

Integration

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Integration – the stuff that happens *after* migration – has an ambivalent relationship to migration studies. The integration question has historically been posed in relation to the context of reception and, therefore, within the disciplinary boundaries of the sociological tradition. The sociological tradition was born with the emergence of the modern city; the question of the stranger within the city – the stranger who comes today and stays tomorrow, as Georg Simmel put it (1950) – has been one of its constitutive problems.

Classically in this tradition, though, the question has been posed in a way that brackets out and renders invisible the migrant journey.

Three problems for the classical sociological approach follow from this. First, it takes a receiving society perspective, as noted by migration scholars developing a more transnational or cosmopolitan perspective. Second, as the national state's role is redefined by the turbulence of globalisation, an integration discourse which 'sees like a state' is increasingly inadequate. And, third, it raises the question of what it is that migrants integrate *into*.

All three of these problems were present in Emile Durkheim's reflections at the start of the 20th century. For Durkheim, in an age defined by mass rural-urban migration, without some mechanism for integration, society 'is no more than a pile of sand that the least jolt or the slightest puff will suffice to scatter.' Forms of organic solidarity were required, and the civil religion of the nation was the answer, binding strangers to the abstraction of the state.

The concept of integration was introduced to the UK's political agenda in the 1960s by Home Secretary Roy Jenkins, who defined it in a far less functionalist way: 'not as a flattening process of assimilation but as equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance' (1967). This definition emerged at a particular historical moment, that of the Windrush generation of (post-)colonial citizen migrants. This generation's first struggle was with its designation as a generation of immigrants. Hence the emergent anti-racist movement (and later the academic consensus informed by that movement) rejected the notion of integration as insufficiently distinct from assimilation. Thus the concept was for a long time largely absent from political and scholarly debates in Britain.

This changed in the wake of the mill town riots and terrorist attacks of 2001, and also as a result of European Union debates. This has happened, however, at a time when integration is in danger of becoming a zombie

concept, stumbling after its lifespan has passed.

The British integration debate has been characterised by a profound lack of clarity. Too often, politicians and pundits unconsciously freight the term with the baggage of Durkheimian functionalism. 'British values' and commitment to the 'British way of life' have taken the role of Durkheim's civil religion of the state, betraying a melancholic nostalgia for a monochrome Britishness that probably never existed. As across Europe, integration debates have had a punitive streak: imagining migrants 'not really wanting or even willing to integrate' (as Prime Minister David Cameron put it), politicians have made full participation in citizenship contingent on the migrant duty to fit in.

Sarah Spencer, in her book *The Migration Debate* (2011), proposes a useful alternative definition: integration refers to the processes of interaction between migrants and the individuals and institutions of the receiving society that facilitate the socio-economic, cultural, social and civic participation of migrants and an inclusive sense of identity and belonging. This definition emphasises the multi-directional nature of integration: it is not something which migrants do, but rather about interaction. It acknowledges integration as a series of processes across a number of related, but ultimately autonomous, domains, at a range of different scales.

This definition challenges the authoritarian drift of an integration debate focused solely on the migrant responsibility to fit in. It presents us with a policy agenda on integration which I will summarise here as seven key questions.

First, how can we go beyond the limits of methodological nationalism to understand the local scale on which integration occurs? Migrants move between countries, but people move between places. Different domains of integration take place on different scales, and most often on a scale smaller than the nation-state. We need to attend better to new geographies of settlement, to local variations in attitudes, to neighbourhood effects, and to local policy.

Second, how can we escape the methodologically nationalist receiving country perspective, to develop comparative research and policy transfer around integration? The nation state is the wrong scale to consider integration, yet the terrain is striated by differences at the national level: definitions of key terms, philosophies of integration, histories of migration, of race and of colonialism, structures of governance. These open up profound *translation problems* which EU-funded officials

and researchers have often glossed over in what Hannah Jones and I (2013) have called a ‘soupy transnationalism’ which glibly boosts putative ‘good practices’ rather than rigorously engaging with difference. We need a more contentious transnationalism to develop more meaningful comparisons.

Third, if integration is a set of processes occurring in multiple domains, how can we understand the intersection of these domains? Both inter-ethnic friendships and feeling at home in a neighbourhood are strong predictors of identification with Britain – but not of each other (Gidley et al., 2012). Similarly, you can be civically active while excluded from the labour market, or residentially segregated while socially integrated. There are multiple paths to integration. Social science understands little about how these different domains influence each other.

Fourth, how do (restrictions to) entitlements impact on migrants’ possibility for integration? Our legal rights and responsibilities are the foundations on which integration – in all domains – is built. Yet policy debates on these rights and responsibilities rarely consider the integration trade-off.

Fifth, what is the responsibility of the public and institutions of the receiving society? If integration is not just the duty of migrants themselves, whose responsibility is it? We don’t know enough about how much public attitudes matter, and what shapes them. We don’t know enough about what difference leadership by public authorities and civil society can make.

Sixth, how can we do integration research without using a reductive ethnic lens? Anthropologists have been accused of methodological ethnicism: the assumption that migrants from a particular nation state or region constitute an ethnic group (‘the Bangladeshis in London’, ‘the Turks

in Germany’, and so on) before their identity, actions, social relations and beliefs are studied. Only by shifting our attention from ethnicity to *sites and spaces of integration* can we overcome this addiction.

Finally, how can we attend to the lived experience of integration? Especially given the gap between what people *say* in interviews and what people *do* in real life: there may be deep, meaningful interactions between migrants and settled people in places where the interviews with settled people suggested high levels of xenophobic attitudes (Jensen and Gidley, 2013). This is a methodological challenge, and suggests the importance of ethnographic research, hitherto relatively neglected in the integration field.

I suspect that an ethnographic approach to integration as a mundane, unremarkable feature of today’s complex societies, might reveal – contrary to the politicians’ rhetoric of dislocated communities and migrants unwilling to integrate – that migrants and non-migrants are getting on with it without us.

References

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