meissner and Vertovec 2014; Vertovec 2019; Meissner and Heil 2020). To be sure, many people among the general public already exercise such capacity for complex thinking about migration and diversity (Schönwälder et al. 2016).

This kind of approach, recognizing ‘complex immigrants differentially incorporating into complex societies’, would be able to accomplish more far-reaching (and less discriminatory) outcomes than many currently remaining, restrictive and singular ideas of ‘integration’ – however successfully they seem to work.

References

- Bendixsen, S. and H. Danielsen. In press. 'Hierarchical forms of belonging in an egalitarian society,' in *Digesting Difference*, K. McKowen and J. Borneman (eds), Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Bertossi, C. 2011. 'National models of integration in Europe: A comparative and critical analysis,' *American Behavioral Scientist* 55(12): 1561-80.
- Billig, M. 1995. *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage.
- Brubaker, R. 2001. 'The return of assimilation? Changing perspectives on immigration and its sequels in France, Germany, and the United States,' *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24(4): 531-48
- Brubaker, R. 2004. *Ethnicity without Groups*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Castles, S., M. Korac, E. Vasta and S. Vertovec. 2002. *Integration: Mapping the Field*. London: Home Office Online Report 28/03.
- Czollek, M. 2019. *Desintegriert Euch!* Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag.
- Favell, A. 1998. *Philosophies of integration: Immigration and the idea of citizenship in France and Britain*. London: Palgrave.
- Favell, A. 2003. 'Integration nations: The nation-state and research on immigrants in Western Europe,' *Comparative Social Research*, 22: 13-42.
- Favell, A. 2019. 'Integration: Twelve propositions after Schinkel,' *Comparative Migration Studies*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-019-0125-7>.
- Finotelli, C. and I. Michalowski. 2012. 'The heuristic potential of models of citizenship and immigrant integration reviewed,' *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 10: 231-40.
- Korteweg, A. (2017). 'The failures of "immigrant integration": The gendered racialized production of non-belonging,' *Migration Studies*, 5(3): 428-444.
- Mayor of London. 2020. *Social Integration in London: A Snapshot of the Mayor's Approach*. London: Greater London Authority
- McKowen, K. and J. Borneman (in press) 'Digesting difference: Migrants, refugees, and incorporation in Europe,' in *Digesting Difference*, K. McKowen and J. Borneman (eds), Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Meissner, F. and T. Heil. 2020. 'Deromanticising integration: On the importance of convivial disintegration,' *Migration Studies* <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnz056>
- Meissner, F. and S. Vertovec. 2014. 'Comparing super-diversity,' *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38(4): 541-55.
- Rytter, M. 2019. 'Writing against integration: Danish imaginaries of culture, race and belonging,' *Ethnos* 84(4): 678-97.
- Schiller, M. n.d. 'Towards a differentiated notion of the mainstream: Involved residents, conceptions of integration and strategies of emplacement in a German neighbourhood,' unpublished manuscript.
- Schinkel, W. 2017. *Imagined societies: A Critique of Immigrant Integration in Western Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schönwälder, K. and T. Triandafilopoulos. 2016. 'The new differentialism: Responses to immigrant diversity in Germany,' *German Politics* 25(3): 366-80.
- Schönwälder, K., S. Petermann, J. Hüttermann, S. Vertovec, M. Hewstone, D. Stolle, K. Schmid, and T. Schmitt. 2016. *Diversity and Contact: Immigration and Social Interaction in German Cities*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

- Taylor, C. 2007. *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Turner, T. 1993. 'Anthropology and multiculturalism: What is anthropology that multiculturalists should be mindful of it?,' *Cultural Anthropology* 8(4): 411-29.
- Van Reekum, R., J.W. Duyvendak and C. Bertossi. 2012. 'National models of integration and the crisis of multiculturalism: A critical comparative perspective,' *Patterns of Prejudice* 46(5): 417-26
- Vertovec, S. (Ed.). 1999. *Migration and Social Cohesion*, Aldershot: Edward Elgar.
- Vertovec, S. 2012. "'Diversity" and the social imaginary,' *Archives Européennes de Sociologie / European Journal of Sociology* LIII(3): 287-312.
- Vertovec, S. 2019. 'Talking around super-diversity,' *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42: 125-139.
- Vollebergh, A. In press. "'The everyday" and ambiguous affect in the governance of the diverse neighborhood in Antwerp,' in *Digesting Difference*, K. McKowen and J. Borneman (eds), Basingstoke: Palgrave.