

Routledge Advances in European Politics

NARRATIVES AND PRACTICES OF MIGRANT AND MINORITY INCORPORATION IN EUROPEAN SOCIETIES

CONTESTED DIVERSITY AND FRACTURED BELONGINGS

Edited by
Zenia Hellgren, Alexander Gamst Page,
and Thomas Sealy



Narratives and Practices of Migrant and Minority Incorporation in European Societies

This book explores the disjuncture that emerges at various levels in European diversity management policies and their translation into practice.

It shows that state-wide strategies can only guide diversification outcomes, not wholly control them, and in practice, national level integration policies rely on multi-level involvement including authorities at regional or local level and civil society organisations. The book demonstrates a complex and varied picture of the ways in which different European countries engage with ethnic diversity, as well as the internal (in)consistency of the philosophical underpinnings of this engagement. As such, it draws attention not just to ways in which diversity “is done,” but illuminates processes and narratives which are messy, contested, and contradictory.

This book is of key interest to scholars, students, and practitioners involved in integration, ethnic and cultural diversity studies, migration and immigration, citizenship, ethnicity, and more broadly to European studies, and the wider social sciences.

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Contested Diversity and Fractured Belongings

**Edited by Zenia Hellgren,
Alexander Gamst Page, and Thomas Sealy**



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Prologue

This book engages with the increasingly contentious spaces where different normativities of integration in European societies are played out and interact with the realities on the ground. The growing polarisation that to a great extent defines contemporary politics, both nationally and internationally, is strongly felt in the field of immigrant incorporation, diversity management and the construction of belonging. What emerges is a complex and varied picture of the ways in which different European countries engage with ethnic diversity, as well as the internal (in)consistency of the philosophical underpinnings of this engagement.

These frictions are not new. In fact, the question of how to manage ethnic diversity resulting from immigration has been a contested issue in European societies for decades. Nevertheless, it has gained a renewed prominence as the result of simultaneous trends that work against pro-diversity policy orientations. In a number of European countries, populist right-wing parties with xenophobic discourses have garnered large proportions of the voting pool, giving them the opportunity to leverage this power to influence the redesign of immigration and integration policies in ways that fundamentally collide with existing pro-diversity policies such as multiculturalism or interculturalism. Simultaneously, at the level of each individual country, there is no consensus as to how to best promote inclusion of migrants and their descendants, even when policy-makers seem to espouse similar diversity-positive frameworks. In addition, the discourse on ethnic minorities often belies the internal complexities, divisions, and stratifications that exist within such categories, for which we might use the term “super-diversity.” Within these complexities we can see multiple ways that members of minority groups engage with, or avoid engaging with, policies and societal discourses, as they attempt to construct what belonging means in their new societies.

With super-diversity, we also see increased boundary-processes where people brought into closer proximity heighten the degree to which they communicate their own group identities. Thus, the concept of diversity is largely used as a synonym for societal heterogeneity, where the majority population comprises a standard against which “difference” is defined. In that sense, what is considered as diverse or not depends on social categories that are defined as being the standard, and what falls outside this pattern varies according to the context. In other words, the definition of diversity depends on the kind of groups (ethnic, religious, gender,

sexual orientation etc.) that are engaged in struggles in a specific context. However, such conceptualisations do not reflect the reality experienced by the people actually engaging in integration processes. Groups often have unclear outlines, internal divisions, and conflicting priorities. They might have different conceptions of the need to integrate, or what integration looks like. With this in mind, diversity is a notion that is contested at many levels, having different meanings according to who is using the term.

Observing these current trends, many of the contributions of this book aim to explore the disjunctures that emerge at various levels in European diversity management policies and their translation into practice. Others are focused on how these policies are experienced by actors on the ground. Policies that the various contributions to this book engage with include forms of assimilation, multiculturalism, interculturalism, and the neo-assimilationist position known as integrationism. France is an oft-cited example of the former, as their policies of incorporation are guided by a philosophy of *assimilation* based on universal rights. At the other end, the UK has been considered to represent a more *multicultural* approach, which is oriented by the valuation and recognition of difference. In recent years, however, there has been a discursive move away from multiculturalism and towards civic integrationism alongside multiculturalism, where the Brexit referendum result has produced a complex set of cleavages on immigration. In a different manner, a third orientation is Spain's preference for *interculturalism*, with a focus on cohesion and contact at the level of the city. In reality, however, such state-wide strategies can only guide diversification outcomes, not wholly control them. In practice, national level integration policies rely on multi-level involvement including authorities at regional or local level and civil society organisations and their outcomes ultimately depend to a great extent on the attitudes and behaviour of people in their roles as institutional actors, employers, teachers, neighbours, and so on.

We are interested in the variety of actors involved in the implementation of diversity policies on the ground, whether they are supportive of pro-diversity approaches or not, and what are the implications of their different agendas and forms of action. By paying attention to this variation, we aim to draw attention not just to ways in which diversity "is done," but to shine light on processes in which minorities are not passive subjects for policies to act upon, but actors with their own priorities, goals, and preferences, at the individual, household, and group levels. Societal diversification narratives are therefore by no means linear or straightforward. Instead, they are messy, contested, and contradictory. In short, we wish to show how contested diversity breeds fractured belonging, with the ambition that this will inspire the construction of more inclusive forms of citizenship for the superdiverse societies of today and tomorrow.

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Part I

Diversity management in Europe

What are the issues at stake?



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1 Introduction

Narratives and Practices of Migrant and Minority Incorporation in European Societies

Zenia Hellgren, Alexander Gamst Page, and Thomas Sealy

The Starting Point

Across Europe, while there is oftentimes firm commitment to diversity-positive agendas such as multiculturalism and interculturalism, we see that neo-assimilationist and even outright xenophobic discourses are gaining presence and influence over migration and integration policies. What we can also see is that these two trends cut across national and local levels producing a complex set of dynamics, tensions and contestations. Moreover, even in contexts that officially promote diversity, tensions emerge around how to translate policies into more inclusive practices, especially when framed against a backdrop of anti-diversity governmental or societal discourses.

The ways in which new people and groups are incorporated into a society are complex and multifaceted, a complexity only exacerbated by every one of these facets being contested. Issues of national identity, official diversity policy and how these intersect with the incorporation of new people become battlegrounds within public discourse when issues such as integration and inclusion are raised. Because of this, the concrete meaning of such terms is hard to pin down. The EU Commission (2023) defines “integration” as “a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of EU Member States.” This, however, is rather vague and open, begging the obvious question of what accommodation means in this context. How much of the burden is on each party, how much can the host nation reasonably expect newcomers to adapt and what accommodation is required of the host-nationals themselves? Other understandings of integration or inclusion might use entities such as “groups” or “society” as their main elements (e.g. Scholten et al., 2017), but this merely raises further questions. To what degree can we speak of a unified society? Where are the boundaries of any given group? Who speaks for said group? The shifting grounds on which integration and inclusion of minorities rest also suggest another query, one which might be negligible for some, but of desperate importance to others; does integration ever have an endpoint?

National policies might have a stab at formulating concrete answers to some of these questions. For instance, a given country might state that integration is achieved when minority groups attain socioeconomic parity with the population

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as a whole (Barstad & Molstad, 2020). However, such conceptualisations do not reflect the reality experienced by the people actually engaging in integration processes. Groups often have unclear outlines, internal divisions and conflicting priorities. They might have different conceptions of the need to integrate, or what this integration looks like. This is also true of policy-makers. Immigration and integration are intensely politicised fields, and there is often no consensus within a host society as to how the incorporation of diverse peoples is to be managed.

This book addresses two main points of contention arising from this context: The division between normative political agendas towards integration and inclusion on the one hand and the cacophony of voices, priorities and agendas that exist in the spaces where these policies translate into action on the other. The contributors to this book explore these topics, viewing the disjunctions that emerge from the data within the management of difference, illustrating the fractured nature of diversity and the contestation of belonging. This introductory chapter lays out the conceptual framework for the book, by delving into the philosophical underpinnings of diversity management and its history in the European context since the end of World War II. Further, we draw the context for the different cases reflected in the chapters of this book by mapping and contrasting different policy approaches to integration and group ethnic diversity in order to define the current European landscape of conflicting, or complementary, integration policy/diversity management paradigms and their contradictions.

Integration, Diversity, Belonging – What Are We Talking About?

Integration

Over the last few decades, “integration” has been a key word in politics, policy-making and academic research addressing minorities’ inclusion or exclusion, religious and cultural practices, labour market participation and socio-economic or psychological well-being, in short, the overall situation of migrants and their descendants. While the perceived lack of integration among migrants and minorities concerns governments who promote policies that place the burden for successful integration processes on the migrants themselves, many academics have increasingly adopted a critical stance towards the term “integration” itself (Favell, 2022; Saharso, 2019; Wiewiorka, 2013). Some focus on the role of the majority society, playing a central (if not the major) role for immigrants’ opportunities of incorporation, though this concept as well may be problematic as it implies that newcomers are to be “incorporated” into something fixed and pre-defined rather than viewing the (super)diverse societies of today as dynamic, constantly changing, where both majority and minority groups need to build new forms of coexistence with enough space for difference yet some degree of social cohesion (e.g. Hellgren, 2016; Garcés-Mascareñas & Penninx, 2016). Penninx and Garcés (2016) coined a much-used definition of integration as the *process of becoming a fully accepted part of a society*. There is however growing recognition that ethnic discrimination limits immigrants’ chances to participate on equal terms and become fully accepted

(Simon, 2022). Increasing focus has also been directed towards the unequal power relations between (native, white) majority society and (racialised) minority groups, impeding such inclusive processes, and while there is still a widespread reluctance against critical race theories in Europe (particularly beyond the UK) (Lentin, 2020, 2015, 2008; Warmington, 2020), an emerging critical scholarship places racism and racialised inequalities at the core of the European “integration failure” (e.g. Hellgren & Bereményi, 2022; Rodríguez-García, 2022; Magazzini, 2021; Simon, 2022). In short, the definitional contours of the term “integration” as well as its purposes and effects, and even utility, have been greatly contested (Spencer & Charsley, 2021).

In this volume, we use the term “integration” when we consider this justified in order to engage in different debates, or seek to show how the term is conceived differently by different actors. Some contributors, for instance, use it since this is the term applied in the specific context that their research addresses. Dikici (in this volume) advances the integration debate by proposing to consider minority integration as a three-way process by adding the transnational level to an analysis that often is nation-centred. Our position towards the concept of integration as such is critical. We believe that the term is on the one hand rather “worn-out” and charged with negative connotations, being associated with assimilationism and “tough tactics” towards migrants (see de Waal in this volume), and on the other hand that the term as such is built on a misconception of what living in an ethnically diverse society essentially is about. We will delve further into this line of thought in the next sections.

Diversity (and Superdiversity)

Northern and Central European countries have become increasingly ethnically diverse through different “waves” of immigration since the post-war period. In Southern and Eastern Europe foreign immigration started later, but at present virtually all European countries have undergone an increasing ethnic, racial, cultural and religious diversification. Several European countries also have numerous national minorities, such as the Roma or the Sámi people. Ethnic, racial, cultural and religious diversity is indeed a social fact of European societies, as recent data from Eurostat (2023) reflect.

It should be noted that statistics on the diversity of European populations generally only cover those who are foreign-born; if children of foreign-born inhabitants and nationalised migrants are included the numbers are far higher, reaching nearly around one fifth of the population in countries such as Germany, Sweden and Spain (INE, 2024; Migration Policy Institute, 2014).

Moreover, the concept of diversity is largely used as a synonym for societal heterogeneity, where the majority population comprises a standard against which “difference” is defined. In that sense, what is considered as diverse or not depends on social categories that are defined as being the standard, and what falls outside this pattern varies according to the context. In other words, the definition of diversity depends on the kind of groups (ethnic, religious, gender, sexual orientation, etc.)

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that are engaged in struggles in a specific context. With this in mind, diversity is a notion that is contested at many levels, having different meanings according to who speaks, where and for whom.

While many still speak of a single majority society that migrants may be integrated into, or marginalised from, this notion may be growing outdated. Vertovec coined the famous term “superdiversity” to address this social transformation towards a normalisation of high degrees of diversity and the complexity of that diversity, largely the result of migration. In the superdiverse society, it is not uncommon to find neighbourhoods where the inhabitants that originate from countries all over the world are more numerous than those who are native-born. Superdiversity also adds to the social complexity of societies through new dynamics of stratification, encompassing ethnic mixing and interethnic conviviality, hypersegregation and growing inequalities (Vertovec, 2023, 2007). Mixtivity as a result of interethnic marriages further adds to this diversification of the European population (Rodríguez-García et al., 2021). In 2022, for instance, 15% of all marriages in Spain took place between a Spanish national and a foreign citizen (INE, 2024, 15 January). In this scenario, issues such as ethnic background and identities become blurred and, it could be assumed, should come to matter ever less in the new, superdiverse Europe that is taking shape.

Yet precisely the demographic development towards increasing diversity and mixtivity is taken up by the alt right that advances across European societies under conspiratory white supremacist labels such as “the great replacement” (Ekman, 2022). Both more moderate and radical populist parties adopt anti-immigrant rhetoric and deservingness narratives, retracting from the view of integration as a two-way process by increasingly placing the burden for a successful integration on the immigrant – without recognising how discrimination often makes integration de facto impossible. We argue that the current political development seriously harms the fundaments for any functioning “integration” or incorporation: the sense of belonging.

Belonging

As the title of this book reflects, we identify a *fractured belonging* in our contemporary (super)diverse European societies. This fracture has several different dimensions and may on the one hand reflect a growing ideological diversity (or polarisation) among the (native) European populations, in turn creating questions such as what it is exactly that newcomers are expected to identify with and feel that they belong to. On the other hand, it may also serve to illustrate the exclusion of migrant and minority groups who find that they cannot gain access to full belonging or “integration” due to the barrier of discrimination (Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2021; Lödén, 2008).

Simultaneously several empirical studies find that there are huge differences between belonging in terms of identification with a (vague and contested) notion of national identity and the identification with a city or neighbourhood which appears more accessible and easier for migrant and minorities to adopt, even if it often is

a form of underdog identity (Zapata-Barrero & Hellgren, 2023; Hellgren, 2019; Oosterlynck et al., 2017), whereas others have pointed to the importance of the national level for minorities' constructions of their belonging (Antonsich, 2018).

With this book, we aim to contribute to definitions of the fractures related to diversity and belonging that represent real challenges in our contemporary European societies and to present some tentative strategies for how these fractures can begin to heal, including migrant agency and narratives with potential to disarm myths of national homogeneity and construct new collective, trans-ethnic identities with place for (super)diversity (see Kochaniewicz and Kuneva & Stoyanova in this volume).

Different Approaches to Diversity Management: Assimilationism, Multiculturalism, Interculturalism and Integrationism

This volume covers both the formation and the implementation of diversity policy and the ways in which it is interpreted, reacted to, embraced and opposed. While such policies might take many forms, they tend to align within a smaller number of umbrella terms denoting the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of the policy in question. Here follows a brief explanation of the four main theoretical and policy approaches to the management of diversity in Europe.

Assimilationism

Classical assimilation theory postulates a linear process where minorities become increasingly similar to the majority in terms of language, customs, values and so forth (Gordon, 1964). When translated from sociological theory to the policy realm, this gains the implication that assimilation is desirable, and/or that encouraging this process is a viable diversity management strategy. Assimilation theory has been influential in a number of countries, particularly the United States. Assimilation or assimilationism nevertheless has rather negative connotations among European migration scholars, taken as an outdated and unrealistic expectation of unilateral adaptation into a false notion of a culturally homogeneous majority society. In politics, assimilationism may be described as the first waves of European diversity policies; however, there has been a shift back towards this "tougher" line in recent years, Denmark being a pivotal case. France is also paradigmatic as a country that never abandoned its assimilationist approach to immigration (Bergamaschi et al., 2023; Mansouri, 2022). One must be aware, however, that these terms are not always used consistently in policy documents or scholarship. Particularly older texts may use the notion of assimilationism in different ways from those here presented.

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism emerged as an alternative to, and critique of, assimilationist positions. In contrast to assimilationism, multiculturalism emphasises the need for

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political recognition of ethnocultural groups and of group rights, and not just formal legal equality between individuals and individual rights (Modood & Sealy, 2023). There is a two-fold emphasis. Firstly, minorities can suffer discrimination, which requires considering group-based identities. Secondly, group identities might be positively valued and significant for groups themselves, including for political claims making. This requires forms of positive recognition and respect, and may also mean differentiated policies between groups and across policy spheres. Although multicultural policies were increasingly adopted in the latter part of the 20th century in countries such as Canada, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Britain, this approach became increasingly challenged from the 1990s and the early 2000s by scholars, politicians and policy-makers alike for fostering social division, although despite rhetoric of its demise, multicultural policies persist (Sealy et al., 2024).

Interculturalism

Interculturalism as an idea emerged in the 1990s as a response to criticisms against multiculturalism, and shortly became prominent in education studies, which is noticeable in its emphasis on “educating” people in diversity and interethnic conviviality (Catarci, 2015; Cantle, 2012; Rodríguez-García, 2010). It was introduced in European public policies (mainly at the local municipal level) in the 1990s and 2000s. As a policy approach to diversity management, interculturalism distances itself from both assimilationism and multiculturalism, considering that both have failed to foster social cohesion and equality in diversity (Mansouri, 2022; Zapata-Barrero, 2019).

Today, interculturalism stands strong as the dominant approach to diversity management at the city level in a broad range of cities in Europe and beyond, including most European countries, Turkey, Japan, South Korea, Canada, Australia, Mexico and Morocco (Council of Europe, 2024). However, it is unclear to what extent it has actually served to reduce inequalities and discrimination (Hellgren & Zapata-Barrero, 2022; Santagati & Bertozzi, 2023). Hellgren (in this volume) for instance argues that its ambition of being politically non-controversial and “fit all” risks limiting its transformative potential, since more concrete (and controversial) measures towards greater equality and anti-racism are avoided.

Integrationism

The philosophical fundaments of integrationism are identical to those of assimilationism (Dodevska, 2023; de Waal, in this volume). In the 1990s, European diversity policies were largely characterised by an increasing focus on integration and a distancing from multiculturalism (Borevi, 2014; Schierup et al., 2006; Ålund et al., in this volume). There is, indeed, a great deal of overlap between the concepts, and there are implementations of assimilationism that would be very difficult to distinguish from integrationism. One key difference might be in the ideology behind it. Assimilationism started from a position that cultural convergence was a natural

process. While it has been adopted by people with nationalist ideologies, this was not necessarily the fundamant of the theory itself. Integrationism, however, takes a more antagonistic stance. It starts from the implicit premise that cultural diversity is a societal threat and that social cohesion and belonging to society must be predicated on adherence to a shared set of values (Kundnani, 2007). These values are implied to be part and parcel of some national identity which is perceived to have been lost through diversification. As such, this approach may be seen as part of the populist call to return to some imagined golden past. The diversity management approaches based on this are particularly (in its more “hard core” versions) compatible with far-right governance. One key difference, however, is that minorities in today’s Europe tend to have a greater platform to voice their concerns than was the case when assimilationism was the norm. Many of the individuals that are now called on to “integrate” will also be born in the respective countries. This rhetoric is likely to create reactions in the minority groups in the various countries, an example of which is explored in Page and Chahboun’s chapter in this volume.

European Engagement with Difference: A Philosophical and Historical Perspective

The question of how to manage ethnic diversity has been a major source of contention in European societies since the end of World War II. The dismantling of colonial empires, rapid economic development and an ageing European population caused migration flows to shift so that the more prosperous European countries became net receivers of migrants (de Haas et al., 2019). Though the colonies were dismantled, cultural and linguistic connections still existed, as well as infrastructure and transport links, all of which facilitated significant numbers of workers coming to Europe from previously colonised parts of the world (Massey et al., 2001). In addition, the new-found stability of these parts of Europe made them desirable destinations for refugees (Peach, 1997). Prior to this, many European societies had been more diverse than their own national ideologies would acknowledge, but this diversity was masked by a public narrative of national heterogeneity (e.g. Minde, 2005). However, as migrants began coming from further away, and primarily settled in the major cities, this diversity became far more visible (Panayi, 2010). In addition, the suppression of minority cultures that we see with, for instance, the Norwegian Sámi, seemed far less palatable to many after World War II, when the world had seen the logical terminus of such ideology (Jackson & Weidman, 2005). The more convivial environment was instrumental in gaining consensus for such documents as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN General Assembly, 1948), the Refugee Convention (UN General Assembly, 1951) and the European Convention on Human Rights (Council of Europe, 1950). The suppression of difference that had been the norm in Europe up until this time could no longer go unchallenged, and was forced to adopt a more euphemistic form, at least for a time.

A slow, often painful process ensued where difference became ever more accepted. The ways in which minorities were marginalised was drawn into public discourse. These topics were subjected to heated debate in the political sphere,

which was mirrored in public discourse, and slowly the standards denoting how it was acceptable to treat and talk about people were altered (Losey & Kurthen, 1995). Such changes are especially visible in popular media. In each decade, it was possible to go back to view that of the relatively recent past and see depictions of minority groups that had grown unacceptable in the interim. Given later developments, one might ask to what extent this represented a real cultural shift. More likely, it was a surface-level gentrification of acceptable discourses, where those that held contrary views were disqualified from participating in said discourse. Those attitudes that were considered problematic to voice openly still ruminated under the surface, and were still rooted in structural inequalities. In addition, racial violence persisted, unequal treatment endured and Jewish graves continued to be desecrated in Europe (van Dijk, 1993). However, while the roots of structural inequalities ran deep, they were being drawn into the light and debated, ethnic violence was called out, and overt racism was being expunged from polite society and political discourse. While still a reality, overt racism was being stripped of its normalisation and forced into the social and political fringes.

This movement was met with constant resistance. Diversification and the spot-lighting of marginalisation created new arenas of conflict (Marsella, 2009). Terms such as “political correctness” and later “woke” were used to trivialise discrimination and racism, giving people the language to dismiss all anti-discrimination as mere overreaction (Crawley, 2007). Nevertheless, overt racism was still banished from the public sphere, to the extent that many did not take populism and the alt-right seriously when it first started to emerge. Populists and the alt-right openly voiced the kind of views that previously would have been assumed to be disqualifying. Instead, they often found significant support in the populace. The political fringes were given a voice and proved far more numerous than many expected. In this way, the dissent to pro-diversity policy orientations was intensified, the detractors becoming bolder and more outspoken, increasingly saying the quiet part out loud. These populist right-wing parties garnered large proportions of the voting pool, giving them the opportunity to leverage this power to influencing the redesign of immigration and integration policies in ways that fundamentally collide with existing pro-diversity policies.

The statements, claims and proposed policies of the populist politicians led to simultaneous uproars in opposition and in support of these statements, with ongoing counter-reactions of each side to the reactions of the other. This is part of a process of polarisation, a process where the political spectrum is divided into two ideologically opposed camps (Palonen, 2009). These camps seem to reinforce each other in a way reminiscent of schismogenesis (Bateson, 1958), where the actions of one entrenches the other further into their positions, which in turn has the same effect on the first and so forth. Simultaneously, these positions become ever more marked by emotional responses (Blikmans, 2022) and increasingly negative views of those with different views (Levin et al., 2021). This also occurs across political party lines (Reiljan, 2020), although the direction of causation is hard to unravel. Part of the issue may be selective media exposure (Prior, 2013) or social media (Bail et al., 2018).

National votes and referendums in Europe repeatedly show large portions of the populations supporting positions that previously were thought anathema. In Italy, the Neo-Fascist Fratelli d’Italia emerged as the first far-right government since World War II. In France, though ultimately losing, Marine le Pen was the runner-up to Macron in two presidential elections. Most famously, after a campaign laced with anti-immigrant and anti-diversity discourse, the people of the UK narrowly voted to leave the European Union, beginning the fraught process of Brexit, which continues to this day. Political divisions are nothing new in themselves, but it may be argued that they are changing character. The polarisation discussed here, the tribalisation and the emotional identification people have with a political position also shift the entities that are available for use as politicisation. Not only are opinions and values open for discussion, increasingly, so are also empirically verifiable facts (Hurrelmann et al., 2015; Cannon, 2016). Thus, rather than disagreements as to how a country should best be run, political divisions now seem to denote different conceptualisations as to what reality is.

Above, we have painted a picture of an embattled European landscape when it comes to managing diversity. Nevertheless, it must be understood that there is a bottleneck when it comes to translating this political landscape into policy. Typically, depending on the system in each country, one of these camps or the other will end up holding the reins of power. There are internal divisions in each party, naturally, and government Green Papers and parliamentary debates can show much disagreement on a given topic. However, this is usually ironed out, compromises made, so that published policy can present a single voice. In this way, official approaches to managing diversity voice an overarching ideology. These may be extrapolated from real-world concerns, becoming reactions to the situation on the ground, or they can be more ideological. For example, when the populist Progress Party was a part of the Norwegian government, integration was placed under the purview of the Department of Justice, reflecting the immigrant-as-criminal ideology which the party espoused.

Ideological positions lead to normative approaches in each individual country. Here, one of the variables through which ideology is filtered is how the individual country conceptualises difference. At some point, however, ideology and normativity need to be implemented. As the aphorism has it, no plan survives first contact with the enemy. While we certainly do not want to suggest that society is the enemy of policy, we might paraphrase the metaphor to say that no theory or policy can fully survive implementation in society, representing as this does an inevitable disjoint between the abstract and the ideal and the practical reality of society. In a sense, this is where this book finds its niche, in the disjunctures that emerge at various levels in European diversity management policies and their translation into practice. Directly or indirectly, the official position of how difference is to be understood and managed affects the various arenas of integration and inclusion/exclusion. As we saw earlier, these ideologies imply certain understandings of what constitutes a group, what acceptable difference is, how accommodating society should be, as well as the other myriad of questions that we viewed earlier. As we also saw, these entities are adopted, redefined, negotiated, challenged by different groups and individuals according to their positioning.

European Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion: Contested Diversity and Fractured Belongings

In this section of the chapter, we will map and define the European landscape of integration/diversity policies, before examining in more detail what implications this has, at a general level, for the immigrant and minority origin populations in the countries that are represented in this book. In the previous section, we pointed out that disagreements tend to be ironed out before government policy is published, so as to present a normative approach with a cohesive philosophical and ideological agenda. France is an oft-cited example in this context, as their underpinning is quite easy to see; their policies of incorporation are guided by a philosophy of assimilation based on universal rights. However, philosophical or ideological foundations for integration and diversity policies change over time and with different political constellations; we have, for instance, seen several countries move from multiculturalist diversity policy approaches to models of civic integration combined with policies intended to significantly reduce immigration.

The development of specific policies aiming at immigrant integration has varied much in terms of time as well as content. The necessity to create integration policies emerged with the growing recognition that the “guest workers” of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s were not returning to their countries of origin and that their children would grow up as new citizens (Van Mol & de Valk, 2016; Scholten et al., 2015; Schierup et al., 2006). The “first generation” of European immigrant accommodation policies (the term “integration” was not yet applied) was characterised by a focus on assimilation (Castles, 1993). In southern European, former emigration countries (Spain, Italy, Portugal and Greece), the transition to receivers of immigration in large numbers started during the late 1980s and grew exponentially over the 1990s and 2000s. This development has often been described as a “surprise,” stimulated by market demands for cheap (often informal) labour, and characterised by a large share of undocumented migrants living in highly precarious conditions (Van Mol & de Valk, 2016; Moreno & De Alós, 2016); integration politics in southern European states are thus a comparably recent phenomenon.

In the East, the end of the Cold War reconfigured the European landscape of migration, with many eastern European states turning into major sending countries. In recent years, some eastern European countries such as Poland, Hungary and the Slovak Republic have also become receivers of migration (mainly refugees from the Middle East since the Arab Spring and currently Ukraine) (Van Mol & de Valk, 2016; Doomernik & Bruquetas-Callejo, 2016). Some Eastern European countries, such as Poland and Hungary, do not have integration policies. Slovakia ratified theirs in 2014, which largely copies the wording of the UN (Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, 2023). However, the situation of minorities in many of these countries seems to be deteriorating, and there are numerous reports of non-white Ukrainian refugees who were excluded from convoys or turned away at the border (Oyebamiji et al., 2022; Sow, 2022). In large parts of Central and Eastern Europe, authoritarian populism has gained a very strong foothold. As is the case elsewhere, populist policy espouses an anti-immigrant

ideology, but Eastern European populism frames integration as having failed and equates this to the failure of The West (Enyedi, 2020).

In the 1970s and 1980s, some European states adopted different versions of multiculturalism as an approach to immigrant incorporation: most notably, the Netherlands, the UK and Sweden. The Dutch pillarisation model was an approach of segmented pluralism. Each “pillar” represented a cultural or religious group that was horizontally separate from the others. Despite the novel terminology, this was a fairly straightforward multicultural approach, where each group was expected to persist as a stable, delineated but ultimately equal unit (Schrover, 2010). The UK moved to an understanding of integration conceived, in the earlier words of Roy Jenkins, “not as a flattening process of assimilation but as equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance” (1967, p. 267). Sweden implemented a multicultural model with much focus on cultural and linguistic minority rights – applied also to the national Sámi minority that had been subject to repressive, “Swedifying” assimilation politics in earlier decades – and an organisation of immigrant communities through ethnic organisations that persists in present days (and that has been criticised for depoliticising and culturalising immigrants) (Schierup et al., 2006; Borevi, 2014). In the 1970s, the Swedish government even officially declared that immigrants should “have the opportunity to choose between their own ethnic affiliation and the Swedish majority culture” (SOU, 1974, p. 187; Sveriges Riksdag, 1975).

Borevi (2014, p. 2) defines the dominant European trend in immigrant incorporation since the later part of the 1990s in terms of “a retreat from multiculturalism and a turn towards civic integration,” to some extent, a return to earlier decades’ focus on assimilation rather than minority rights. This shift involved the requirement that newcomers acquire the language of the host country (rather than to stimulate them maintaining the origin languages), and that they learn about the country’s history, norms, and traditions – knowledge that is corroborated through various types of integration tests at different stages of the immigration process (Borevi, 2014). This development coincided with times of economic downturns, significant restrictions on new migration, growing concerns with the apparent disintegration and social exclusion of emerging second generations of immigrants, and increasing presence of anti-immigrant political actors across Europe (Golder, 2016).

Nevertheless, there has never been one “European model of immigrant incorporation” with several trends continuing to exist in parallel. Even if integration as the overarching European aim has not been questioned, there are constant disputes over its actual meaning. Since the European Anti-discrimination directives were adopted in 2000, as a result of massive anti-racist mobilisations, there has also been an increasing focus on anti-discrimination in this context, and on discrimination as a serious obstacle for integration (Hellgren & Zapata-Barrero, 2022). For instance, interculturalism emerged in the late 1990s and 2000s as a critique of multiculturalism (for its incapacity to promote social cohesion), compatible with soft models of integration where emphasis lies on equality/non-discrimination (Cantle, 2012; Zapata-Barrero, 2019). Currently, this softer version dominates in some European countries, such as Spain and the UK. Many European states, including

the Netherlands, Denmark, Austria, Italy and Sweden, have however undergone a noticeable shift towards more unilateral, assimilationist models of integration in recent years – a trend that appears clearly related to the increasing influence of anti-immigrant, populist far right-wing parties over immigration and diversity policies.

There are also examples of how national pro-diversity policies are sometimes hampered by lacking support at the local level. The reverse also occurs, where an assimilationist approach to diversity at the state level can fuel grassroots initiatives such as the development of interculturalist programs in schools (Bergamaschi et al., 2023). All in all, what these patterns point to is a complex and varied picture of the ways in which different European countries engage with ethnic diversity, as well as to the internal (in)consistency of the philosophical underpinnings of this engagement.

In this book, we are interested in the variety of actors involved in the implementation of diversity policies on the ground, whether they are supportive of pro-diversity approaches or not, and what are the implications of their different agendas and forms of action. By paying attention to this variation, we aim to draw attention not just to ways in which diversity “is done” but to shine light on processes in which minorities are not passive subjects for policies to act upon, but actors with their own priorities, goals and preferences. Societal diversification narratives are therefore by no means linear or straightforward. Instead, they are messy, contested and contradictory.

The contributions gathered in this volume cover a broad range of European localities, representing different dimensions and paradigms of diversity management. The book is structured into three subsections, each of which approaches key issues concerning the current state of diversity governance in Europe from different perspectives. The chapters that make up this book are in part a critique, in part an attempt to nuance and in part an attempt to complement writings on policy. This includes both a top-down perspective, focusing on how policy might be implemented and a bottom-up perspective, such as how implemented policy is perceived and reacted to by individuals in the field.

Structure of the Book

The contributions gathered in this volume cover a broad range of European localities, representing different dimensions and paradigms of diversity management and different struggles around inclusion and belonging. The book is structured into three subsections, each of which approaches key issues concerning the current state of diversity governance in Europe from different perspectives.

The first section, titled “Diversity management in Europe: What are the issues at stake?” begins with this introduction where the conceptual framework is laid out. After this, **Tamar de Waal**’s chapter takes the Dutch case to analyse the European level and the general shift across the member states towards a framework of “contractual integration” in which the notion of deservingness becomes central: migrants have to “deliver” their individual integration in exchange for increased rights granted by the receiving states. **Erdem Dikici**, in turn, challenges both state-centric

and local approaches to diversity management and argues for a model of migrant and minority integration that also takes into account the transnational dimension.

In the second part of the book, “Interrogating Policy, Narratives and Practices,” we focus specifically on the contradictions between diversity policies and practices through three cases that examine different dimensions of this issue and find that pro-diversity policies do not necessarily translate to more inclusive practices. **Thomas Sealy, Pier-Luc Dupont, and Tariq Modood** first approach two diversity-positive paradigms in their chapter, multiculturalism and interculturalism, which often are placed in opposition to each other rather than – potentially more constructively – emphasising their complementarity. While theorists in these two camps have tended to emphasise the nation (for multiculturalism) or the local level (for interculturalism), by comparing two British municipalities they explore how policies consistent with both multiculturalism and interculturalism combine and complement one another but in quite different ways between different local authorities. **Zenia Hellgren** then analyses a case that is often taken as an example of good practices in European diversity management: the Catalan model of interculturalism. Her chapter examines the gap between intercultural policies and the difficulties to implement these in practice. By highlighting the absence of an explicitly anti-racist framework and lacking preparation to deal with racism in schools, she illustrates how pro-diversity policy frameworks and discourses are no guarantee for inclusive, anti-racist practices. The section is concluded by **Aleksandra Ålund, Carl-Ulrik Schierup and Magnus Dahlstedt**, who return to the paradoxes of multiculturalism that two of them examined three decades ago (Ålund & Schierup, 1991). They focus on the Swedish case in a European context of growing anti-immigrant sentiments and retreat from multiculturalism, and discuss how post-migrant activism for social justice may potentially counter the destructive development.

In the third and final section of the book, “Whose belonging?,” the question of identity and struggles for inclusion and belonging, and how these are affected by the increasingly contested diversity, are brought to the forefront. **Leda Kuneva** and **Maria Stoyanova** address the central question of belonging by exploring how and to what extent migrants get to belong in the Bulgarian national framework. Their chapter uncovers the changeable and unsettled nature of migration-related narratives in Bulgaria, as a reflection of the changeable and unsettled realities of migration and integration in the country. **Agata Kochaniewicz**, in turn, focuses on migrants as actors who challenge structural inequalities and unilateral integration policies that restrain their right to belong. Her chapter explores the potential for migrants to set agendas and influence policies and practices through discourse production that starts at the micro level. A complementary perspective is then offered by **Alexander Gamst Page** and **Sobh Chahboun**, as they focus on how different actors in Norway might conceptualise integration differently according to their own needs and priorities. The main participants of this chapter are Norwegian Muslims, who present integration as a concrete set of measurable objectives with a clear endpoint. This is done in explicit opposition to the understanding of integration presented by right-wing societal discourse, which Norwegian Muslims interpret as intentionally vague so that the goalposts may be perpetually moved,

keeping minorities excluded. Finally, **Mehrdad Darvishpour and Nicole Nunez Borgman** conclude the book with their ethnographic study of young unaccompanied migrants from Afghanistan. Their struggle to survive in Sweden reflects deep tensions between migration and border policies and other policy areas, such as social services and children's rights. They approach a particularly sensitive issue in relation to questions of belonging – the very right to stay in a country; to some extent even to exist as a human being.

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2 Individualised Integration and Contractual Civic Integration Policies

A Dutch Case Study

Tamar de Waal

Introduction

Over the last quarter of a century, there has been a structural growth of standardised civic integration requirements for third-country nationals (hereafter, migrants) in EU Member States. This development has been systematically defended as part of a turn towards a more “integrationist” policy approach towards migration on the continent. These policies require migrants to undergo civic integration courses, language and citizenship tests, integration contracts, and oaths as conditions for attaining increased residency and citizenship rights (e.g. Goodman, 2010; Solano & Huddleston, 2020; de Waal, 2021). The implementation of these requirements has taken place against the backdrop of debates about the desirability of immigration, multiculturalism and emerging refugee crises. Moreover, their stark proliferation is still potent. “Even” Sweden recently opted for the instalment of such integration requirements, while the country has long been discussed in academic scholarship as a “test-free zone” (e.g. Nygren-Junkin, 2009, p. 57; Carrera & Vankova, 2019, p. 36).

This chapter aims to understand the underpinnings and ramifications of this European trend by describing developments within this policy area in the Netherlands. It focuses on the question of what might explain why the Dutch civic integration policy to date has had almost exclusively negative policy evaluations. The Netherlands was the first EU Member State to introduce a mandatory civic integration policy in 1998 and, since then, has changed it many times. More concretely, three different civic integration laws have succeeded each other (1998, 2007, 2021), while these laws were also almost constantly tweaked by the implementation of smaller – but nevertheless at times far-reaching – legal and system changes. During this period, there have also been a high number of policy evaluations conducted by various public institutions and research bodies (e.g. the National Ombudsman and the Court of Audit), particularly from 2017 onwards. These evaluations consistently criticised the policy outcomes of Dutch civic integration scheme.

In short, the answer to this question – that is, why Dutch civic integration policy has almost exclusively received negative evaluations – has to do with the fact that Dutch civic integration policies have increasingly started to rest on what I call “individualised” integration requirements. What this entails will be explained in

detail now, but in essence it means that the responsibility to “integrate” is put on the shoulders of individual migrants. Within individualised integration conceptualisations, “integration” serves as a criterion to assess whether migrants have managed to deserve to belong to the Netherlands (i.e. become “really Dutch”) based on their personal compatibility with idealised societal standards attributed to Dutch society (de Waal, 2021; Schinkel, 2017). To date, a fundamental political examination and reconsideration of this shift towards individualisation has been lacking, with the result that, despite all the negative policy evaluations, the Dutch civic integration scheme has never been fundamentally changed or improved (see also Nissen & de Waal, 2021). Thus, civic integration policy has been frequently altered in the Netherlands, partly in response to critical policy evaluations, but without reflecting on, let alone abandoning, the problematic and counterproductive foundations of older policies, with the result that newer policies continue to suffer from them.

This case study deserves academic scrutiny, because the Dutch shift towards “individualised” civic integration policy does not stand on its own but is part of a wider European tendency (see also de Waal, 2021). For this reason, it is valuable to analyse and clarify the reasons behind the disappointing Dutch policy results because it can teach us broader lessons on the policy results of civic integration premised on ideas of “individualised integration” instead of a (ongoing) process of mutual accommodation.

The academic literature on civic integration policy is extensive and can be (very) roughly divided into four different categories. Firstly, there is the literature that lists and aims to categorise civic integration requirements and citizenship laws across Europe, which is a dynamic policy field (e.g. Goodman, 2010; Solano & Huddleston, 2020). Secondly, the literature assesses the permissibility of integration and citizenship requirements from the perspective of (mostly liberal) theories of justice, often warning against their potentially exclusionary effects (e.g. Bauböck & Joppke, 2010; Carens, 2013; Kostakopoulou, 2010). Thirdly, there are studies that scrutinise and often criticise the political–symbolic ramifications of these policies – for example on the values of equal status and equal citizenship (e.g. de Waal, 2021; Badenhoop, 2023; Suvarierol & Kirk, 2015). Fourthly, there is the increasingly developing literature that unpacks and denounces the notion of “immigrant integration” underpinning civic integration policies, often using perspectives of decoloniality (e.g. Schinkel, 2017; Favell, 2022; Blankvoort et al., 2021).

All these perspectives are valuable, but this chapter takes a different approach. It asks why, on a more applied level, Dutch civic integration policy keeps failing despite the accumulation of negative policy evaluations. In this way, I can make visible and discuss the political implications and practical realities of a currently dominant normative-political perspective on “integration,” which is the ambition of this book. The structure of the chapter is as follows. Firstly, an overview is given of the legislation and public policy concerning civic integration policy in the Netherlands and various policy evaluations that have been conducted are discussed. Then it is elaborated how a shift towards “individualised integration” and, with that, “contractual” civic integration requirements is an important reason behind the failure to fundamentally improve Dutch integration policy over the past 25 years.

The conclusion reflects on what the findings of the chapter may imply for other European countries.

Civic Integration Policy in the Netherlands

In 1998, the first Dutch civic integration policy (*Wet Inburgering Nieuwkomers*) went into effect (e.g. Klaver & Odé, 2009). Migrants from outside the EU who were long-term residents in the Netherlands were required to take a government-paid civic integration course consisting of 500 hours of language instruction and 100 hours of civic and vocational orientation. This policy had a so-called effort requirement: attending education was mandatory but passing the final test was not required. However, those who culpably violated their “obligation to integrate” were fined and potentially had their social benefits cut.

In 2007, a new integration law was introduced (*Wet Inburgering*) (e.g. van Oers, 2013). The introduction of this law was triggered by several international and national developments, such as the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the victory of Pim Fortuyn’s party in the Netherlands in 2002 – soon after his assassination – and the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004. Much attention subsequently arose in the Netherlands about the (alleged) failed integration of migrants, especially Muslim migrants. The new law no longer had an “effort requirement” but a “result requirement.” Migrants were required to pass their integration requirements – which now included multiple language tests and a “knowledge of society” test – within three-and-a-half to five years. In addition, migrants could also receive fines for not passing the examination on time. Starting in 2010, passing all civic integration requirements also became a requisite for obtaining permanent residence rights (e.g. Groenendijk et al., 2021, p. 2724).

In 2013, another major system change followed. The premise of civic integration policy up to that time was already that the migrant had to be “self-reliant” (e.g. Groenendijk et al., 2021, p. 2723), but with this system change, this was taken to the extreme. From then on, migrants had to pay for their integration education and tests themselves, for which social loans were offered, up to €10,000 (e.g. de Waal, 2021, p. 43). Refugees were refunded this loan, but only if they passed their civic integration requirements on time. To other migrants, most notably family migrants, this refund policy did not apply, meaning that they always had to pay back the loan. Moreover, the role of Dutch municipalities in directing civic integration policy was minimised; migrants had to look up all information online and design their own civic integration trajectory (e.g. find an adequate school on a privatised integration education market). This was followed by the introduction of a “participation declaration” in 2017, consisting of a list of “core Dutch values,” which had to be signed to complete the integration trajectory at pain of fines (e.g. de Waal, 2021, p. 42).

Next was the Integration Act 2021 (*Wet Inburgering*, 2021), of which the implementation was delayed in part due to the coronavirus epidemic (e.g. Nissen & de Waal, 2021). Under this law, municipalities have partly regained their position to guide civic integration policy, and migrants are offered multiple “routes” through which they can complete all civic integration requirements. These routes

are tailored to their individual “learning capacity,” which is determined during an “intake” assessment at the beginning of their civic integration trajectory. During this intake, the educational starting point for migrants is established. The policy aim is that most migrants will enter one of the so-called “B1-routes.” This means that, albeit via different routes, the ultimate objective is to pass all examinations on language level B1 (within the previous law, this was A2, a lower level). Under conditions, exams can also be made on the A2 level, but only after failing B1-tests. The new law also introduced an “education route” for younger migrants and a more practical “z-route” for migrants for whom it is estimated, during the intake, that they will never be able to pass language exams. The z-route consists of 800 hours of courses, and refugees must do an additional 800 hours of participation activities. In addition, the “personal integration plan” was introduced, which is a plan that migrants must make together with their municipalities regarding how they will meet their integration requirements. The social loan of the 2013 system has been partially reversed in the new law: Refugees no longer need to pay for their integration education (and take out loans). For other migrants, with the largest group being family migrants, the loan system has not changed.

It is worth noting that in the above description of the changes that Dutch civic integration policy has undergone, not all legal and policy changes are included. For example, the number of language exams has increased steadily over the years, deadlines have been shortened, grounds for exemption introduced and abolished and public funds made available and withdrawn and fines increased. These changes consistently made the civic integration trajectory more burdensome and expensive for migrants, and no requirement or punitive measure, once introduced, has ever been revoked again. Moreover, the grounds on which migrants can lose their residency rights by failing to complete civic integration requirements have been expanded (de Hart & Besselsen, 2014; de Waal, 2021, pp. 26–28).

If we count all changes, major and minor, the Dutch civic integration policy has changed more than 20 times over the past 20 years. The outcome is that the “integration duty” of migrants currently entails that, in principle, migrants must complete four language exams: a test on Dutch society, a knowledge requirement on the labour market, a participation statement and the personal integration plan within three years. The other option is to complete the z-route, but the explicit policy ambition is that only a small percentage of migrants will take this. Moreover, there are now nine “sanction moments” (e.g. not finishing civic integration requirements on time, not signing the participation declaration, not being committed enough to the personal integration plan) based on which migrants can receive fines, which can also be repeated. The total amount of fines can reach thousands of euros. Completing all of these requirements costs migrants considerable time in the first few years after arrival.

Lastly, following the implementation of the new civic integration law in 2022, a discussion emerged about raising the language requirement for naturalisation uniformly to B1 for all migrants (Besluit naturalisatietoets, 2021). This would involve, amongst other things, that migrants who have completed the z-route to fulfil the civic integration requirements would no longer be eligible for naturalisation; they

could only receive a permanent residency permit. The proposed bill submitted on this subject is no longer under consideration due to the fall of the Dutch cabinet, but the discussion will likely be reopened at a later date.

Evaluations of Dutch Civic Integration Policy

As mentioned, Dutch civic integration policy has been subject to many evaluations, which were published particularly since 2017. These evaluations focused mostly on the Dutch civic integration policy since 2013 – that is, the system in which the supervising role of municipalities was minimalised and the migrants received social loans to buy and arrange their civic integration trajectory. Civic integration systems prior to 2013 have been difficult to systematically evaluate because of all the policy changes. As Han Entzinger (2022, p. 22) notes, the various policy options that were put in place were adjusted before sound scientific empirical research could be done on them.

A policy evaluation that received much political and public attention was conducted in 2017 by the Court of Audit, which is constitutionally tasked with investigating the costs and effects of government policies. In its evaluation, the Court of Audit concluded that the system of loans, repayments and debt cancellation in 2013 was set out without carefully contemplating its potential outcomes (Netherlands Court of Audit, 2017). Moreover, the quality of integration education in the privatised market was not properly protected or assessed, and there was a lack of transparency for migrants regarding the private courses available. Secondly, the emphasis on “personal responsibility” underpinning the civic integration policy was not thought out and did not work in practice; migrants did not receive enough information and, therefore, eventually needed more support. Thirdly, the Court of Audit established that it was unclear whether the imposition of fines for migrants failing civic integration policies had any positive effect. It was also observed that it was virtually impossible to enforce the sanction of fully withdrawing the right to residency due to failing to meet civic integration requirements, as the residency rights of the involved migrants were almost always protected based on their asylum status (e.g. article 3 European Convention of Human Rights; article 33 Refugee Convention) or family ties (article 8 ECHR). Their findings also suggested that civic integration policies made it difficult to find a stable job alongside completing civic integration requirements. Lastly, the punitive nature of the system did not encourage migrants to aim for the highest feasible level but to “play it safe” and opt for the required A2 examinations.

In 2018, the “Integration Barometer 2018,” conducted by the Verwey-Jonkers Institute, was published by the Dutch Council for Refugees (“Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland”). The Barometer (Kahmann et al., 2018) focused on the policy results of civic integration policies since 2013 for refugees in particular. It first established that refugees were intrinsically motivated to “integrate,” or put differently, that demotivated or unwilling refugees were no policy issue. However, the civic integration system was often experienced by refugees as a stressful path full of obstacles. Refugees indicated that they received too little information while the rules

were complex. It was also difficult to find the right language programme tailored to their needs. Secondly, the Barometer found that the punitive system stimulated risk-averse choices, such as aiming for lower language levels than would have been possible. Moreover, many refugees indicated that they would prefer practising the Dutch language while establishing social contacts instead of only studying Dutch in a school setting with other migrants. Thirdly, the Barometer also found that the policy assumption that integration is the personal responsibility of the migrant, who must be “self-reliant,” does not work in practice. Refugees need to be (at the least) informed about their rights, obligations and the expectations of the civic integration system; otherwise, in time, they will actually require more guidance and assistance. Fourth and lastly, the Barometer indicated that the civic integration policy should become more flexible, taking into account the individual capacities, ambitions and circumstances of refugees.

Soon after, in the same year, the Nationale Ombudsman published its report “A False Start: A Study on Decent Civic Integration Policy” (“Een valse start: een onderzoek naar behoorlijke inburgering”). In the report, the Nationale Ombudsman (2018) responded to the announcement of the Dutch cabinet to introduce a new civic integration law again. In the Netherlands, the Ombudsman utilises a standard of “decent governance” (behoorlijk bestuur), which broadly assesses the proportionality and reasonableness of public policies and their results. In the report, the Ombudsman listed the standards of “a decent civic integration policy” based on the complaints the Ombudsman received in previous years. According to the Ombudsman, firstly, civic integration policy should not be seen as a “favour, but as a sustainable investment” (2018, p. 4). This implies that integration naturally involves responsibility for migrants but that it is also in the interests and a responsibility of society. Therefore, the government should focus on facilitating rather than sanctioning. Secondly, there should be room to treat different cases differently: the government should tailor its services to the specific needs of specific migrants. Lastly, the Ombudsman warned that migrants should be adequately informed and that their complaints, if they have them, should be taken seriously.

In 2018, the research institute Significant published a comprehensive law evaluation commissioned by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, which is responsible for civic integration policy. The evaluation (Significant, 2018) found that the Dutch civic integration system was too self-contained and lacked coherence with, for example, broader educational institutions. Secondly, it criticised the assumption of a “personal responsibility” of the integration system and noted that introducing far-reaching private market forces did not work without “critical consumers.” Migrants could not yet sufficiently oversee the commercial “civic integration market,” given that they had just arrived and were still unfamiliar with Dutch society and had limited command of the Dutch language. As such, the system also provided insufficient incentives for language schools to deliver high-quality and customised services. Thirdly, the report described the disadvantages of uniform result obligations: The objectives of civic integration policy should be motivating and adapted to the needs, ambitions and capacities of individual migrants.

Since the latest legislation took effect in 2022, there have not yet been many policy studies conducted on it, and most of the integration terms for migrants who fall under it are still pending. However, the first studies that have appeared indicate that the new policy is not yet working well. Research from Erasmus University Rotterdam commissioned by the municipality of Rotterdam on the start of the new integration policy in Rotterdam (Damen et al., 2023) showed that the new policy is, first of all, very complex, which causes start-up problems and delays for migrants and municipalities. Migrants must contact many kinds of institutions and are confronted with bureaucracy. Secondly, it pointed out that it is highly unequal that the social loan system is still in place for family migrants, while integration trajectories for refugees are now paid for. Thirdly, “participation” is stated as the spearhead of the new civic integration policy, but the researchers observe that it is unclear what this should entail, given that, for example it is (still) not made easy to combine work with completing all civic integration requirements on time.

The Shift to Individualisation and Contractualisation of Civic Integration Policy

Thus far, in this chapter, I have summarised the legal changes and policy evaluations of Dutch integration policy over the last 25 years. Several criticisms have continued to recur. Firstly, the “self-reliance” of migrants was overestimated, while this increasingly became the premise of the Dutch civic integration policy. Secondly, the various evaluations showed that the policy had too little flexibility to adapt to the wishes and capacities of individual migrants. Thirdly, several evaluations raised the question of whether sanctioning migrants who failed to meet integration requirements was effective (i.e. led to better social outcomes).

This section describes how Dutch integration policy has increasingly come to rely on what I call “individualised” notions of integration, which explains, at least in part, the disappointing policy outcomes discussed here. To fundamentally improve Dutch civic integration policy, legislators and policy-makers in the Netherlands, among others, must recognise this shift and understand its ramifications to reverse it.

The term “integration” was traditionally propagated by scholars such as Émile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons. Integration was used to discuss how societies maintain their social cohesion and keep individuals and groups connected in networks and relations in ongoing processes of communal socialisation. Within these processes, the state was often seen as a centre of coordination (e.g. Bader, 2001, p. 132). Durkheim, for instance, searched for shared normative values, such as a “common will to live together” (e.g. Allan, 2005, p. 136; Durkheim, 1897/2018). Therefore, within this conceptualisation of integration, the political ideal of integration had two crucial elements. Firstly, it was applied to and a property of a collective (thus, a larger group or society as a whole), and secondly, it entailed a communal socialisation of all its members (see also de Waal, 2021, pp. 34–35).

Although it is most likely that current-day perspectives on “integration” in Europe historically stem from this Durkheimian collective perspective in some

way, these two crucial elements have gradually moved to the background. Today, in the Netherlands, “integration” predominantly involves a personal condition that individuals with non-EU and so-called non-Western migrant backgrounds and their descendants should achieve. It also serves as a criterion to assess whether these individuals deserve to belong to the society in which they reside. It became quite uncommon, or even strange, to discuss whether “Dutch society” is integrated or not, while it became rather common to discuss the personal integration of, for example, a Hussein or a Fatima. Indeed, if integration is discussed in the Netherlands, it mostly involves political and public conversations on non-Western and non-EU immigrants and their descendants, focusing on their individual compatibility with (an idealised image of) “society” (see also Schinkel, 2017; Driouichi, 2007; de Waal, 2021). Within these conversations, an image of Dutch society is produced in which it is fully harmonious, democratic, secular and reinforced by a historically formed and virtually unchangeable list of national traditions, values, languages and customs. It is acknowledged that the Netherlands has had historical struggles regarding equal treatment (e.g. of women or LGBT+), but these are presumed to belong to the past. The process of integration boils down to non-EU and non-Western migrants arriving in a pre-established community to which these migrants might or might not “fit.” Stating that, for instance, Fatima is “very well integrated” means that she embodies certain positive characteristics – say, she is fluent in Dutch and completed her university degree – and became “really Dutch.”

This perspective on integration is often not principally focused on full cultural assimilation (although at times it certainly is); its most distinctive feature is its hyperfocus on the individual and their abilities, position in the labour market, behaviour, political choices and so on. As such, more symbolically, this conceptualisation of integration thus has a strong spatial character: if a migrant is deemed unintegrated – which may involve many things, such as not speaking the national language well or supporting certain illiberal political opinions – this migrant is deemed, although physically present, as symbolically “outside of society,” alienated from it and not belonging to it (e.g. Anderson, 2013; de Waal, 2020).

This conceptual shift has had major impact on the shape of civic integration requirements and makes many of the policy changes in the Netherlands understandable. Firstly, due to the shift to individualised integration, the core purpose of the policy field of civic integration became increasingly understood as measuring the process of “personal integration” of individual migrants. This personal transformation of integration is tested by obliging migrants to pass examinations that assess their knowledge of Dutch language, history, values and loyalty. Increasingly, more civic integration requirements are seen to monitor, one might say, a test phase in which migrants should invest and demonstrate their personal integration (i.e. prove their compatibility to an idealised image of Dutch society).

Secondly, given that the process of “integration” is not expected to take place (or even able to occur) on the social level of society but on the level of individual migrants, it becomes imaginable to contractually demand the delivery of “integration” from individuals. Therefore, the shift towards individualised integration facilitates the tendency to contractualise civic integration policy and to shift the

responsibility for “integration” onto the shoulders of the migrant, expecting them to be “self-reliant.” Within this contract, migrants must deliver their personal integration and receiving states then deliver secure residency and citizenship rights in return (e.g. Kostakopoulou, 2010; Badenhoop, 2023). As a result, citizenship and permanent residency and with that belonging is increasingly seen as a reward that (explicitly) needs to be “deserved” or “earned” by migrants by performing a growing series of duties, tasks and investments that prove individual integration (e.g. de Waal, 2021; Joppke, 2021).

Thirdly, the shift towards individualised integration reinforces the idea that all migrants must meet the same integration requirements. If migrants must deliver their personal integration to deserve to belong, then “integration” takes on the same meritocratic logic as, say, getting a diploma: Some get it because they deserve it – for instance, because they have a certain cognitive level or have worked hard – while others do not. Indeed, the moment the idea takes root that permanent residence and citizenship must be earned, it is even deemed unfair to say that migrants should receive customised integration trajectories or should be able to complete their integration trajectory “at their own level.” However, it is questionable whether obtaining permanent residence and citizenship should be meritocratic, given that democratic principles require the inclusion of all permanent members of society who are continuously subject to the laws of the state as equals with rights and enable their participation in political decision-making procedures (e.g. Jensen et al., 2019; Rubio-Marín, 2000).

Fourthly, the rejection by the Dutch state of public responsibility for offering state-funded integration schemes in 2013 (and today for non-refugees) can also be understood in this context. Of course, the individualisation of civic integration policy coincides with, and is reinforced by, other documented “neoliberal” tendencies in Western European welfare states, in which individuals are made responsible for their own better participation at pain of sanctions and fines (e.g. Borevi, 2010; Anderson, 2013; Bassel et al., 2020). However, particularly if the policy assumption becomes that only migrants who are “integrated” belong to society, there is no reason, except perhaps for charity, to spend public money on migrants who still have to demonstrate their capacity to “fit in.” Rather, investing in migrants who are still in their integration “test phase” and who might turn out to be unwilling to integrate or incapable of integrating is an unnecessary financial risk. It remains to be seen whether they manage to integrate, which is their personal condition and, with that, their responsibility, in terms of effort but also in costs.

Fifthly, the individualisation of civic integration policy also explains attempts to threaten migrants with the loss of residency rights if they fail to fulfil civic integration conditions. This is a logical result of the political narrative that only migrants who personally integrate fulfil their integration contract and deserve secure residency and equal rights. If that were the case migrants who fail civic integration requirements (and are thus deemed “incompatible” with society) must leave the territory. Otherwise, if it turns out that the “non-integrated” can eventually stay as well, the political narrative that only integrated persons belong, and that civic integration policy determines who these are, is little convincing. Legal experts and the

legal reality do highlight that actual expulsion is virtually always blocked by constitutional and EU norms, but the political promise that migrants who fail to meet their integration requirements will have to leave is hence important for the symbolism behind the instalment of civic integration requirements (e.g. Permoser, 2012).

Sixthly, individualised integration conceptualisations overlook broader questions of emancipation and managing diversity in the broadest sense of the word, due to the strong ethnic-cultural focus of the notion of “integration.” It goes beyond the scope of this chapter to fully describe the ramifications of the contemporary European perspectives on “integration” – which also affect citizens with non-EU migrant backgrounds (see de Waal, 2021; Schinkel, 2017; Favell, 2022) – but in the context of civic integration, it is a legal reality that obligatory civic integration requirements are exclusively aimed at non-EU migrants, in particular, refugees and family migrants. Other groups, such as internal EU migrants, non-EU migrants on work visas and displaced Ukrainians (who now fall under the EU Temporary Protection Directive), legally cannot be mandated to integrate (e.g. Permoser, 2012; de Waal, 2021). However, if one takes a broader perspective of what “integration” might entail, there is in fact little reason to (over)focus on one particular migrant group in such a punitive sense, instead of structurally making public education and public trajectories assessable for whoever might benefit from it. Indeed, through the lens of broader ideals of inclusion and emancipation, it seems that the best policy option would be to transcend the narrow focus of contemporary “integration” debates and to aim for a number of innovative, flexible and demonstrably effective public strategies that are open to, and address the specific needs of, all types of migrants and citizens, accessible to all for free or at low costs.

Seventhly and lastly, it is important to recognise that individualised integration requirements do not lead to a personalised approach within civic integration policy. The 2021 law change shows this in particular. In the many policy evaluations, the point of critique that Dutch civic integration policy was not taking individual circumstances into account kept recurring. However, within the new law, we have seen that for the lion’s share of migrants (1) no integration requirements or “sanction moments” have been abolished, (2) the “personal integration plan” has been added as an additional standardised mandatory integration requirement, with its learnability test and different B1-routes, (3) the language level to complete the integration trajectory has uniformly been raised and (4) the number of grounds for fines has been increased. This shows that questions such as “What is actually the conceptual idea behind standardising integration requirements?” or “Do (all) migrants benefit from completing all requirements or should we differentiate?” have not been raised. One could argue that some of the changes, such as the “learnability intake” and the introduction of the “personal integration plan,” are attempts to tailor civic integration trajectories to the personal situation of migrants. However, these additions are not aimed at the offer of a true “personal plan,” but at completing all standardised integration requirements, even at a higher language level. Put differently, not the personal question “What does this person need at this moment to flourish?” but the individualised question “How does this person complete the mandatory integration requirements in time?” is the focal point.

Evaluating Individualised and Contractualised Civic Integration Policies

So what explains why Dutch civic integration policy has had almost exclusively negative policy evaluations to date? An important part of the answer is that while policy evaluations have convincingly shown that Dutch civic integration policy needed improvement, they have not addressed or triggered a fundamental discussion on the foundations of the policy. For example, the expected self-reliance of migrants has been repeatedly criticised, but on a rather basic and practical level, without questioning ideas of “individualised integration” or “earned citizenship” and what the more structural effects of those ideas are (as outlined in the previous section).

Moreover, individualised conceptualisations of integration have also dominated the manner in which critical policy evaluations have been politically interpreted. This is the case, because individualised integration conceptualisations create disorientation about how to evaluate the outcomes of civic integration requirements. Through an individualised lens, their core purpose is to measure which individual migrants deserve to belong. However, the pursuit of this goal – limiting belonging and rights to those who earn it – is prone to conflict with broader societal emancipatory goals, for instance, when integration requirements become stricter, more expensive and exclusionary. For example, the Court of Audit observed in its 2017 report that only 50% of migrants that started their civic integration trajectory in 2013 had completed all the integration requirements within their three-year deadline and, thus, received fines and could not attain permanent residency permits for longer periods of time. Refugees were relatively unsuccessful. Of this group, only 30% managed to fulfil their integration duties (Netherlands Court of Audit, 2017). Not long after, the Dutch liberal party (VVD, at the time the largest party in the cabinet) reemphasised that permanent residency and citizenship should be earned. Moreover, it promised to find legal ways to circumvent existing EU and constitutional laws that prevent deportation to proceed with expelling migrants who fail to fulfil the integration conditions as soon as possible. This is merely one example. But it does illustrate that if individualised integration conceptualisations are prevalent, political responses start to suggest that civic integration policy is perhaps strict but also successfully lay bare which migrants “do not belong to society.” As a result, the real policy problem is deemed to be that migrants who have proven to be “unintegrated” are not expelled.

This would be impossible if the core purpose of civic integration policy is not seen as measuring belonging but, for example, to further broaden certain emancipatory societal goals. If one is concerned with fostering certain social mechanisms – say, enhancing language levels, stimulating participation or reducing social distances – then the method to assess the quality of such policies is simple: It would be based on empirical research evaluating whether these policies in fact promote or jeopardise these goals. However, individualised integration strategies focus on measuring successful individual integration and preventing undeserved access to belonging, which implies that this policy field is about selection. As such,

by shifting to personal integration standards, the Netherlands has lost its method of straightforwardly adjusting its civic integration policy based on empirical research. Instead, Dutch politics has constantly modified its civic integration requirements based on the (arbitrary and open-ended) question: Have migrants individually integrated enough into “society” to deserve to belong?

Nonetheless, civic integration policy premised on individualised integration conceptualisations is a missed opportunity for the Netherlands to facilitate and contribute to the incorporation of immigrants into its country. It repeatedly turned out to be a matter of time that alleged personal integration problems pose broader societal questions according to policy evaluations – not in the least because migrants are not actually deported but remain members of society, albeit with more precarious rights and possibly fines and debts. In response to these policy outcomes, the Dutch government occasionally changes some of its most impractical policy decisions, such as not requiring refugees to take out social loans or not providing any information to migrants. However, policy outcomes and proposed amendments are still often discussed in discourses of individual integration instead of fundamentally criticising these discourses and their foundations. Therefore, it is not surprising that, soon after several highly negative policy evaluations of the Dutch civic integration policy, there was yet another legislative proposal that citizenship should only be available to migrants who achieve the language level of B1. This was defended explicitly based on the argumentation that belonging and “being Dutch” should be earned by “integrating.”

Conclusion

This chapter is a case study of Dutch civic integration policy over the last quarter of a century and how dominant normative-political ideas of “integration” play out in practice. In brief, I have shown three things. Firstly, the Dutch integration policy has often been changed and increasingly came to rest on ideas of “individualised integration” and, with that, on ideas of contractual civic integration policy and earned belonging. Secondly, I have demonstrated the (practical) consequences of this by discussing multiple policy evaluations of Dutch civic integration policy. Thirdly, I have shown that to enhance these consequences and genuinely improve the documented negative system outcomes, merely adjusting some of the most counterproductive parts of existing policies is not enough. Rather, a fundamental debate is needed about the concept of “integration” as well as the downsides of ideas such as “individualised integration,” contractual civic integration policy and earned citizenship. Only then can a civic integration policy (if this is still the appropriate label) that is proactive, inclusive and truly responsive to personal needs be formulated. Otherwise, the ideological question of “How do we measure whether a migrant has integrated enough?” will continue to remain the benchmark to assess civic integration policy. This undermines the implementation of supportive and measurably effective civic integration policies, which are seen as a public responsibility. Moreover, the “integration” policy will remain unnecessarily focused on one group – namely, non-EU, non-Western

migrants – and obstruct looking at questions of emancipation in a broader, more facilitating and inclusive sense (e.g. including and facilitating other migrant groups or even citizens).

To conclude, a brief reflection on what this may mean for other European countries. This chapter indicates that other EU member states should be careful not to install civic integration policies that are comparable with those of the Netherlands – and certainly should reject the conceptual perspectives of “integration” that underpin Dutch policy. This chapter shows that this is not only prudent for normative or legal reasons; several policy evaluations in the Netherlands strongly conclude that Dutch civic integration policy is also not performing well more practically.

Unfortunately, scholarship shows that many other EU countries are also increasingly working with outright “contractual” integration policies – the word “contract” is often even explicitly part of these policies, in France and Austria, for example (e.g. Mazouz, 2017; Permoser, 2012). Additionally, member states like Denmark have civic integration policies, of which research shows that they are strongly exclusive (e.g. Jensen et al., 2019). There is not an immediate solution to this because we live in polarised times where putting migration on the agenda – among other things, by introducing additional civic integration requirements as conditions to attain increased rights to prevent “undeserved belonging” – is to the electoral advantage of many parties. However, one thing is certain: This dynamic does not lead to well-functioning civic integration policies that benefit migrants or receiving societies.

Possibly, the Ukrainian refugees (or displaced persons) now residing in other parts of Europe are going to offer a new policy perspective: They do not – at least for the time being – have to complete mandatory civic integration programmes. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to analyse the exact effects of this – and the precise legal differences – but perhaps, although we should not idealise the temporary reception of Ukrainians with highly precarious residence statuses, the flexibility and immediate full access to education and work offered to them might offer insights for how we should also treat other (non-EU) refugees.

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3 Challenges to National Frameworks of Minority Integration in Western Europe

**Minority Accommodation,
Transnationalism and Dual Citizenship**

Erdem Dikici

Introduction

The accommodation of post-war ethno-cultural and ethno-religious groups in Western European countries has gradually become central to politics and public policies. It has been a contested issue associated with national policies of migration, citizenship, identity and state–religion relations. Such accommodation is also profoundly related to ongoing public, political and academic debates, bolstering the contentedness of diversity regimes. Since the early 2000s, there has been a debate centred around a crisis of or backlash against what is called “national models of integration” (Joppke, 2004; Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010), a general obsolescence in old immigration and integration policies in Europe and the United States (Martiniello & Lafleur, 2008, p. 647), and an increasing presence of neo-assimilationist and xenophobic discourses on migration and integration, as highlighted in the Introduction to this volume.

The burgeoning literature on mobility and transnationalism demonstrates that border-crossing connections, engagements and activities of increasing numbers of actors have increased in scope. They have also become a more significant part in understanding and shaping national approaches and outcomes regarding migration and post-migration processes of accommodation, eventually challenging “national models of integration” (Dikici, 2022a). The term “national models of integration” refers to models developed by nation-states and carry their own historical particularities (e.g. political traditions) that are often reflected in the formulation of citizenship. That is, cross-national differences in models of minority integration are related to “different normative value systems” (Bertossi & Duyvendak, 2012, p. 237). This is an important way of understanding the prevailing models as it illustrates that qualities of a nation-state are strongly linked with understandings and policies of migration, integration, citizenship and so forth. Nonetheless, it fails to address prevalent sociological processes of transnationalism and mobility.¹ Thus, I use the term “national models of integration” both (1) to refer to the models/frameworks embedded in established cultural settings and legal frameworks of citizenship and identity and (2) to emphasise the fact that these models are conceptualised and framed within the boundaries of the nation-state, with a nation-state

framework of thinking, hence, suffering from what Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002) call methodological nationalism. Methodological nationalism can be understood as the tendency to equate the concept of society with the boundaries of a nation-state.²

With the proliferation of advanced transportation and telecommunication technologies, an increasing number of people (e.g. immigrants) have gained further ability to reconnect with their country of origin and cross-border mobility has become a part of people's lives (Karanfil, 2009). This has been further facilitated by increased practices of dual citizenship that have gradually become widespread since the 1990s in Western Europe. There are various views concerning the impact of dual citizenship on the integration of post-war minorities into destination countries. While some studies underline an inherent tension between minority integration and dual citizenship by citing the loyalty of minorities towards their country of origin, others highlight that dual citizenship does not necessarily hinder minority integration. Indeed, dual citizenship has become a testing ground for the ideas and claims around "contentedness of diversity" and "fractured belongings" that this edited volume seeks to address. Therefore, this chapter examines dual citizenship, which emerged at the intersection of national regimes of citizenship and increased mobility of people, which is often discouraged based on presumed corroding effects of so-called dual loyalties. In doing so, it engages with the debates around multiple belongings.

I will attempt to provide a fresh theoretical approach namely "integration as a three-way process and negotiation."³ The three-way approach avoids both the pitfalls of methodological nationalism by considering transnational contexts and actors and the extreme fluidity or methodological transnationalism by recognising the enduring relevance and power of the nation-state and emphasising the importance of multicultural citizenship as a national framework of minority accommodation. It argues that integration is a process and negotiation between the destination country, minorities (e.g. immigrants) and (available) transnational actors, all of whom have certain responsibilities, and hence, are all legitimate actors and interlocutors.

The three-way approach builds on the idea of multiculturalism as understood and conceptualised by the Bristol School of Multiculturalism (BSM) (see Sealy et al. in this book; Levey, 2019). Multiculturalism is centred on equality of difference not only as special rights regarding sub-national groups or indigenous communities – as theorised notably by Will Kymlicka (1995) – but also as a broader framework of equal citizenship and struggle for recognition and accommodation of post-war minority ethno-racial, ethno-cultural and ethno-religious groups and identities – as theorised by Bhikhu Parekh (2000) and Tariq Modood (2013) and writ large by the BSM (Levey, 2019; Uberoi & Modood, 2019). It builds on the ideas of equality, inclusivity and common belonging, fostering multicultural citizenship as a normative and political framework to achieve a just society. The three-way approach can be seen as an attempt to reconceptualise multiculturalism in a triadic way or transnationalising multiculturalism.

Rethinking the Concepts of Minority Integration and Cross-Border Human Mobility

Integration as a Process and Negotiation

Since the late 1980s, the concept of integration has been widely used to refer to the accommodation of post-war ethno-cultural and ethno-religious minorities into the settled societies in the Global North. It undoubtedly remains as one of the most intensely debated but inconclusive concepts. In European policy debates, for instance, integration mainly implies “a ‘middle way’ between coercive conformism to national norms and values, on the one hand, and the threat of separatism, seen as latent in the excessive preservation of non-European cultures, on the other” (Favell, 2014, p. 65).

A traditional way of understanding integration highlights structural, political and socio-cultural dimensions. Structural integration refers to structural arrangements undertaken by the destination state that enable minorities to have equal access to the major institutions such as education, housing and health services. Political integration denotes that minorities obtain political rights such as citizenship, voting rights and so forth through political opportunity structures crafted by the destination country. Finally, socio-cultural integration refers to inter-ethnic interactions and engagements at the level of individuals and groups. This also involves developing hybrid/hyphenated identities and a sense of attachment towards the country of settlement (Bauböck, 1994; Zetter et al., 2002; Permoser & Rosenberger, 2012). This formulation explicitly refers to a “two-way process,” in which the destination country is expected to undertake some structural and legal actions together with facilitating political opportunity structures, whilst minorities are expected to participate, and be willing to integrate into the settled society. Hence, integration is reduced to governmental policies and minority participation. Integration, however, is a multifaceted phenomenon involving minority mobilities as well as transnational ties, activities and attachments to the country of origin, as much as those in the host country. Furthermore, in this traditional formulation, minorities are conceived as passive subjects expected to navigate their ways within predefined structural, political and socio-cultural arrangements. Nonetheless, through various channels, such as civil society advocacy movements and lobbying, minorities can influence the debates on and decision-making processes regarding their own integration. An example that illustrates the agency of minorities is British Muslims’ lobbying activities to address and outlaw religious discrimination in the UK. Their proactive lobbying played an undeniable role in the 2006 and 2010 Equality Acts (Dikici, 2021).

A largely welcomed approach to understanding integration is based on outcomes or indicators, pioneered by Ager and Strang (2004). According to Ager and Strang (2004, p. 9),

An individual or group is integrated within a society when they: achieve public outcomes within employment, housing, education, health, etc. which are equivalent to those achieved within the wider host communities [as well as

when they] are in active relationship with members of their ethnic or national community, wider host communities and relevant services and functions of the state, in a manner consistent with shared notions of nationhood and citizenship in that society.

Although this approach offers a useful ground for further discussions it is both (1) inadequate in terms of its emphasis on, say, a sense of belonging, and (2) problematic since certain indicators (e.g. interethnic marriages) are evidently expected by some groups, not all. Identifying and elaborating on indicators of integration could certainly be worthwhile; yet indicators may not be fixed or valid for all minorities. Some, for example, argue that interethnic marriages “are often regarded as the strongest measure of social integration” (Carol et al., 2014, p. 388), whereas others (Rodríguez-García, 2015; Alba & Foner, 2015) dispute it, and claim that it is a context-dependent issue. Overall, focusing on outcomes/indicators of integration can generate significant insights, still one could only develop a better understanding of the concept by focusing on it as a process and not merely as an outcome.

Targeting a conclusive definition of integration is not viable, yet it is imperative to clarify what it means in this chapter. Inspired by Modood's (2013) multicultural integration, the following working definition can be helpful. Integration can be seen as a “three-way process and negotiation” in which minorities (e.g. immigrants), the destination country and (available) transnational actors are involved in and influence the debates on, and processes of, integration. Integration is a process of developing appropriate legal and political responses to include, not exclude, marginalise or stigmatise minorities into multicultural societies. It is about dealing with every-day and institutionally embedded racisms and inequalities; meeting with the demands of equal access to, and participation in, all domains of the settled country and restructuring the distribution of resources and power. Equally importantly, integration is about developing multiple or hyphenated identities and a sense of attachment towards the country of settlement, as well as developing an inclusive or multiculturalised national identity in which difference is not excluded or marginalised but recognised, included and respected. In this sense, the three-way approach focuses on re-formulation of identities and belongings from a positive lens; that is, it does not consider multiple belongings as conflicting belongings.

Transnationalism

Transnationalism has become a key concept that helps us to better understand the relationship between migration, integration, citizenship, nationhood, belonging and identity (Kastoryano, 2022, pp. 244–245). Despite all the efforts of nation-states to significantly restrict migration and incidents like the Covid-19 pandemic, national borders have become more fluid, allowing more people to move across them. One of the important outcomes of this increased cross-national movement of people is that people have gained the ability to become active participants “here” (e.g. settled country) and “there” (e.g. origin country) at the same time. That is, increased transnational engagements and activities enable, for example immigrants, “to

remain active in their sending communities more regularly and influentially than in the past" (Levitt et al., 2003, p. 569). Therefore, in their seminal work, *Nations Unbound*, Basch et al. (1994, p. 8) define transnationalism "as the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement."

Studies have demonstrated that increasing engagements of minority individuals and groups in the country of origin have become denser, influencing their mode of engagement in and integration into settled countries (Vertovec, 2009; Portes et al., 1999; Faist et al., 2013). Equally, transnationally organised state and non-state actors have gained greater influence both in the lives of peoples and in relation to wider socio-economic and political outcomes (Dikici, 2021). Transnational faith networks, for instance, play a significant role in facilitating tangible ways for cross-national engagements as well as creating transnational social/religious spaces (Dikici, 2022a).

Scholars of transnationalism contend that there is a need "to rethink and reformulate the concept of society such that it is no longer automatically equated with the boundaries of a single nation-state" (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004, p. 1002). They urge an analytical reconfiguration of the concept of society based on a transnational perspective, promoting two normative positions: (1) The nation-state and nationalism are no longer relevant in relation to, say, citizenship, in this post-national or transnational era (Soysal, 1994; Sassen, 2002); and (2) mobility is the most important human condition (Basch et al., 1994; Glick Schiller et al., 1995; Faist, 2013). Although this call to re-consider the concept of society with a transnational perspective is not without a point, it is, however, misleading to neglect the hegemony of nation-states over socio-political processes and outcomes – for example in shaping migration and related issues, as they have "a monopoly on defining membership within the societal community" (Kivistö, 2003, p. 21). Indeed, debates on civic integration policies in Western Europe reveal the enduring power of nation-states regarding controlling migration and determining the terms and conditions of inclusion and citizenship (Dikici, 2020).

The concept of transnationalism offers a valuable lens to comprehend empirical sociological realities of contemporary lives of many by "avoiding methodological nationalism [however] replacing methodological nationalism with methodological transnationalism is not without risks" (Martinello & Lafleur, 2008, p. 654). Methodological transnationalism can be understood as the tendency to see social phenomena from a cross-border perspective only. It is the tendency "to celebrate the transnational life of migrants as the prototype of [the] human condition" (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2003, p. 600). For the three-way approach advocated here, discussed next, it is imperative to balance the boundaries of nationalist thought and a transnational angle while studying social phenomena. One must, therefore, avoid overstating the weight of transnationalism, as it might not be available or desirable for some people such as refugees, on the one hand, and neglecting the persistent power of the nation-state, on the other. In the face of the rising monoculturalist populist nationalism in recent years, addressing the transnational aspects of people's lives, activities and attachments without undermining the national unity in the

settled country has become a real challenge (Dikici, 2022b), which the three-way approach discussed here seeks to address.

Integration–Transnationalism Nexus?

Increased mobility of people, the spread of multiple memberships and increasing impacts of transnational organisations have brought concerns about successful integration to the fore (Dikici, 2021). Although the debates on the relationship between integration and transnationalism remain contested, there is an emerging integration–transnationalism nexus.

There are four basic views on the relationship between integration and transnationalism. The first argues that border-crossing ties and activities of minorities generate dual loyalties, strong ethnic identities, extremist ideologies; thereby, they undermine the integration of minorities into the settled country – a.k.a. the alarmist view (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2000; Hammond, 2013). This view presupposes an inherent conflict between the loyalties to the host country and the places or entities that minorities might identify themselves with – which is best manifested by concepts and policy approaches such as the war on terror and home-grown terrorists. The second view emphasises that transnational ties and activities can be a survival strategy for some minorities, for example who lack certain skills such as language (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013). The third view suggests that transnationalism and integration are not mutually exclusive, but rather interrelated and mutually supportive (Levitt, 2003; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003; Snel et al., 2006; Zhou & Lee, 2013; Dikici, 2022a). Finally, the fourth view argues that “transnational ties can exist alongside process of integration, so that the two are not necessarily a ‘zero sum game’” (Erdal & Oeppen, 2013, pp. 873–874). There are various other conceptualisations, including Takeyuki Tsuda’s (2012) fourfold (zero-sum, side-by-side, positive reinforcing and negative reinforcing), Erdal and Oeppen’s (2013) threefold (additive, synergic and antagonistic) and Dekker and Siegel’s (2013) twofold typologies (complementary and substitute), which provide more detailed but not distinctive insights regarding the relationship between transnationalism and integration.

In sum, it is now fairly established that minority transnational engagements do not necessarily hinder their integration into the countries of settlement. However, there is a dearth of studies that offer a theoretical approach for rethinking and reframing contemporary minority integration into a national citizenship with a transnational perspective. Thus, this chapter highlights the importance of considering both national and transnational phenomena, which is best indicated and framed through the three-way approach.

The Three-Way Approach to Minority Integration

I argue that minority integration should be conceptualised as a three-way process and negotiation in which the immigration receiving country, minorities (e.g. immigrants) and available transnational actors are considered as legitimate interlocutors of the debates on and processes of integration and are expected to contribute.

National models of integration (e.g. assimilation, liberal integration and multiculturalism) often overlook minority cross-border connections, activities and attachments, on the one hand and transnational state and non-state actors (e.g. sending states, religious networks) on the other hand.

This is, however, not to suggest that all transnational actors contribute to integration, but to emphasise that both minorities' cross-national engagements have become a significant part of their lives and an increasing number of state and non-state actors, such as sending-states, supranational unions (e.g. the EU) and non-state networks, are interested in migration, integration and the relationship with the diaspora. As a result, the implications, either positive or negative, are not just unavoidable, but merit closer attention.

The three-way approach differs from postnationalist, cosmopolitanist, and transnationalist approaches by recognising the enduring relevance and power of the nation-state. Nation-states are not fading away (Smith, 2002, pp. 112–115). On the contrary, they remain as the central actors controlling whom to include or exclude – for example by designing policies for integration such as naturalisation programs. Similarly, the three-way approach differs from liberal integration and multiculturalist approaches that do not consider mobility and transnationalism as important determinants in the processes of migration and post-immigration processes of integration. I identify three clusters of actors of the debates on and processes of integration: (1) the receiving country with its public and political institutions and civil society actors (e.g. churches, refugee organisations), (2) minorities (e.g. immigrant associations) and (3) transnational actors such as sending states, non-sending states and supranational unions as well as non-governmental organisations and networks (see Dikici, 2021).

The idea of multicultural integration, pioneered by Tariq Modood (2013) and broadly advocated by the BSM, is important for the three-way approach discussed here. Modood (2013, p. 2) defines multiculturalism as “the recognition of group difference within the public sphere of laws, policies, democratic discourses and the terms of a shared citizenship and national identity.” Multicultural integration

works simultaneously on two levels: creating new forms of belonging to citizenship and country, and helping sustain origin and diaspora. The result – without which multiculturalism would not be a form of integration – is the formation of hyphenated identities . . . These hyphenated identities, on this understanding, are a legitimate basis for political mobilization and lobbying, not attacked as divisive or disloyal. Such minority identities do not necessarily compete with a sense of nationality.

(Modood, 2013, p. 45)

Modood (2013) proposes a two-way process in which minorities and majority are expected to participate in the national domains. It seeks integration into a national citizenship within a nation-state container of thinking. I argue that it thereby suffers from methodological nationalism and requires rethinking. Firstly, the multicultural integration model does not adequately address possible effects of transnationalism.

Modood's formulation omits mobility of people and transnational phenomena (e.g. cross-border lives, connections, networks and belongings) writ large. Secondly, the multicultural model offers an explanation on how and why minorities should participate in national/societal domains in the settled country and underlines the importance of preserving difference; yet it does not sufficiently address how and by which channels. The three-way approach, however, emphasises the importance of transnational ties, relations and activities, as well as transnational actors as significant channels for preserving and maintaining difference, thereby reducing the risk of assimilation, while at the same time underscoring the importance of participation in the national domains of the settled country.

As underlined earlier, the three-way approach builds on the idea of multiculturalism, as understood by the BSM, but it seeks to re-conceptualise it in a way to include transnationalism. The three-way approach contends that multiculturalism can be extended to cover transnationalism without jeopardising its core principles such as equality and recognition of difference and promises such as shared national identity and unity in diversity (see Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, 2000). For instance, the three-way approach suggests that a concept of citizenship can be re-designed not simply to exclude cross-border reality, but to respond in a substantial way – for example by embracing dual citizenship. Indeed, dual citizenship has been welcomed by many liberal democracies especially since the 1990s and there is no evidence suggesting that it has negatively influenced minority integration in the respective countries, as discussed below. In sum, the three-way approach seeks to transnationalise multiculturalism. It is not an alternative paradigm; it aims to contribute to the multicultural model of integration by reconceptualising it in a triadic way.

Dual Citizenship and Minority Integration

Increased and denser transnational engagements, activities and belongings pose significant challenges and are becoming a predicament for nationally focused approaches to citizenship, identity and minority integration. Scholars of minority integration, including multiculturalists, have thus far failed to re-frame their nationally focused models/frameworks of integration by incorporating transnationalism, although, unsurprisingly, they are inclined to encourage dual citizenship rights. For those who advocate minority integration (e.g. liberal nationalists and multiculturalists), it is also imperative to clarify the normative desirability and practical implications of dual citizenship, and transnationalism writ large.

Dual Citizenship: A Drag on Minority Integration?

There is little doubt that mobility of people as much as goods and finances has become a defining characteristic of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Growing numbers of people, for instance, pursue ways to gain a second, often premium (i.e. Western), citizenship to achieve practical ends, such as work benefits and travel privileges. As such, many sending countries, including Mexico, Turkey, Morocco

and Pakistan, have introduced new legislation to enable dual citizenship to maintain their co-nationals' attachments towards their origin countries in addition to consolidating (human, financial etc.) capital transfer (Dikici, 2021). This has led to tangible ways for transnational engagements, and dual citizenship has become popular, not just among individuals and sending states but also at the level of destination states. About four-fifths of countries in Europe and the Americas allowed dual citizenship by 2010, whereas it was less than a third in 1990 (Harpaz & Mateos, 2018, p. 462). Therefore, dual citizenship has not only become an "institutional expression of and the basis for transnationalism" (Kastoryano, 2005, p. 694), but also has further strengthened fluidity of borders, mobility of people and duality of identities and belongings. Indeed, dual citizenship rights, bilateral agreements and supranational arrangements (e.g. Schengen) have further consolidated mobility, triggering debates on the nature of citizenship, nationality and identity.

Indeed, the practice of citizenship is further complicated by the inclusion of cross-border reality by means of the relationship between citizenship and nationality. Developing multiple attachments has puzzled scholars of nationalism, resulting in resistance towards dual nationalities. A multiplicity of allegiances is often interpreted as conflicting allegiances on the part of nationalists. Whereas the traditional nationalist position insists on an us-versus-them formulation (see Huntington, 2004), a growing number of scholars, including multiculturalists and liberal nationalists have established the viability of multiple belongings. In fact, the latter consider dual citizenship not just as a sociological reality but also as an essential human right (Kivistö & Faist, 2007; Harpaz & Mateos, 2018).

Insofar as dual citizenship consolidates transnational connections with the country of origin, it is claimed to be detrimental for engagement in, and development of, a sense of belonging to the country of settlement. Nationalist frameworks of membership often perceive dual citizenship as a factor leading to dual loyalties, thereby hampering minority integration. Some scholars (Joppke, 2010; Spiro, 2007), hence, discourage dual citizenship by claiming that it negatively impacts naturalisation processes, solidarity and trust among co-nationals, whereas others argue that it does not simply facilitate transnational connections and engagements (Basch et al., 1994; Faist et al., 2013; Fox, 2005; Glick Schiller, 2015), but reinforces integration into host societies (Dikici, 2021; Levitt, 2003; Portes, 2001; Zhou & Lee, 2013).

Indeed, an important part of scholarly works on dual citizenship focuses on its implications on minority integration (Jones-Correa, 2001; Portes et al., 2008; Mazzolari, 2009; Hickerson, 2013). Jones-Correa (2001) has argued that the United States maintains its discontent in relation to dual citizenship citing its detrimental impacts on American citizenship, even though minorities (e.g. immigrants) and sending states are affirmative of dual citizenship based on positive outcomes. Jones-Correa's (2001, p. 998) findings, however, suggest that "immigrants from countries recognizing dual nationality average higher naturalisation rates in the United States than countries that do not." He (2001, p. 1023) therefore concludes that dual citizenship "has relatively small, but positive, effects on immigrants' naturalisation as U.S. citizens." In sum, transnationalist and multiculturalist scholarship has established that people can develop multiple attachments at the same time

and navigate their ways around them (cf. Dikici, 2021); hence, dual citizenship does not necessarily impede identification with either homeland or settled country (Schlenker et al., 2016).

Dual Citizenship, Dual Loyalties?

Historically, individuals have been imagined as being a part of a single (political) community; hence, being loyal to different communities at the same time has often been regarded as “irreconcilable” (Jones-Correa, 1998, p. 5). The concept of dual citizenship (sometimes referred to as dual nationality as well) is traditionally deemed at odds with the idea of sovereignty. Modern nation-states contested and resisted demands for “dual” rights, ensuring that no one serves two masters. Indeed, minority communities have been compelled to demonstrate their loyalty and allegiance to either their country of origin or settlement. Nevertheless, unanticipated by nation-states, the globalisation process has eased and tolerated multiple citizenship practices based on benefits generated through minority transnational engagements. Moreover, the prevalence of globalisation trends such as the rise of human rights as well as “the erosion of sovereignty as an insulating principle” has weakened nationalist positions (Spiro, 2018, p. 880). However, there is still tentativeness regarding dual citizenship among those nationally focused, diversity-friendly approaches to minority integration such as liberal nationalists.

From a liberal nationalist perspective, citizenship rights are of critical importance for people’s “autonomy and chances to lead a good life as well as for governments’ capacity and legitimacy to rule them.” (Bauböck, 2018, p. 1026). Dual citizenship allows greater autonomy and allocates a wider plethora of choices for individuals of especially disadvantaged backgrounds such as immigrants. Acquiring a premium passport, for example, could empower individuals by means of freedom of movement and choices. This fact, however, creates an unease among liberal nationalists regarding dual citizenship, who largely affirm and advocate for more autonomy and choices while seeking solidarity among co-nationals.

David Miller's (2008, pp. 382–383) views concerning dual citizenship and loyalty, for instance, explicitly illustrate the liberal tentativeness. He argues that, in the face of “the multicultural character of the receiving state” (2008, p. 382), it would be “anachronistic” to expect minorities (e.g. immigrants) to entirely uproot themselves from their country of origin and eliminate their sense of belongings and loyalties towards them. To show this tension, Miller focuses on the prospect of clashing loyalties by citing cases such as a war between origin and settled countries. While noting that individuals have the right to refuse to take part in a war that they consider as unjust, Miller (2008, p. 383) contends that minorities can be expected to protect their new homeland based on citizenship being, among other things, a covenant “for mutual protection, and so by entering a political community and taking the path to citizenship status a person acquires the obligation to contribute to the community’s defence.” He, then, argues that host nations “should act towards immigrants on the basis that they are committed citizens until in the case of any particular individual there is clear evidence to the contrary” (2008, p. 383).

Here, Miller does not delve into this critical issue at length; this rather brief account doesn't say much beyond a basic liberal position, or the normative desirability and implications of dual citizenship regimes. From a practical aspect, liberal nationalists would not have a significant problem insomuch as acquiring premium citizenship could empower individuals through autonomy and choice. From an identity aspect, however, liberal nationalists seem either unenthusiastically affirmative or silent about it. Multiculturalism as an approach is compatible with dual citizenship (Dikici, 2021), although this goes largely under-communicated by advocates of multiculturalism, the exception being the three-way approach advocated here.

In sum, even though a growing number of developed countries (desperately aim to) restrict migration, they also increasingly allow people to hold dual citizenship (Harpaz & Mateos, 2018). While the former is largely justified on the grounds of national self-determination and sovereignty arguments, the latter has become a manifestation of the basic rights that the liberal democratic state promises to provide. The increasing popularity of dual citizenship proves, if nothing else, that nation-states can approve of the idea that people are not inherently bound to a single nation-state and are capable of developing multiple attachments.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed minority integration, transnationalism and dual citizenship as key concepts that have received significant political and academic interest for the last three decades. It has offered a theoretical framework (the three-way approach) for rethinking who the key actors are in the process of minority integration in contemporary Western European societies. The three-way approach, by adding to and re-conceptualising multicultural integration as well as criticising both methodological nationalism and methodological transnationalism, contends that integration requires us to consider both national and transnational contexts together to better comprehend minority integration. That is, the three-way approach seeks a middle ground between "extreme fluidism and the bounds of nationalist thought" (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2003, p. 576) in studying minority integration. Whereas national contexts refer to nation-states' ideologies, institutions and policies concerning integration as well as immigrants' participation in national domains, transnational contexts refer to cross-border ties and activities of immigrants and transnational actors.

The three-way approach is, therefore, a contribution to the efforts on creating a new configuration of society as a unit of analysis via stretching the boundaries of the national and nation-state through embracing a transnational perspective. It suggests that the concept of "national" can and should be transnationalised. The practice of dual citizenship is an important way to understand such a configuration. Dual citizenship has become an increasingly common practice and is largely conceived at two levels: For minorities and sending-states, it is an opportunity to obtain practical ends; and for the destination countries, it is potentially facilitating dual (conflicting) loyalties, thereby being undesirable. It is this latter category that scholars of minority integration must provide a thorough account on, for example,

whether dual citizenship inevitably or automatically leads to conflicting loyalties, undermining solidarity, feeding distrust and so forth. Insofar as dual citizenship has been an increasingly widespread practice among minority communities in the West, it needs to be located in the political philosophy of diversity, identity and integration; thus, its normative desirability and implications need to be addressed by those in pursuit of an inclusive social imaginary. In this regard, the three-way approach discussed here could be a commencing point.

Notes

- 1 Following Bauböck (2022, p. 168), I use the concept of mobility in a broader sense to refer to freedom of human “movement across and within borders.”
- 2 Bridget Anderson (2019) argues that methodological nationalism poses ethical and epistemological challenges, and she advocates methodological denationalism to mitigate potential challenges, which suggests migrantising the citizen to allow people to recognise the effects of migration controls as well as to understand the relationship between exclusion of out groups or noncitizens and implicit exclusions of in group people. Methodological denationalism suggests a reconsideration of concepts and categories created by nation-state system (e.g. migrant and citizen) (Anderson, 2019, p. 6).
- 3 The term “three-way” was first used by Erzan and Kirisci (2006), Kirisci (2008, 2009) and Desiderio and Weinar (2014). Their use of the term refers to either the EU as an actor of the debates on immigrant integration, or Turkey as a sending-state that plays an active role in the integration processes of Turkish-speaking people in Europe. I, however, use the term as a broader concept to refer to national and transnational contexts as well as transnational state, non-state and supranational actors writ large. By fluidism, I refer to the idea of cosmopolitanism and a postnationalism that do not acknowledge the importance and relevance of the nation-state and nationalism in regard to understanding social phenomena.

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Part II

Interrogating policy, narratives and practices



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4 Multiculturalism and Interculturalism

Views from the Local

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Introduction

In the UK, as elsewhere in Europe, integration and social cohesion in relation to ethnic and cultural diversity are never far from the newspaper headlines or policy concerns. While these issues have gained attention from a variety of scholarly positions, one key debate has been between two pro-diversity paradigms of governance: multiculturalism (MC), with emphasis on respect for and recognition of group-based difference which is supported and accommodated, and interculturalism (IC), which instead emphasises contact, mixing and what is shared or common.

Debates between the two camps have centred around the contention that IC can, should, or even has replaced MC as the dominant paradigm. From the 2000s, multiculturalism was being called into question and vilified across Western Europe by some politicians, policy-makers, and scholars (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010). A number of senior political figures in the last 10 to 15 years have pronounced multiculturalism a failure, and a retrenchment of MC in favour of IC found purchase in policy. The Council of Europe's *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue* commented that "Whilst driven by benign intentions, multiculturalism is now seen by many as having fostered communal segregation and mutual incomprehension, as well as having contributed to the undermining of the rights of individuals – and, in particular, women – within minority communities, perceived as if these were single collective actors" (Council of Europe, 2008, p. 19). This signalled an explicit shift in integration policy across Europe. In the case of Britain, urban riots in some northern English cities and concerns over Islamist terrorism triggered accusations that state multiculturalism was creating "parallel lives" in which Britain's different ethnic communities lived separately from one another. Under the banner of "community cohesion," intercultural policies came to be seen as necessary correctives to multicultural excesses and a better way of ensuring integration, equality, and a sense of belonging for all (Cantle, 2001).

The fact that MC and IC have often appeared as oppositional positions has shaped scholarly debates as well as policy and political rhetoric (Antonsich, 2016; Levrau & Loobuyck, 2018). Indeed, on the face of it there has been a shift in the UK policy landscape towards policies that are consistent with IC, and it became routine for politicians and policy documents to denounce multiculturalism in

setting out their approach. Nevertheless, some research has begun to suggest that the two approaches live side by side in policy and can be complementary rather than antagonistic (Mathieu, 2018; Mansouri & Modood, 2021; Fossum et al., 2023; Dupont et al., 2023; Sealy et al., 2025).

MC and IC then have provided two significant paradigms in which questions of identity, belonging, integration, and equality have been thought. There is now a rich literature and sustained debate between their proponents, and this debate seems to be entering a new phase driven as much by complementarity as by dividing lines. It is to this emerging concern that this chapter seeks to contribute. To do so it focuses on one of the key aspects of this debate, namely the status of the national vis-à-vis the local. For interculturalism, the local (along with the global) is to be prioritised over the national as the site of identity-making and integration policy. By contrast, multiculturalism stresses the national in both these regards, at least in political theory. This issue of levels of governance, and particularly the position of the local, therefore appears as a point of emphasis, omission, and critique. This chapter, however, addresses it as a site of complementarity between the two paradigms. More specifically, it explores how MC and IC can be found alongside each other in integration policies in Britain. Although a number of the features will necessarily be context specific, the chapter aims through this to consider wider dynamics. The chapter first sets out the landscape of these scholarly debates and national policy shifts in relation to them. It then addresses the matter of complementarity between MC and IC by focusing on two local authority areas. It presents an analysis of policy documents in each to assess how they embody aspects of IC and MC, how they relate to one another, and with what emphases and rationales. This serves as the basis for assessing the question of complementarity.

Cutting out the Middleman

One of the key points of distinction and antagonism between multiculturalist and interculturalist approaches to integration, equality, and inclusion is an issue of levels: supra-national, national, or local. There are two aspects to this: one is about identities and the other about governance.

Cantle, the foremost proponent of interculturalism in Britain, has stated that “the key difference between multiculturalism and interculturalism generally revolves around the way in which personal and collective identities are conceptualised and instrumentalised” (Cantle, 2016, p. 140). Cantle deplores what he sees as (borrowing from Sen) the “miniaturisation” of people and their identities (2012, p. 21; 2016, p. 141). As a result of globalisation and super-diversity, individual identities are seen, on this account, as too protean to be captured by ethno-cultural or ethno-religious categories; it is multiplicity and fluidity that we should instead be emphasising. From this, intercultural theorists such as Cantle and Zapata-Barrero bypass the national in seeking to connect the local with the cosmopolitan and global in order to reflect contemporary conditions of superdiversity and more recent patterns of migration. The national is seen as too crude and blunt, unable to reflect the multiplicity of people’s lived identities. In so doing, they seek to free

conceptual analysis from the “iron jacket” of national identity and move beyond majority-minority dimensions (Zapata-Barrero, 2019). The local is seen as a more appropriate level at which these identities can be captured conceptually, and better addressed through policy appropriate to people’s lives. We might also see a related trend in much work falling under the umbrella term “everyday multiculturalism” (Wise & Velayutham, 2009), which, although not operating in the idiom of IC (and differing from it in notable ways), shares a critique of theoretical MC as too fixed on groups, too static, and too removed from the micro-level of everyday lives (Sealy, 2018). The methodological nationalism of multiculturalism is seen as out of date and unable to provide a more cosmopolitan basis for identity and solidarity, straight-jacketed by group categories, and by national borders. A national approach in this account can only speak at “the blandest and therefore almost meaningless level” (Cantle, 2012, p. 22). Cantle argues that identities as conceived under multiculturalism remain “fixed and given, rather than transitory and chosen – they are fundamentally about past heritage, rather than future personal and collective development” (2012, p. 30). This emphasis extends to governance, where on the one hand supra-national organisations and mechanisms such as the European Convention on Human Rights are seen as important for keeping nation-states in check, and on the other hand, the local is seen as the more appropriate and agile level for policy development.

Multiculturalists, by contrast, point to the continued salience of the national both for governance and for constructing inclusive identities. Modood, for instance, has argued for the continued relevance of group categories to both address patterns of discrimination and recognise identities that are important for groups themselves. Modood has also advocated “multicultural nationalism” as a remaking of national identity to which all can have a sense of belonging (Modood, 2020), not least due to indications that this can be significant for minorities (e.g. Antonsich, 2018). Multiculturalists have also pointed out that IC attacks a caricature of MC (Modood, 2017; also Sealy, 2018; Meer & Modood, 2016). Table 4.1 summarises the key differences most relevant for this chapter.

Policy Framework

The early 2000s marked the emergence of scholarly debates between MC and IC, which in many ways have tracked policy shifts. Although government multiculturalist policies had already come under criticism from different positions (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010), interculturalism as a replacement and a prominent voice goes back to the *Community Cohesion report* (Cantle, 2001), drafted in response to disturbances and ethnic tensions in northern English cities. The report did not use the term “interculturalism,” and indeed the term “interculturalism” is not one used by the UK government. But the report’s findings and recommendations came to form the basis of much of the intercultural critique of multiculturalism in Britain, not least because its author, Ted Cantle, developed the “community cohesion” terminology that was later picked up in government policy and became the most strident advocate of IC against MC in Britain.

Table 4.1 MC and IC compared

	<i>Multiculturalism</i>	<i>Interculturalism</i>
Identities	Group and individual – hybrid ethno-cultural/ethno-religious and national.	Individual – fluid and multiple. Local and cosmopolitan.
Integration	“Multicultural nationalism” – dialogically remaking national identity inclusive of minorities.	Liberal-secular values; or combining localism with a human rights cosmopolitanism.
Equality	Focus on difference – to address discrimination and for recognition of group self-conceptions.	Focus on commonalities. Cross-cultural interactions fostered to reduce prejudices.
Policies	Targeted and specific policies where necessary.	Difference-blind, mainstreamed policies.
Level of governance	National governments lead diversity policies and cultivation of common belonging.	Local governments lead diversity policies; national policies circumscribed by supra-national institutions, e.g. EU, human rights.

IC, interculturalism; MC, multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism was blamed for a range of social ills. These include ethnic communities living socially segregated from one another, in a state of “parallel lives” as the community cohesion report put it (also echoed in the later Casey (2016) Review); lack of cross-cultural dialogue and gender equality; insufficient promotion of what came to be called “Fundamental British Values”; and lack of a common identity to which all could relate. Subsequent policy documents have reproduced this criticism of multiculturalism. The government’s flagship *Integrated Communities Strategy* (2018) stated that “multiculturalism has too often encouraged communities to live separate lives – reinforcing distinct cultural identities.” Multiculturalism came to be seen as no longer fit for purpose, unable to respond to the superdiversity of contemporary British society. Community cohesion, consistent with interculturalism, would instead focus on contact and mixing, and what we all hold in common (values and identity) instead of differences.

Consistent with IC, UK politics has seen a shift towards the local through decentralisation policies. The Localism Act (2011) was introduced to pass more power and freedoms to local authorities and communities on the basis that “power should be exercised at the lowest practical level – close to the people who are affected by decisions, rather than distant from them.” This formed a legislative arm of the Coalition government’s (2010–2015) “Big Society” strategy (in contrast to “big government”). The policies of the Big Society placed a strong emphasis on “active citizenship” through individual and community involvement. When it comes to political participation explicitly and directly, however, the focus was on particular communities where the participation of especially women was seen to be “held back” by socio-cultural norms contrary to fundamental British values (although policy documents do not explicitly name which communities). In this there is a clear link to the “parallel lives” and cultural barriers arguments formulated in

the Casey Review and earlier Cantle Report. Central government's role came to be conceived as something of a background supporter and facilitator, a partner in funding charity, community, and NGO bodies and programmes. In 2019, the government set out 70 actions it would deliver to promote integration with over £50 million of funding. A good example that conveys the idea of the Big Society is the National Citizen Service, a programme which brings young people together from a wide range of backgrounds to develop their skills, contribute to their communities, and promote integration.

Yet this was no straightforward shift towards something we might describe as an interculturalist paradigm. The key relevant piece of equality legislation is the Equality Act 2010 (EA2010), applicable across the UK, which replaced and synthesised a raft of earlier and distinct legislation. The Act outlines nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race (including colour, nationality, and ethnicity), religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. Diversity in policy documents is often discussed in wider terms under these protected characteristics. There are also specific and targeted measures for addressing diversity and challenges that arise from it. The Race Disparity Unit was set up in 2016 and produces the website Ethnicity Facts and Figures, with statistics by ethnic background across a range of social policy areas. In this respect, the EA uses a wider and looser notion of diversity than found in multiculturalism but it further deepens and institutionalises a group-based law and policy perspective that is a feature of multiculturalism, whilst emphasising intersectionality.

Recent research has shown that at the national level community cohesion or interculturalism policies are in fact coterminous with multiculturalism policies, and the latter have remained even as they have been disavowed by politicians and the former have gained prominence in policy (Mathieu, 2018). Indeed, decentralisation has taken place without extra powers or resources being passed downwards to elected local governments; sometimes powers have been taken from them and given to unelected regional quasi-government organisations (Quangos).

This chapter contributes to the emerging area of research looking at how interculturalism and multiculturalism exist alongside one another in Britain's policy landscape by focusing on the key dimension of the local. By focusing on local authority case studies, we are able to gain insight into how MC and IC can exist alongside each other. Given that the issue of levels is a key dimension in the debate between the two positions, and that the local is seen by interculturalists as the site *par excellence* of IC and integration policies, a detailed and comparative look at different local authority areas can reveal how we might need to rethink the complementarity between MC and IC. What the discussion that follows will show is that rather than the local being the domain of IC and the national of MC, both are present at the local level (as they are at the national) and that their specific configuration varies between local contexts. Not only does this add to our understanding of how MC and IC can be complementary, but it also helps dispel the notion that different levels of governance are the domain of different paradigms, or that the complementarity between the two is a matter of one level for one paradigm.

Methodology

This chapter is based on work carried out as part of the PLURISPACE project, funded by HERA. PLURISPACE sought to investigate to what extent and how four policy and theoretical approaches to diversity were reflected in the activity of national governments, local authorities, and civil society organisations. The four approaches were multiculturalism, interculturalism, cosmopolitanism, and transnationalism. The project comparatively researched four national contexts, Norway, France, Spain, and the UK, with the aim of developing a new normative framework (Fossum et al., 2023).

This chapter is based on data gathered as part of the UK research and more narrowly focuses on the multiculturalism–interculturalism debates and the issue of the local level, as already set out earlier. It discusses policy documents from two local authorities, the city of Bristol and the London Borough of Brent. These two local authorities were chosen as they represent distinct population demographics in relation to national figures and, as will be seen, quite different emphases when it comes to exploring the complementarity between MC and IC. This is not to suggest that breakdown of the separate groups themselves is a match, but that on basic percentage terms white British majority-ethnic minority figures are similar.

Whereas Bristol is not dissimilar from the national figures, with 18.9% of the population from ethnic minorities, in Brent it is the white British group which forms the local minority. Documents were identified and gathered through searches of local authority databases covering the period 2010 to 2021. Further documents were also identified through references in policy documents and subsequently included in the sample. In total some 35 documents across the two authorities and different policy areas were analysed to assess their stated aims and objectives, identification of policy problems to be addressed, stated principles and approaches, and the policies and mechanisms put in place. It should be noted that MC and IC do not appear as named paradigms that the local authority is explicitly following, but analysis shows how features of both paradigms are reflected in policy. Policies were coded against the contrasting approaches, principles, and features of IC and MC (along the lines of Table 4.1) to build a picture of how the two co-existed. Documents cited in the following discussion use an acronym for reference. The full list of documents analysed, including the acronyms adopted, is listed separately in the Appendix at the end of the chapter.

Two Local Case Studies

The following sections present an analysis of the two local authority case studies, laying the groundwork for a concluding discussion on the implications for thinking about IC and MC in a comparative and complementary way. An initial point to make is that as local authorities both Bristol and Brent sit within the national and in significant ways are bound by national government laws and policies. Nevertheless, the two are notably different in how IC and MC can be seen in the local policy landscape. As such, they present two different modes of emphasis and complementarity

between the paradigms. The first section will explore this in relation to Bristol, and the second will turn to Brent.

Bristol

Bristol is the largest city in the Southwest of England, with a population of 472,400 (Census, 2021). Although a prosperous city on the whole, Bristol is also marked by deep inequalities. It has 41 areas in the most deprived 10% in England (15% of residents) and 3 in the most deprived 1%. The initial post–World War II non-white settlers were African-Caribbean and established an annual (more recently bi-annual) carnival in the city (St Pauls carnival, named after the area of the city where many of the first generation migrants settled). Today, Bristol is a diverse city and home to at least 45 religions, 187 countries of birth, and 91 main languages spoken.¹ Figures from the most recent census (2021) indicate that the ethnic minority population is 18.9%, a slight increase on the previous census. In terms of race relations, the city became prominent in 1963 when the Bristol Bus Boycott succeeded in overturning discriminatory policies of the Bristol Omnibus Company that barred black and Asian employment on the city's buses. The city came to recent international prominence when a statue in the city centre of the 18th century slave trader Edward Colston was pulled down and dumped into the river as part of Black Lives Matter protests in the city. The statue now resides in the city's museum.

When it comes to Bristol's integration policy documents and strategies, we can say that the city's approach is one strongly oriented by interculturalism, but with significant features of multiculturalism.

An interculturalist strand can be seen in Bristol's conception of its identity as a city. Maintaining and promoting a unique Bristol identity and vision is prominent throughout policy documents, and it unsurprisingly emphasises the local in its conception of identity and in terms of level of governance. This comes through in how Bristol sees itself as a global city, reflecting (cosmopolitan) global values and human rights and aims to "grow global citizens who understand the global challenges we face and who have all they need to participate in a globalised world and can enjoy the opportunities it brings" (BGC, p. 4). In part, this plays on the diversity of the city and the people who make it up and their transnational connections and social and economic capital as a result, with the aim of bridging between a local as well as "world community" (BGC). We find here then the bypassing of the national in favour of local-global connections. Bristol's "proud tradition of citizen-and community-led action," for instance, is principally oriented towards the local and "to investors and global audiences" (CS). Its vision here positions itself at the interface of the local and the global in which cities directly engage with other international cities rather than nation to nation to "rebalance sovereignty from national governments towards local government in order to ensure cities and regions have a stronger national and global voice" (BGC).

The rights of asylum seekers and refugees is a further area where we can see aspects of a cosmopolitan outlook, identity, and discourse. Bristol is a City of Sanctuary that aims to be open and welcoming to those fleeing violence and persecution

and to “recognise their skills, experiences and the positive social and economic contribution they can make” (CS; ICAP). Actual policies in relation to this are constrained by national laws and approaches to asylum seekers and refugees, but the city is active and encouraging of being a place where they are welcome. As a local authority, Bristol sits within national laws, policies, and interests – decentralisation has its limit – and this is also reflected in policy documents, where the local-global connection is also related to national interests (BGC; CS). This said, however, the emphasis is clearly on the local-global connection central to interculturalism.

This emphasis on the local, as well as looking from the city to the global, also makes room for “a distinctively ‘Bristol’ vision” (BRS) in relation to national laws and policies. This can be seen in the city’s approach to (in)equality, where Bristol has developed its own equality charters and a more expansive approach to protected characteristics than that in the EA2010. Along these lines, the EIP “commit[s] to fulfilling *both the letter and the spirit* of our legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010” (emphasis added) and includes a more expansive approach to equality. For example, although socio-economic inequality is seen as most fundamental (EAP), it also recognises intersectional inequalities, where ethnicity relates to age, gender, and so forth and “place based communities and communities of interest” (EIP; EAP).

Yet, when it comes to measures of equality, social cohesion, and citizenship, a mixture of multiculturalism and interculturalism can be observed, even if neither one is named as such. There is still a marked emphasis on policy approaches consistent with interculturalism. Cohesion and contact are stressed to ensure “more connected and less isolated communities” (SBC), and measures to create and encourage such contact and mixing are at the forefront of policy aims. Cohesion, or its lack, is seen as directly related to (in)equality where “inequality threatens cohesion” (BRS) and so needs to be tackled to ensure cohesion is possible. This is, moreover, a goal deeply rooted in a sense of local (city) identity and place (CS).

There are also policies, strategies, and approaches more consistent with MC, and which would be averse to IC theorists. For instance, programmes have been set up to target specific areas of policy as well as specific groups, guided by the protected characteristics of the EA2010 as well as city level data on inequalities. The city developed its own Equality Charter, co-designed by private, public, and voluntary sector organisations in conjunction with Bristol City Council, in response to a race equality manifesto for the city that was launched in 2015 by representatives from ethnic minority communities and groups. Equality fora were created that cover the protected characteristics of the EA2010 and that provide a way for groups to highlight specific needs and concerns. Communities defined by these protected characteristics influence the council, which provides grant funding for the fora (VISNA). Commissions to address specific areas of discrimination, such as the Women’s Commission and Commission for Race Equality (the latter set up in 2018), provide focused strategic plans for improving inclusion and representation of people within those categories. We can see then that inequalities disproportionately faced by ethnic minorities are explicitly identified and addressed, and that this is done in consultation with organisations and groups and listening to and

understanding the diverse needs of the population so that services and products are accessible and inclusive is a prominent aim (ABEC). In terms of identities and conceptions of equality, this is much more consistent with MC.

Measures of multiculturalism based around recognition, accommodation, and support of ethnic and religious identities are evident in policy goals as well as general principles and understandings. It is notable also that when policies are addressed towards particular issues that more directly affect particular communities, there are efforts to frame these in a more general way. Female genital mutilation and forced marriage, for instance, are not outlined in community specific ways, in an attempt to avoid stigmatising approaches to safeguarding (Karlsen et al., 2019). There is an effort to name and target specific communities when identifying discrimination and inequality patterns but avoiding such naming when the policy is addressing practices that might be more prevalent in some communities.

The Council has committed to establishing new ways in which communities are engaged (VISNA). The Citizen's Panel is one way in which this is done. It consists of a sample of citizens invited at random to join the panel and then members are selected to mirror the demographics of the city (VISNA). Focusing on specific demographics has been highlighted as an effective strategy. For instance, the highest level of satisfaction is expressed by the Muslim community, which is put down to specific community cohesion work done with this group such as Building the Bridge, a community relations committee instituted by the city to allow minority communities question and advise on community-sensitive policies (Lewicki et al., 2014).

On the whole, neither multiculturalism nor interculturalism is explicitly mentioned in policy or strategy documents, but we can trace significant elements consistent with both. Overall, we might say that Bristol is an intercultural city with strong multicultural sensibilities. This suggests that, as far as Bristol is concerned, while its vision is one largely consistent with IC, this requires certain features of MC if patterns of inequalities and discrimination are to be properly addressed.

Moving to Brent, we see a quite different form of complementarity between MC and IC.

Brent

Brent is a borough in the Northwest of London with an estimated population of 339,800 per the Census of 2021 and includes within its borders the iconic Wembley stadium. The borough is extremely diverse in terms of ethnicity and has become more so in recent decades. Figures from the most recent census (2021) shows that 15% of the population are white British, 20% are from white ethnic minority groups, and 65% from non-white ethnic minority groups.

As with Bristol, neither IC nor MC is explicitly mentioned in policy or strategy documents. In both rhetoric and policy, however, aspects of both are again evident. In contrast to Bristol, MC has a stronger presence, and we might say that Brent is a multicultural local authority area with intercultural sensibilities, and so something of a mirror case to that of Bristol.

IC consistent policies are certainly evident. The 2010 Community Engagement strategy references the importance of ‘contact zones,’ including those that are the common sites of focus for empirical IC and everyday multiculturalism studies such as streets, parks, sporting venues, and so on. But this comes with a different point of emphasis. They are conceived as zones where “cultures are celebrated” rather than where individuals come into contact and difference is backgrounded. It is “this celebration of cultures,” the document goes on, which “is a clear expression of shared values by the whole Brent community.” The 2011 Place Making Guide, which might suggest the relevance of explicit interculturalism references, talks of making public spaces useable and where people can participate but makes no explicit references to contact or cohesion.

Brent does, again unsurprisingly, emphasise the local: the local identity of the borough and the importance of this for its residents. The local also forms the main basis for policy development and implementation. The local is asserted, for instance in how Brent “does not necessarily agree with government policy” and “engage[s] with these strategies on a critical basis, led by the needs of Brent’s residents.’ Consistent with some of the critiques of MC from IC (and everyday multiculturalism), the national is treated critically and with caution as being too far removed from the local context, and it is at the local level where appropriate policies can and should be formed.

In contrast to Bristol, however, it does so within a nested framework where Brent sits within London, which sits within the national, and London and the national are the more frequently referenced relevant contexts rather than the city-global emphasis of Bristol. Brent’s 2019 Stronger Together strategy, for instance, is situated in the context of the national ICS and the London Mayor’s All of Us strategy (ST). Brent of course is not a city and so this different emphasis from Bristol is therefore to be expected. Given the importance of London for this nested level of governance, it will be important to say something here about London’s policy framework before continuing.

Two key documents outline the London Mayor’s strategies for equality and integration, All of Us, and Inclusive London. The approach centres a London identity to which residents can feel connected and included – diversity being a matter for celebration and integral to the idea of London itself. This forms one the core objectives of the Citizenship Integration Initiative, which also focuses on developing civic and democratic engagement and active citizenship. All of Us adopts a critical approach to a simple emphasis on contact and mixing, with which it associates previous approaches. “Emphasising the quantity rather than the quality of interactions” it says, failed to focus on “building meaningful relationships.” Notably, it stresses that “where discrimination and inequalities persist, [society] is not fully socially integrated.” It thus explicitly emphasises the conditions of contact highlighted by Allport (1979), a feature which has received insufficient attention in some forms of cohesion and contact literature (see Sealy, 2018 for discussion). Nevertheless, consistent with critiques of previous state MC, it also stresses that too much emphasis has been placed “on integration between people of different nationalities and ethnicities” to the detriment of other characteristics such as age,

social class, employment status, sexuality, gender, and disability, and so diversity is understood in expansive terms. This approach, nevertheless, expands rather than replaces. In Inclusive London, 39 equality, diversity, and inclusion objectives across a range of policy areas are set out along with specified target groups; 37 of these objectives include ethnic minorities as one of those groups.

Returning to Brent, we can see how MC-consistent policies and approaches provide the greater substance when it comes to thinking about diversity and equality. Cultural diversity is seen as a strength throughout the Council policy documents and as something to be embraced and celebrated: “The cultural diversity of the borough and the cohesion between its different communities are major factors in Brent’s characteristic vibrancy and dynamism” and “celebrating the rich diversity of our local community helps to make everyone feel valued and respected and to break down barriers between different groups.” As such “the council acknowledges the distinctiveness of the many cultures and communities which make up our borough, and celebrate its diversity, it is vital that these are not used to divide us” (ST). This contrasts with an approach based on individual fluidity that is cautious of difference, instead emphasising the importance of group-based identities as something positive and to be supported. Integration is seen as something incumbent on everybody, not just on some, and in this follows the London Mayor’s emphasis in the ‘All of Us’ strategy for the capital (ST).

An approach more consistent with MC is also found at the heart of the borough’s Equality Strategy, which stresses the need to recognise difference and for an equity-based understanding of equality and a differentiated rather than a general approach: “Brent Council understands ‘equality’ to be about fair and equal treatment. Critically, this does not mean treating everyone the same. Instead, this requires us to focus on improving equality of outcomes to effect meaningful change. We may need to respond to people in different ways in order to meet their particular needs and to address any disadvantages faced by people who share a protected characteristic” (BEP; EP). Programmes to this end have included targeted apprenticeships; Brent in2work providing help with making an application or additional language skills (BOF); and the Moving on Up Initiative (MOU), which is delivered in partnership with the Black Training & Enterprise Group (BTEG) to help young black men into employment.

A particular area of concern for equality is equality and inclusion for women. Although also a pointed feature of Bristol documents, in contrast, Brent’s strategies are more likely to highlight the barriers to inclusion and differences between ethnic groups; lack of English language skills, need for safe spaces, lower employment of Bangladeshi and Pakistani women and so on (ST), and the need to identify community specific barriers. Brent’s strategy documents, in contrast to Bristol’s, are also far more likely to identify ethnic groups being particularly affected rather than identifying issues more generically.

Intercultural extensions are evident to “promote good relations between communities and address negative stereotyping of any groups, and build resilient, cohesive communities that take pride in and feel a sense of responsibility towards their neighbourhoods” (BEP). The Council also recognises both longer-established

groups and newer and growing populations, reflecting the ‘superdiversity’ of the borough – growing communities of Brazilians, Portuguese, and Somalis, for instance (ST).

In terms of political participation, features of national government policy such as active citizenship, community cohesion, and community engagement are reflected through a variety of means, such as ward fora, the borough forum ‘Brent Connects,’ a borough magazine, and a regular Residents’ Attitude Survey and Citizen’s Panel (BOF; SCI; BP; CES). A new Civic Centre aims to provide a venue for local participation in democratic debate, possibly televising Council meetings and citizenship ceremonies online (BOF). As well as general measures, targeted measures are also included, such as involving bodies representing the interests of different racial, ethnic, national groups, and religious groups in policy development (SCI). It is also stressed that these measures allow wider participation that is inclusive of those to whom basic forms of political participation might not be possible because of citizenship status.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has sought to respond to the emerging question of complementarity between two approaches to integration and the governance of ethno-cultural diversity: multiculturalism and interculturalism. To do so, it focused on two local authority areas in Britain and analysed their relevant policy and strategy documents over a ten-year period. The issue of levels (local, national, and global) has been a key aspect of the debates between MC and IC when it comes to identities, governance, and conceptions of equality (Fossum et al., 2023)

While neither IC nor MC is explicitly referred to in Bristol or Brent’s policy and strategy documents, elements of each are clearly identifiable, but in each context how these features appear and relate to one another is markedly different. In Brent, multiculturalism is more clearly evident than Bristol, with some intercultural add ons. Equity and differentiated policies and measures are explicitly referred to as means of achieving equality. The language of celebration of diversity and communities is stronger in Brent relative to mixing of diverse individuals. The local is the most emphasised level of governance, but this is also situated in the regional (being London), and it stresses a critical approach to national level policies where these do not accord with the borough’s own outlook. Bristol, by contrast, is more interculturalist with significant aspects of multiculturalism, especially when it comes to addressing discrimination and targeting particular demographics to ensure representativeness in political participation. Bristol has more flashes of cosmopolitanism through its positioning itself as a “global city” with “global citizens,” with an emphasis on the local connected to the global. Bristol explicitly sets out a more expansive understanding of equality and protected characteristics than that of the EA2010.

The analysis suggests that policy programmes consistent with MC and IC can and do exist alongside each other in the British policy landscape. Whereas some research has begun to show how this is the case at the national level, this chapter

has explored how this looks in more detail at the local level. Interculturalists have often been dismissive of MC's methodological nationalism and focus on the role of the state, a criticism echoed by everyday multiculturalists. Interculturalists, by contrast, pay special attention to local levels. The issue of levels, and especially the position of the local, is therefore a key area of contestation and distinction between the two and central to debates. The analysis here suggests that the local is not necessarily the domain of a single paradigm, but an important site of complementarity. By being attentive to the stated principles and policy measures of local authorities, this chapter has shown distinct ways in which MC and IC sit alongside and relate to one another as they respond to local demographics, conditions, and opportunities.

Note

- 1 Unless stated otherwise, figures in this section are all from www.bristol.gov.uk/statistics-census-information/the-population-of-bristol.

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Appendix: Local Authority Documents Analysed

<i>Bristol</i>	<i>Report titles</i>	<i>Acronyms</i>
2013	Health and Well-Being Strategy	HWS13
2017	Bristol Global City	BGC
2017	Managing Unauthorised Encampments Protocol	MUEP
2017	Strategy for Bristol Culture	SBC
2018	Bristol Resilience Strategy	BRS
2018	Corporate Strategy	CS
2018	Equality Action Plan	EAP
2018	Equality and Inclusion Policy	EIP
2018	Inclusive Cities Action Plan	ICAP
2018	Voice and Influence Service Needs Assessment	VISNA
2019	About Bristol Equality Charter	ABEC
2020	Health and Well-Being Strategy	HWS20
2020	One City Plan	OCP

Brent

2010	Brent – Our Future	BOF
2010	Community Engagement Strategy	CES
2010	Cultural Strategy for Brent	CSB
2011	Brent Place Making Guide	PMG
2013	Cemeteries Strategy	CS
2014	Equal Life Chances for All	ELCA
2014	Museum and Archive Strategy	MAS
2015	Brent Equality Policy	BEP
2015	Equality Strategy	ES
2016	Equality Policy	EP
2017	Statement of Community Involvement	SCI
2017	Strategic Framework for School Effectiveness in Brent	SFSE
2017	Workforce Strategy	WS
2018	Inclusive London	IL
2018	All of Us	AU
2019	Borough Plan	BP
2019	Inclusive Growth Strategy	IGS
2019	Stronger Together	ST
2020	Gender, Ethnicity and Disability Pay Gap Reporting	GEDPGR

5 The Absence of Race in the Intercultural Narrative

An Anti-Racist Gaze at the Catalan Education System

Zenia Hellgren

Introduction

In a European landscape where immigration and integration policies are increasingly influenced by far-right, populist agendas, Catalonia remains committed to its intercultural approach, which is reflected in diversity policies that emphasise social cohesion and equality in a framework of ethnic, religious and cultural pluralism (Catalan Government, 2017, 2019). Simultaneously, inequalities affecting migrants and racialised minorities in Catalonia are huge, as elsewhere in Spain. Recent studies show that racism grows alarmingly and that racist prejudices damage immigrant families' trust in schools (Prokic, 2024; Andújar et al., 2022; SOS Racisme, 2022a; Cortés, 2021; Spanish Government, 2020). Interculturalism presupposes egalitarian interaction between people of different origins (Hellgren & Zapata-Barrero, 2022). Working towards this ideal requires firm commitment to anti-racism, and the Catalan government aimed to enhance the struggle against inequalities affecting migrants and racialised groups through the new Law against discrimination approved in 2022. The law includes several measures to prevent ethnic discrimination in the education system, but at the time of writing (2024) these had not yet been implemented (Catalan Department of Education, 2024; Catalan Law for Equality of Treatment and Non-Discrimination, 19/2020). In fact, there has long been reluctance to recognize the significance of race as a driver of social stratification within the intercultural narrative (Rodríguez-García, 2022). All in all, the tensions around interculturalism and anti-racism make Catalonia a particularly interesting case to study the difficulties to effectively address (structural) racism.

Based on extensive fieldwork conducted between 2017 and 2024 in the frameworks of three different research projects,¹ this chapter engages with the apparent paradox that serious problems with "ethnic inequalities," racism and discrimination are widespread also in an open, tolerant and pro-diversity policy framework. In fact, there is no guarantee that intercultural policies mitigate these phenomena in practice. Perhaps the gap between intercultural policies and discourses, and the difficulties involved in translating these into more egalitarian, anti-racist and inclusive practices, represents an Achilles' heel for the intercultural project: In its endeavour to avoid controversies and bring the vast majority of society on board, its transformative impact becomes harder to achieve.

In this chapter, I take the case of the pronouncedly intercultural Catalan education system to search for explanations of the wide gap between intercultural policy narratives and discourses on the one hand, and the persistent problems with inequalities, exclusion and underrepresentation of migrants and racialised minorities on the other. I focus on the education system since I consider it arguably the most fundamental societal institution in shaping opportunities, (in)equality, sense of belonging and shared identities; it can operate in ways that bridge the divide between different groups, or that broaden it.

The Catalan school system is strongly segregated in socioeconomic terms and divided between public, semi-private and private schools, with public schools – particularly those in more vulnerable housing areas – taking the major part of migrant and minority origin pupils. The school failure of immigrant and Roma children in Catalonia, as well as at the national level of Spain, is a widely recognised problem (Durst & Bereményi, 2024; Bereményi & Hellgren, 2022; Bayona & Domingo, 2018). The potential explanations are many, and generally include socio-economic marginalisation, low educational level of parents and overall “integration difficulties.” Much less attention has been paid to the education system itself and how it operates to create inclusion or exclusion of the pupils, or how ethnic diversity is represented within it and what role this plays for the opportunities and sense of belonging of minority children (Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2021a; Martín Criado, 2018; Martín Criado & Gómez Bueno, 2017; Bereményi & Carrasco, 2017). Is, for instance, the actual ethnic and cultural diversity of society transmitted through the school material used? In her discussion of the school failure of Roma children across Europe, O’Hanlon (2016, p. 7) summarises the Spanish case with the following words: “Roma students aren’t in the classrooms, and their history isn’t in textbooks: 500 years of Roma contributions to Spain fails to merit a single mention in school history books.” I argue that the lack of representation of diversity among school staff and in textbooks needs to be addressed as part of an anti-racist intercultural education agenda.

To understand Catalan interculturalism and the relationship between discourse and practice, it appears necessary to also assess the role of Catalan nationalism in shaping the content of “interculturalism” in the Catalan context. The education system plays a central role in the construction of a Catalan collective identity, and aims to shape common frameworks for belonging, largely through the enforcement of Catalan as vehicular language (Conversi & Jeram, 2017). A central issue for inquiry is therefore to what extent the education system is perceived as inclusionary versus exclusionary by migrants and minorities.

The following research questions have guided the analysis:

- 1 *Do Catalan intercultural education policies address the fundaments of interculturalism, here understood as interethnic relations based on equality and anti-racism?*
- 2 *(How) do practitioners at the school level implement intercultural education policies?*
- 3 *How do migrant and ethnic minority origin students and stakeholders perceive the Catalan education system in terms of inclusion-exclusion?*

It should be noted that critically scrutinising the impact of interculturalism does not per se imply questioning its relevance as diversity management agenda. Particularly in times when anti-immigrant populism is gaining political presence it appears central to declare commitment to inclusive, anti-racist narratives. My primary concern is not with interculturalism as agenda, but with the absence of analyses and measures that explicitly address racism as producer of inequalities.

Interculturalism and (Anti)Racism

Interculturalism emerged in a climate of growing worries across Europe over the failures to achieve successful integration processes and increasing right-wing extremism in the 1990s. It was formulated partly as a critique of multiculturalism's emphasis on difference: the aim of interculturalism was to represent a "third way" between assimilationism and multiculturalism by accommodating cultural diversity within a shared framework of basic (liberal democratic) values. Soon it became a popular approach for diversity management, mainly at the local level, in Europe and beyond (Zapata-Barrero & Mansouri, 2022; Cantle, 2012). Currently, the European Council's network of Intercultural Cities has 146 members across Europe and the world, for instance in Morocco, the United States, Mexico and Australia (Council of Europe, 2024). To what extent interculturalism is really that different from multiculturalism has been the subject of an ongoing academic debate (e.g. Sealy et al., in this volume; Meer et al., 2016). It has also been highlighted as paradoxical that intercultural agendas tend to presuppose equality and power-sharing but avoid engaging with (potentially controversial, redistributive) concrete measures to achieve this, or that they shy away from discourses on racial justice. Intercultural policy narratives rarely translate into concrete programs or public policies that address structural and institutional discrimination beyond anti-racist declarations and campaigns (Rodríguez-García, 2022; Hellgren & Zapata-Barrero, 2022).

Bonilla-Silva (1997) assumed, similarly to other critical race theorists, post-colonialist thinkers, intersectionality scholars and other critical academics, that racialised social systems – with roots in colonialism – operate simultaneously at multiple, often unconscious, levels and perpetuate racialised inequalities. As Rodríguez-García (2022) and Golash-Boza (2016) point out, racism cannot exist without the idea of race (as social construct), or, as eloquently put by Hughey (2017, p. 27), "race is a biological fiction with a social function," differentiating between people with (generally) negative consequences for those racialised as non-white.

I argue that a socially transformative anti-racist agenda must build on such a comprehensive, structural analysis of racism. This could take place within the intercultural narrative or under a different label. What is important is that recognising structural racism and the racialisation of inequalities is central for the potential to strengthen anti-racist education. To propose an anti-racist education, in turn, involves inquiring what expressions of racism we find in the present education system. An anti-racist agenda that only targets explicit racism such as hate speech and racist violence misses all the layers below the "tip of the iceberg," the many subtle, everyday expressions of racialisation that differentiate between people based on

factors as the tone of their skin, and that also convinced “anti-racists” may (unwittingly) contribute to through their professional roles or unconscious biases.

We may imagine several options for suggesting an anti-racist agenda with transformative potential. Here, I will linger at the idea of representation as an outcome-centred way to address ethnic inequalities (Hellgren, 2021). Cruz Rodríguez argues that interculturalism requires far-reaching structural transformation of society, including redistribution of political and socio-economic power, in order to “eliminate the social and economic inequities that impede an egalitarian dialogue between cultures” (Cruz Rodríguez, 2014, p. 70). Yet measures aimed at reducing misrepresentation such as quota systems or affirmative action programs to empower disadvantaged groups are rarely considered within the framework of intercultural policies, being viewed as controversial and unpopular among the majority society (Cruz Rodríguez, 2014).

In an earlier publication, I used Nancy Fraser’s oft-cited distinction between targeting and transformative measures (for social justice) to theorise about the receptiveness for quota or affirmative action models in Catalan public institutions, with the aim of increasing the representation of ethnic diversity (Hellgren, 2021; Fraser, 1995). While Fraser saw these measures as competing, I consider them potentially complementary. Applying this idea to the education system, the overall aim would be to mainstream anti-racist, pro-diversity perspectives in teaching (transformation). By actively recruiting more teachers of minority groups and including their histories in the school curricula (targeting), such transformative effects could be facilitated. Native majority teachers, students and families would become used to racialised teachers representing the schools on equal terms, countering the still common presumption that racialised people in Spain are “poor and uneducated” (Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2021a). The narratives and histories of people from minority groups, who are often not listened to or included, would gain presence, altering persistent Eurocentric narratives in text books and elsewhere. Children and youth from racialised groups would find role models who signal that they too can reach high positions in society. Engaging with this kind of questions could increase the anti-racist, transformative impact of intercultural policies.

As highlighted earlier, interpreting interculturalism as an agenda for structural transformation is however not uncontroversial. A leading public officer representing diversity policies in Barcelona claimed that the success of interculturalism depends on how it is “sold” to the majority society (M12, 2020, see Annex 1). Interculturalism’s endeavour to remain politically non-controversial in order to attract “everyone” and survive shifting political majorities may be contrary to the transformative measures it would take to, for instance, combat economic inequalities that affect immigrants and minorities disproportionately, or mainstream anti-racist and de-colonial perspectives in education. Politicians who support interculturalism are aware of the risk of upsetting powerful actors as well as the broader public when considering potentially unpopular measures (Hellgren, 2021).

In the case of Catalonia, there is also an overarching political framework strongly shaped by sub-state nationalism, which defines the Catalan version of interculturalism. Conversi and Jeram (2017) argue that Catalan nationalism has incorporated

interculturalism rather successfully. It is, however, an open question how inclusive migrant and minority origin youth perceive what “Catalanity” is. For instance, Khan and Gallego-Balsà's (2021) work on racialised Catalans, or the anti-racist NGO SOS Racisme's campaign against racial profiling (SOS Racisme Catalunya, 2022b), show clearly that there is a racial dimension to who is perceived as Catalan and who is not. A number of recent studies examining intercultural education discourses and practices in Catalonia found that while these have increased their presence in school curricula and teacher training, diversity is widely treated as a matter that only concerns students of foreign nationality. Therefore, intercultural programs are mainly applied in schools with high numbers of migrant-origin students. Furthermore, it is stated that the term “interculturalism” is in itself vague and interpreted in different ways by different actors, and since teachers' training in interculturalism is voluntary, it is generally only pursued by those most interested in it. All in all, it is concluded that there are several difficulties involved in defining, and practising, “intercultural education” (Garreta-Bochaca et al., 2020; González-Faraco et al., 2020; Garreta-Bochaca, 2011). This coincides with my findings and is central to my analysis of the obstacles for implementing anti-racism in education.

Data Collection and Analysis

This chapter is based on fieldwork conducted between 2017 and 2024 in the frameworks of three different research projects.² Vakeripen focused on the communication between school staff and families of pupils belonging to a highly stigmatised ethnicity: Roma people. REPCAT examined the discursive and physical representation of diversity in Catalan public institutions, and the third – ongoing – project REACT addresses structural racism in the Catalan education system. An important objective is to reach broad consensus on what racism consists of and strive towards mainstreaming anti-racist education.

Methodological triangulation was applied in all three field studies. The following data has been included in the analysis conducted for the present chapter:

- Content analysis of the Catalan intercultural education policies and the official Catalan school curriculum.
- Analysis of textbooks used in 6th grade of primary school (ages 11–12) and 3rd grade of secondary school (ages 14–15) in public and semi-private (*concertada*) schools in Barcelona, together with school websites (72 schools in the Barcelona area provided this information, and a selection was made of the most frequently used book titles) (Hellgren, 2021).
- Two focus group sessions with 20 Roma and Muslim women and men aged 18 to 28, who were educated in the Catalan school system, in July 2023.
- Sixty-seven interviews with stakeholders in decision-making positions at the Catalan Department of Education, headmasters, teachers and other school staff in public and semi-private schools, policy-makers and representatives of ethnic organisations. These interviews were conducted between 2017 and 2024, transcribed and coded through the software tool Dedoose.

- Participation in 14 meetings and workshops addressing interculturalism and education in Catalonia, including roles as active participant/panellist in some of these (see Annex I).
- A survey with 119 pupils of migrant, Roma and native origin who participated in the REACT project during the period 2023 to 2024.

Examining “Intercultural Education” Through the Lens of Anti-Racism

Intercultural Education Policies in Catalonia

In Catalan intercultural policy narratives, the emphasis lies on promoting broad, positive values such as tolerance, equality and peaceful coexistence (see, e.g. Catalan Government, 2017, 2019). This spirit resonates also in the specific education policy documents. According to the Catalan Department of Education (2024):

Intercultural education is a pedagogic response to the demand to prepare the citizenry so that it can develop in a plural and democratic society. Its ultimate aim is equality of rights, duties and opportunities for all, and the right to difference within a framework of shared values of conviviality, while promoting spaces for interaction and inclusion. To this end, the use of the Catalan language is promoted in a framework of linguistic pluralism, as an element of cohesion and equality of opportunities.

It is noteworthy that the new regional law against discrimination, implemented by the Catalan government in December 2022, had not yet been included in the intercultural education curriculum as this analysis was concluded in August of 2024. This law is considerably more specific and far-reaching than the current more general intercultural education policy formulations and includes a chapter that specifically addresses the education system. According to the law, “specific measures must be taken to guarantee that minors from ethnic minorities remain in the education system,” “the content of the initial and permanent teacher training and the curricular competencies at all educational levels should pay specific attention to equal treatment and non-discrimination” and the Department of Education has to “safeguard that the content of any educational and school material in any format, and the language employed therein, is aware of diversity and avoids any kind of discrimination for this reason” (Catalan Law for equality of treatment and non-discrimination, 19/2020).

The Department of Education offers tools to encourage the schools to implement interculturalism.³ Nevertheless, it is clearly stated that the transformation of policy into practice is mainly the responsibility of the schools themselves. Diversity-positive schools are also explicitly considered the main resources in order to achieve an intercultural education system (Catalan Department of Education, 2024). These policies are not binding, and whether and to what extent they are being transformed into practice depends on the practitioners who may or may

not develop inclusive practices at the ground level. In the case of the education system, these practitioners are primarily teachers and other school staff. The voluntary nature of the intercultural education policies and the fundamental role played by the schools and the individuals working there was also underlined by an interviewed decision-maker at the Department of Education:

“We cannot force this on anyone. It [a successful implementation of interculturalism] depends on many things, on the school boards and the teachers in each school, and there are also differences between teachers. It depends on whether they have been trained in these issues, if they prioritize them, if they have reflected upon them . . . There is a lot of fear, for instance there are teachers who worry about [immigrant] children speaking their own languages during the breaks. So yes, in practice obviously the implementation [of intercultural/pro-diversity guidelines] depends much on the voluntariness of each school, the director and all staff members, and their own ideologies and convictions matter a lot.” *Director at the Catalan Department of Education, 2018*

She also confirmed that while school curricula in general terms stipulate that education should follow basic intercultural principles, there is no control of if and how this is done in the schools, nor is there any evaluation of the text books or other educational material used.

All in all, there are important discrepancies between what interculturalism should mean in practice and whether it should explicitly emphasise anti-racism. The divergences between actors at the level of policy-making and implementation are clearly illustrated by the following quotes, reflecting different views on the role of a shared Catalan language as guarantor of social cohesion, which have been a cornerstone in the Catalan version of interculturalism (Khan & Gallego-Balsà, 2021):

“Many foreign students don’t speak any language well . . . we need to make sure that they learn Catalan to make conviviality work.” *Language, Interculturality and Social cohesion coordinator, Catalan department of education, 2023*

“There is this view that as long as they [the racialised students] learn Catalan, racism will end, and we know that this is not true, that we need to fight against racism at the structural and institutional level.” *Policy-maker, Catalan government, 2023*

Intercultural Education in Practice?

Clearly, how diversity is addressed in the education system ultimately depends on what individual schools, and teachers, choose to do. Let us look closer at some key elements in transmitting a pro-diversity approach to the students: textbooks and other teaching contents and diversity among the teachers themselves.

Diversity in Textbooks

In Catalonia, schools are free to choose what education material they use as long as they comply with the overall learning goals defined by the Department of Education (interviews, 2018–2019). In earlier decades, the Department of Education had to approve textbooks before they could be used in schools. A decision-maker explains the dilemma that this shift towards greater autonomy for individual schools may represent:

“The schools choose what material they use, and if they use textbooks I have to be honest and say that these books may not be very up to date in terms of diversity, but many public schools nowadays don’t use books. We don’t know what teaching material every school uses.” *Director at the Catalan Department of Education, 2018*

Several stakeholders emphasise the impact for both minority and majority origin children’s worldviews of how diversity is represented in school material:

“White children don’t encounter the same ethnic diversity that they see in the streets in the textbooks. And children who are not white don’t feel represented, it is harder for them to identify with the school system.” *Decision-maker in the Catalan Government, participant in meeting M1*

“The general image of Africa is that of poverty and disaster, and the imagery of a ‘poor Africa’ influences how children will look at kids from Africa in their school, for instance. What children learn in schools, from textbooks and other school material, contributes to construct their image of ‘the other.’” *Member of the Catalan Parliament, participant in meeting M1*

“If the schools continue to teach that Columbus ‘discovered’ America, where are we going? In that case we should teach that the Roma discovered Europe – from our perspective it may be true.” *Founder of Roma youth organisation, participant in meeting M2*

The textbook analysis that I conducted concluded that there is generally very little content on immigration and diversity, and racism or discrimination are barely mentioned (Hellgren, 2021). There is also no mention of the Roma people – besides listing this ethnicity among the holocaust victims in one of the books – which is consistent with the criticism by O’Hanlon (2016) referred to earlier.

Diversity in Teaching

A fundamental dimension of diversity in education concerns if and how it is represented in the classrooms. All of the interviewed officers at the Department of Education, headmasters, teachers and other education staff expressed positive attitudes towards the idea of increased ethnic diversity in education content, but many also considered difficult to know what to do in practice. Several teachers claimed

that the information from the Department of Education on how to implement an intercultural perspective in teaching does not reach them. Several headmasters considered problematic that the Department of Education's guidelines are recommendations with no obligation to be implemented: "it is only discourse," one of them said (interviews, 2018).

In approaching how diversity is addressed in the education system, and in relation to the idea of representation as potentially transformative, it was considered relevant to also look at the ethnic diversity among teachers. A mapping was conducted to figure out whether and to what extent there are teachers and other school staff of diverse origins, assuming that the vast majority represents the white, native majority middle-class that is often implicitly understood as the "norm citizenry." This was a challenging task, since there are no forms of ethnic registration in Spain. To keep such registers would be illegal, which is currently a matter for debate and some contestation. There are, for instance, anti-racist actors who claim that it may be necessary to register ethnicity in order to detect and prove discrimination (Hellgren, 2021).

According to the interviewed directors at the Department of Education, it is impossible to know how many teachers there are of migrant or minority origin in Catalonia. They did however state that "teachers are, in general, of Catalan or Spanish origin," a view that was confirmed by the headmasters and teachers (interviews, 2018–2020). This may be considered problematic based on the view that a more ethnically diversified teaching staff is necessary to provide the pupils of diverse backgrounds with role models, to reflect and normalise the actual ethnic diversity in society as a whole, to promote better representation of diversity in educational contents and to prevent racist or discriminatory treatment in schools. A director at the Department of Education believes that reforming the recruitment processes for teachers may be necessary in order to facilitate employment of newcomers:

"That is really something that the Department of Education needs to consider, that the diversity we have in our society is not represented in the classrooms, and how we can change that. The system has been like it is for so many years now and it seems very obsolete." *Vice-director at the Department of Education, 2019*

To diversify the teachers' workforce in terms of ethnic origin was also an indirect objective of the Department of Education's *Plurilingüisme* program, developed in 2019 as part of the intercultural education policy. The program strives to empower children of minority backgrounds and visibilise their origin language and culture by offering classes in minority languages (such as Arabic and Chinese) as part of the curricular activities, eligible for native and minority students alike. At a broader level, this program also claims to foster general attitudes of openness and non-discrimination among all children. Recruiting teachers of minority origin to teach the minority language courses however proved difficult. The system of civil service examinations for teachers partly explains this, as does the low numbers of minority origin students enrolled at the universities' teacher programs, or at the

universities in general, which in turn is related to structural inequalities producing a vicious circle of lacking representation (Hellgren, 2021).

The director of the Plurilingüisme program states that the idea of linguistic pluralism as an asset represents an important discursive shift at the Department of Education, and that there are still varying opinions about it at the department and in the schools, which affects the program's implementation in practice. This view is confirmed by other interviews with decision-makers at the Department of Education and school staff:

“You can find examples of all kinds of attitudes among the school staff. I work with teacher training on interculturalism and linguistic diversity, maybe we have 60 teachers every year who are interested in our training programs. Not everyone is interested in these questions, obviously. Now that we incorporated Arabic and Chinese as foreign languages in the ordinary school programs, there are people who consider this very good and others who don't agree at all. This is evident, there is no consensus on these issues. It is impossible to speak for the whole education system.” *Director, Department of Education, interview 2018*

This statement reflects a general dilemma for an intercultural – and anti-racist – education system: How can actions that aim to translate policy into practice become mainstreamed (and perhaps even compulsory) without people perceiving this as coercive? I referred to this as the “Achilles’ heel of interculturalism” (and perhaps of any ambitious pro-diversity, anti-racist agenda) (Hellgren, 2021): It cannot work unless it is broadly and actively supported and implemented, and many people may be reluctant to do so if this agenda is perceived as truly transformative in ways that they find uncomfortable. In an ethnically homogeneous environment, it is likely that an institutional collective identity is established that may be taken for granted by members of the ethnic majority, but be perceived as exclusionary for people of other origins. A participant at one of the meetings about interculturalism in schools, herself racialised and a former student in the Catalan school system, puts it this way:

“The main problem is . . . the structural racism that is everywhere, in attitudes, in the textbooks. The school system is dominated by those who consider a certain group of people, the Catalan middle and upper classes, as ‘normal.’ There are fantastic people working in the schools, but there are also teachers who are very racist. And it is enough with one or two of these to make your life impossible. If you have a racist teacher, then that is enough to destroy a child’s educational career, he or she will only think of quitting school as soon as possible.” *Immigrant reception worker and PhD Candidate, participant at meeting M2*

This quote leads us to the next section of the analysis, which shifts the focus to migrant and minority experiences and perceptions on the Catalan education system.

Minority Voices on Inclusion and Exclusion in Catalan Schools

In order to complement the views by teachers and other stakeholders, this analysis will be concluded by a section based on two focus group sessions with ethnic minority youth who were schooled in Catalonia, a survey with 119 migrant, Roma and native 14–16-year-olds, 16 interviews with representatives of ethnic organisations and people of ethnic minority origin with positions in public institutions or political parties and the meetings listed in Annex I.

Focus Groups

In the two focus group sessions that were organised in relation to a training of anti-racist role models for the project REACT in July 2023, 20 young men and women who identified as Roma or Muslim participated. All of them were schooled in the Catalan education system, and all shared experiences of negative stereotyping as well as overt racism in the school environment. Overall, they narrated numerous situations that reflected an attitude of moral and cognitive superiority by professionals in the educational field and a wide variety of prejudices centred on their presumed gender roles, future possibilities to find work or their religion. Some examples:

“They [the teachers] say that they are not racists but then the things they say are, are racist, the stereotypes.” *Young Muslim man, 2023*

“I think that they have dehumanized us. As a social educator I see a lot of my colleagues who work with racialised youth automatically tell them that they will not reach the university, that it is better to look for other alternatives for them. They want to decide for us, and when we rebel against that, we are a problem for them.” *Young Muslim woman, 2023*

“At our school they organized talks against sexism only for the Muslim and Roma boys, while the others got to create video games.” *Young Roma man, 2023*

The survey confirms what we have learned throughout the fieldwork conducted for the REACT project: that a majority of the 14–16-year-olds who participated in the project consider that there is a problem with racism in their own school, and have experienced racist treatment themselves. They also highlight that the teachers tend to avoid intervening and are reluctant to talk about racism, while teachers state that there is a lack of teacher training and adequate preparation to deal with the ethnic diversity and racial tensions that they often encounter in the schools.

Stakeholders

Recurrent in the narratives by ethnic minority stakeholders is their emphasis on the need to mainstream diversity. Nearly all of them firmly defended a quota system (while nearly all ethnic majority institutional actors who were interviewed for

the same project, REPCAT⁴ and considered such measures unfair and unpopular among people in general). Some stated that part of their mission is to advocate for some form of positive action to recruit more minority people for positions as police officers or teachers:

“What we want is to place Roma people, and immigrants too but I speak for the Roma, in central positions of public representation, as in the police force and the education system. And they must meet the requirements in terms of qualifications, we cannot compromise on that. So, I propose that if there are say 800 vacancies for police officers, 5 of these could be reserved for Roma people. Nowadays, 5% of all civil service positions are reserved for disabled people, so some could also be reserved for ethnic diversity.” *Leader of Roma organisation, 2019*

“The political parties should apply a quota, 5% for immigrants. But they don’t want to do that. They’re scared. They can do it for women, but that’s different. But within the quota for women, they should state that so and so many should be of diverse origins, and for men, the same.” *Leader of Pakistani organisation, 2019*

Several of the interviews also reflect the subtle exclusion that many racialised Catalans experience and that hampers their sentiments of belonging:

“People just never imagine that I could be Catalan-speaking, though it is my first language, they would always address me in Spanish, assuming that I was Dominican since I’m black. And I suffered a severe personal crisis from all this, never feeling accepted as Catalan and at the same time, not feeling African. I grew up in a white family and felt white, but always different. . . . So, when I decided to opt for civil service examinations . . . it was partly to prevent being discriminated, not having to show up at a private company and see what they thought of me.” *Public officer of African origin, 2019*

“The problem is that there is this clearly defined notion of who is Catalan, and it is very difficult for an outsider to be accepted as Catalan. I went to a talk organized by the Generalitat and said that perhaps it’s not about trying to become, but to stop being Catalan in this way, for everyone . . . when we cease being something fixed, we can all start becoming something else. . . . But that . . . the institutions, they have a defined standard for who can represent them, and who cannot.” *PhD student and intercultural association leader of African origin, 2019*

The experience of racialised people not being seen as natives despite growing up and going to school in Catalonia is overall a salient topic, both in the interviews and during a series of meetings about diversity in education organised by the Barcelona City Council, The Catalan Department of Education and the foundation ACSAR,

respectively (meetings 1–6). This appears to be a common experience by racialised youth in schools, here narrated by a young girl of Pakistani descent:

“I was bullied for being dark during my whole school period. Finally, I got anxiety and started hurting myself. They would say to me, ‘you’re black, you’re not from here,’ and the teachers would not do anything. But moving, I finally got good teachers who helped me, which was fundamental for me being able to study pharmaceutics as I do today.” *Participant at meeting M6*

A young boy of Moroccan origin expresses his gratitude towards a teacher but, seemingly without being aware of this, at the same time he also expresses how being treated as inferior may be so common that it is taken for granted:

“I have a teacher who treats me well despite me being a foreigner, he told me that even if I’m Moroccan, I can still study and read and that has influenced me a lot.” *Participant at meeting M6*

During the same meeting, a renowned Catalan education scholar underlines that “the problem is that the teachers continue to see pupils with foreign background as foreigners.” In the same line of problematisation, a Moroccan-origin anthropologist at another of these meetings claims that ethnic stereotypes are frequently used in the internal evaluations of pupils that schools perform:

“Catalan pupils are described as ‘good students,’ and immigrant children as ‘problematic,’ without any prospect of an academic future. These labels condition the pupils and how they see their opportunities, and themselves.”
Participant at meeting M4

When somebody in the audience asks “why youngsters of minority backgrounds are systematically recommended vocational training programs after compulsory school, while the ‘white kids’ are guided towards academic programs,” a director at the Barcelona City Council’s Education Consortium gives the following account, highlighting the intersection between race/ethnicity and class:

“The problem is that the teachers are white, Catalan, and middle-class. These are the kind of people that go to the university. This is also a matter of class, there are no journalists or teachers from the lower classes for instance. This is another kind of racism.” *Participant at meeting M4*

The families of Roma, Moroccan, Sub-Saharan African and Asian origin who participated agreed that many schools continue to reproduce stereotypical images of children with foreign backgrounds and their families that, despite good intentions, serve to stigmatise them and highlight their “difference.” What they want, they declared, is instead to be allowed to form part of the mainstream, a mainstream that needs to be constantly redefined. As one Roma father said, “it is very important to feel that we are included in the regular school curriculum and not just

during a ‘culture week’’ (meeting M2). In a similar vein, school staff present at a follow-up meeting unanimously declared that they were tired of different “intercultural actions” and considered these inefficient for achieving a more normalised and egalitarian conviviality in schools: “Don’t impose more programs on us – what we need is to mix the students, Catalans with Moroccans, and so on” (meeting M4). This brings us back to the discussion of interculturalism, (anti)racism and equality: Clearly, the gap between pro-diversity policies and actual outcomes is linked to the structural racism and inequalities, and physical segregation, that often prevent such mixing from taking place.

Concluding Discussion

In this chapter, I have addressed the absence of a critical analysis of race and an explicitly anti-racist agenda in the framework of the intercultural narrative. I have taken the case of the Catalan education system and used data from three research projects to advance our understanding of why a pro-diversity policy approach like interculturalism fails to effectively combat (growing) racism and intersectional inequalities. Three specific research questions were posed and investigated.

Firstly, examining Catalan education policies shows that these incorporate the fundaments of interculturalism at a rather general level. A critical analysis of (structural) racism and its (colonial) roots is absent, and more specific guidelines and requirements for a pronouncedly anti-racist education policy have not been implemented. The narratives by teachers and other education stakeholders moreover reflect that the intercultural policy guidelines that schools receive are often perceived as too vague.

Secondly, it is considered problematic both by some decision-makers at the Department of Education and by school staff that the implementation of intercultural education is entirely voluntary. As noted earlier, there is a tendency that only those already committed to intercultural ideals participate in, for instance, teacher training on diversity and anti-racism, or actively strive to include diversity in the classrooms. Ethnic diversity is overall absent from the textbooks, and teachers of minority origin remain very few. In the education system just as in society in general, the actual content and impact of interculturalism depend to a great extent on the commitment to its ideals by majority society, and by individuals in key positions.

Thirdly, the narratives of migrant and minority origin students and stakeholders focus to a great extent on their experiences of exclusion and racism in the education system. The education system that they describe appears as a “racialised social system” (Bonilla-Silva, 1997) in itself, where the cultural and ethnic homogeneity of teachers and other key actors uphold racial biases by which white, native students to a greater extent are perceived as normal and well-behaving, and racialised students as problematic and bound for failure. In this context, there is a need to critically revise the inclusionary and exclusionary elements of a shared national identity as the basis for Catalan interculturalism: Is it about incorporating migrants and minorities in an already existing notion of “Catalanity,” or about reshaping this Catalanity itself into something new?

Finally, there is clearly a need to approach the link between interculturalism, anti-racism and intersectional (in)equality in more tangible ways, for instance by addressing the socio-economic segregation that defines the Spanish/Catalan education system overall and cements a situation in which most vulnerable migrant and minority students are concentrated in public schools with scarce resources. In assessing why so few minority students continue to higher education, it must be considered that the costs for university studies are inaccessible for many low-income households, let alone the existence of some scholarships. Thus, in order to fully understand, and potentially address, the underrepresentation of ethnic diversity, we need to turn to the structural dimensions where race and class intersect and produce a pronounced ethnic/racial penalty in terms of school failure, poverty and social exclusion. Subtle forms of discrimination, of not being fully accepted, of not being selected, of growing up feeling that anything one achieves is “despite of being who one is,” as the narrative by the Moroccan boy reflected earlier, are intimately linked to a generalised migrant/minority disadvantage that reproduces inequality of opportunities from an early age, and contributes to reproduce a society represented by the native, white middle and upper classes (Hellgren, 2019; Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2021b). If interculturalism is really about societal transformation, it cannot limit itself to assuming a utopian scenario of equality while reality is moving in the opposite direction.

Notes

- 1 The chapter is based on empirical research about inclusion/exclusion in education and how ethnic diversity is represented in the Catalan education system, conducted in the framework of three EU-funded research projects led by the author between 2017 and 2024:

REACT: Research-Action against Antigypsyism and Anti-Muslim Discrimination: An Intersectional Approach to Deconstruct Institutional Racism in Schools. Funded by the EU's CERV programme (Citizens, Equality, Rights, Values). Grant Agreement PREUR02922EC-CERV-REACT-101084345.2022–2024.

REPCAT: The Role of the Ethnic Majority in Integration Processes: Attitudes and Practices toward Immigrants in Catalan Institutions. Funded by a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual Fellowship. Grant Agreement: 747075-REPCAT-H2020-MSCA-IF-2016/H2020- MSCA-IF-2016.2018-2020.

Vakeripen/Roma Inclusion in Education: Fostering Constructive Attitudes and Good Practices in the Barcelona Area. Funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) Programme of the EU, Grant Agreement JUST/2015/RDIS/AG/DISC/9372).2017–2018.
The content of this chapter represents the views of the author only and is his/her sole responsibility. The European Commission does not accept any responsibility for use that may be made of the information it contains.

- 2 See footnote 1.

- 3 For instance: Framework for linguistic pluralism (<https://xtec.gencat.cat/ca/projectes/plurilinguisme/>); Protocol for prevention, detection and intervention against hatred and discrimination (<https://xtec.gencat.cat/ca/centres/projeducatiu/convivencia/protocols/conductes-odi-i-discriminacio/>); Teacher training in intercultural competence (<https://xtec.gencat.cat/ca/projectes/intercultural/ambitsactuacio/centres/>); and AULA (resources to apply interculturalism in the classrooms, with emphasis on equal treatment, respect for difference, and how to offer teaching and school material free from stereotypes) <https://xtec.gencat.cat/ca/projectes/intercultural/ambitsactuacio/aula/>.

- 4 See footnote 1.

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Annex I Meetings about interculturalism and education

<i>Meeting ID</i>	<i>Title of the meeting</i>	<i>Date and place</i>
M1	“El tractament de la diversitat als llibres de text” (The treatment of diversity in textbooks)	5 December 2018, Fundació Acsar, Barcelona
M2	“La educació intercultural en diàleg – què en pensen les famílies?” (Intercultural education in dialogue – what do the families think?)	6 March 2019, Espai Avinyó, Barcelona
M3	“Més enllà de l’aula” (Beyond the classroom). Research seminar on school failure among immigrant students.	29 May 2019, Espai Avinyó, Barcelona
M4	“La educació intercultural en diàleg – què en pensen els i les mestres?” (Intercultural education in dialogue – what do the teachers think?)	13 June 2019, Espai Avinyó, Barcelona
M5	“Jornada de llengua y cultures d’origen” (Session about origin languages and cultures). Conference about the Plurilingüisme program of the Catalan Department of Education.	17 May, Department of Education, UPF, Barcelona
M6	“La educació intercultural en diàleg – què en pensen els i les alumnes?” (Intercultural education in dialogue – what do the pupils think?)	20 February 2020, Espai Avinyó, Barcelona
M7	“La construcció del sentit de pertinença dels joves fills de famílies immigrades” (The construction of belonging among children of immigrants)	23–24 October 2019, Generalitat de Catalunya
M8	“For an intercultural future.” Seminar series, stakeholder seminar 1: Immigration politics: challenges, objectives and tools.	9 October 2019. Organised by Fundació Catalunya Europa, Fundació La Caixa, The Club of Rome.
M9	“For an intercultural future.” Seminar series, stakeholder seminar 2: Public management from an intercultural perspective.	19 November 2019. Organised by Fundació Catalunya Europa, Fundació La Caixa, The Club of Rome.
M10	“For an intercultural future.” Seminar series, stakeholder seminar 3: Equity, Equality and Non-discrimination	24 January 2020, Organised by Fundació Catalunya Europa, Fundació La Caixa, The Club of Rome.
M11	National Pact for Interculturalism, official presentation by Generalitat de Catalunya.	14 November 2020, Generalitat de Catalunya
M12	Re-SOMA-GRITIM transnational seminar: Interculturalism and Migration Observatories: Evidences, policy approaches and social ties.	31 January 2020, Generalitat de Catalunya
M13	Debate on education in Catalonia between Miquel Essomba and Zenia Hellgren.	27 February 2020, Pompeu Fabra University
M14	International Intercultural Cities Comparative Meeting. Moderated debate with representatives from ethnic organisations in Catalonia.	22 September 2022, Pompeu Fabra University

6 Paradoxes of Multiculturalism in Retrospect and Prospect

Remodelling Sweden

*Aleksandra Ålund, Carl-Ulrik Schierup, and
Magnus Dahlstedt*

Introduction

“Diversity”: From Credo to Scare

Multiculturalism became a focused issue in both popular and political discourse after the end of the Cold War. The affirmation of migration and ethnocultural diversity was elevated to a European *Credo* – a creed, conveyed not least by the European Commission’s attempts to develop progressive standards of governance. One of its more remarkable manifestations is the declaration *Together in Diversity*. The declaration was drawn up in connection with the designation of 2008 as the *European Year for Intercultural Dialogue* (European Commission, 2009, p. 3), an initiative aimed at initiating long-term processes within the Union and its Member States. The declaration presented Europe’s growing cultural diversity as a unique asset. It was argued that the enlargement of the Union, together with the liberalisation of labour law and of globalisation, had increased the multicultural character of the Member States and the number of languages, religions, and ethnic and cultural backgrounds. As a result, intercultural dialogue was seen as increasingly important in promoting the emergence of a European identity, social cohesion, and European citizenship.

Today, in the third decade of the 21st century, the declaration appears as an anachronistic incantation. Rather than a fresh mainstay for a reverberant intercultural dialogue, 2008 was to become the year that sparked a deep financial crisis shaking the world. This was followed by an escalating political–ideological fusion of key issues for a constantly crisis-threatened neoliberal financial capitalism with those of a soaring neoconservative right-wing nationalism – a development reminiscent of the political landscape of the 1930s. In country after country, austerity policies and a destructive marketisation of welfare systems, which could be discerned already in the 1990s, intensified. An ideopolitical turnabout was accompanied by slogans of “social cohesion” based on a narrow nationalist understanding of so-called “earned citizenship,” a citizenship, explains Joppke (2021a, p. 1), “that is simultaneously more difficult to get and easier to lose” and which “inherits elements of neoliberalism and of nationalism in tandem.” The “culturally alien,” “immigrants,” “migrants,” or “refugees,” came to be, more than ever, scapegoats

for social disarmament and the erosion of the welfare state (Schierup & Scarpa, 2017). These scapegoats are presented as offshoots of the overarching social ill of “multiculturalism,” which in the rhetoric of its detractors loses all meaning and ends up standing for whatever they disagree with.

In this very spirit, in 2011, in the wake of the financial crisis, with a widespread precarisation of work and living conditions, and against the backdrop of popular protests, we witnessed the Heads of Government of the EU’s three most powerful Member States stepping forward and proclaiming in unison the burial of multiculturalism. In Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel sought to avert an increasingly vocal xenophobic movement of discontent by being openly critical of multiculturalism. In France, President Nicolas Sarkozy marketed himself as more patriotic than Marine le Pen of the National Front (who led the polls during the then ongoing presidential campaign), with aggressive descriptions of multiculturalism as a threat to the unity of the nation, social cohesion, and core values. In Britain, Prime Minister David Cameron tried to stem the tide with similar arguments at a time when his pro-EU policies had come to be increasingly challenged by the openly racist United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), but also by a neo-nationalist wave within Labour.

This political volte face within the European Union had been preceded by methodical academic brush clearing. Academic prophecies about cultural diversity as a threat to the nation’s cultural unity, social cohesion, core values, equality, and progress had, in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, left their mark on the political debate, not least on “integration.” They have different philosophical, political, and scientific roots. Among the more influential we find Amatai Etzioni’s (Etzioni, 2002) neoconservative appeal to “free societies,” to stand up for “unity in diversity” and to take seriously the concerns of people’s “sense that they are threatened by massive immigration and by the growing minorities within their borders that hail from different cultures, follow different practices, and have separate institutions and loyalties.” Another example, from the left, was the British publicist David Goodhart’s (Goodhart, 2004) warning that “open borders” and “too much diversity” undermine welfare state solidarity.

Even in Sweden, prominent politicians joined the choir. A governmental proposition from 2009, signed by the premier, highlighted imagined Swedish secular and democratic core values (*värdegrund*) of “emancipatory liberty . . . individual identity and integrity . . . and of subjective livelihood assurance” in critical contrast to retrograde (foreign/imported) values of “economic indemnity . . . and traditional authority exercised by religious institutions, by the family as a normative institution for the primary social group and by a nation mandated to pose demands on the citizen for submission and duty” (SOU, 2009, p. 39, our translation). A position paper by a working group of the leading conservative party (*Moderaterna*) (Nya moderaterna, 2009) emphasised, in turn, problems of a permissive and “caring” (*omhändertagande*) nanny state. The working group asked for a more disciplinary orientation concerning a “welfare dependency tending to be inherited across generations of immigrants,” attributed to multi-ethnic suburban areas where youth was seen to be fostered to social outsiders and to reject Swedish society, its laws, and

norms. “[C]itizenship in Sweden should not be watered down” and, thus, conditions for immigrants and asylum seekers to receive Swedish citizenship should be sharpened. Furthermore, the Working Group concluded that “citizenship received on false grounds should be withdrawn,” a claim highlighted when the proposal was presented in the leading Swedish daily *Dagens Nyheter* under the headline “Take away citizenship from criminal foreigners” (Billström et al., 2008). The ideas of the working group were, in effect, echoed by a proposal for “temporary citizenship” status, put forth by a prominent social democrat (Kvällsposten, 2011), seen as an insurance for foreigners’ good behaviour.

Across the EU and the UK, the tour de force following the 2008 financial crisis has only deepened in intensity since. It relates directly or indirectly to immigration, to the supposed peril of multiculturalism and diversity and the needs to protect European and Christian values in confrontation with Muslims and Islam. This is a political regression which, Werbner contends (2012, p. 198), includes critics “from both the socialist Left and the liberal Centre and Right . . . postmodern anthropologists, feminists and human rights activists” as well as “right-wing racists, traditionalists and nationalists.”

At the time of writing (2024) political protagonists across the EU essentialise culture as fixed and static, which glosses over social, institutional, and economic aspects related to the exclusionary positioning of migrants and minority groups (Schierup et al., 2022; cf. Bogado et al., 2023). Exploring social transformation of contemporary Sweden, we have discussed a deep-seated nationalist political discourse engulfing most of the political landscape (Ålund et al., 2017). It is a development that has exacerbated a racialising stigmatisation of segregated multi-ethnic areas in metropolitan suburbia and a related Islamophobia.

This political U-turn, with overt exclusionary discourses and policies towards immigrants and post-migrant minorities, across Europe and in Sweden, sparked by the financial crisis, stands out, not least, in contrast to the liberal inclusiveness of an internationally famed Swedish multicultural reform agenda of the 1970s, to which we shall attend in the following. It foreshadowed, in effect, a momentous Swedish migration policy debacle that came to follow in the aftermath of the 2015 so-called “refugee crisis” and which continues to deepen at the time of writing (2024). It reflected parameters of a protracted systemic change in several acts, which we delve into aspects of in the following, by reviewing three decades of social transformation in Sweden. This, in turn, illustrates broader policy shifts across Europe, in terms of the implementation of neoliberal welfare reforms in combination with a rise of right-wing nationalist sentiments and their appropriation by mainstream political parties, including the centre-right as well as the political centre-left (Schierup et al., 2023).

The way in which ideas of “culture” and “diversity” have been understood and manifestly rephrased at the top political level after the 2008 financial crisis may seem striking, but it is indeed not as novel as it might appear. It confirms that the criticism formulated in the beginning of the 1990s in the book *Paradoxes of Multiculturalism* (Ålund & Schierup, 1991), as a contribution to the Investigation on Power and Democracy in Sweden (Petersson, 1988), is as relevant today as then.

The book developed a sharp critique of the disparity between politics and practice. It exposed an essentialised homogenisation of cultural differences in political and media discourse, fuelling institutional discrimination and an ethno-racial division of labour and society. The book warned – with reference to the British sociologist John Rex (1985) – that inherently such a distorted “diversity policy” could lead to the emergence of a deeply ethno-racially divided society, political oppression and racial super-exploitation, with South African apartheid as a deterrent example.

The present chapter starts by revisiting visionary Swedish political reforms of the 1970s phrasing social, cultural, and political rights of migrants and ethnic minorities in terms of citizenship on equal terms, and we discuss discrepancies between vision and political practice. We proceed by discussing what has unfolded since the publication of *Paradoxes of Multiculturalism*, in terms of an incremental erosion of the Swedish welfare state, connected with the dominance of commodifying neoliberal polities. We bring out how this development has progressed through several stages of critical cognizance and reform; yet, in consequence, come to frame increasing austerity of migration, social and labour market policies, incremental social inequality, accompanied by securitisation and racialised stigmatisation of migrants and post-migrants. In the final part of the chapter we explore how this transformation of the so-called “Swedish model” of an inclusive welfare state (Schierup & Ålund, 2011; Schierup & Scarpa, 2017), has, in turn, provoked the rise of protest movements focusing issues of social justice (León Rosales & Ålund, 2017). These movements, initiated by a post-migrant generation in Sweden’s disadvantaged suburban neighbourhoods, have branched both translocally and internationally. It is a development that has become a shared experience across the European Union (e.g. Dikeç, 2017, 2007). It has its roots in systematic discrimination and stigmatisation of migrants and racialised others, reflected, as indicated, in an inflamed debate on multiculturalism across Europe. But it provides, as well, arguments for how multiculturalism could be “decolonised” (Alessandrini, 2023) as a resource for transversal conviviality.

Swedish Multiculturalism Revisited

Paradoxes of Multiculturalism was written as part of the Investigation on Power and Democracy in Sweden (SOU, 1990). This inquiry was initiated following a government decision in 1985, and concluded in 1990 with its final report, Democracy and Power in Sweden. The study was an extensive public government inquiry, which set out to map the state of Swedish democracy. Or, as stated in the directive, to “deepen knowledge about the conditions of Swedish democracy, about citizens’ opportunities to influence their living conditions and about the factors that create power to shape tomorrow’s Sweden.”

The inquiry was an important document of the time, from a period of transition in Swedish contemporary history (Dahlstedt, 2009). The report, and in particular the final report, can be read as an expression of the norms and ideals of the time. If we read the final report today, we find a description of a problem according to which the welfare state is seen as in need of extensive renovation. The public sector

had become too extensive, centralised, bureaucratised, and too costly. That was the diagnosis. But above all, the welfare state had deprived the individual of their ability to take initiative and curtailed their of power to create their own life, based on their own will and ability. The answer to what was seen as the problem of the time was therefore sought from the individual. The future would be built on a new social contract, with the individual at the centre, with freedom and personal responsibility as guiding principles.

At the same time, the Study of Power and Democracy was based on research that often conveyed a different story of the state of Sweden at the time, about what created the problems that could be identified and that pointed out other scenarios for the future than what was included in the final report *Democracy and Power in Sweden*. One of these alternative perspectives was the research that came to be presented in *Paradoxes of Multiculturalism*, published the year after the Study on Power and Democracy delivered its final report. The book examines a problem which at that time had only been given limited attention, namely the conditions for migrants and their children offered by the Swedish welfare model. The background was a visionary “immigration policy” formulated 1968–1975, which raised the bar high. The ambition was to transform Sweden into a socially inclusive, multicultural welfare society. On that background *Paradoxes of Multiculturalism* provided a critical examination of the contradictions between theory and practice, which were reflected in the development of Swedish society since a comprehensive immigration and integration policy reform was adopted by the Swedish parliament in 1975.

Visionary Reforms . . .

The reform was influenced by ideas of “multiculturalism” of the time, not least as they had taken shape in Canada, with Sweden being one of the European countries that most markedly adopted a multicultural policy (Borevi, 2013). In tune with these international currents of the time, the Swedish reforms did away with the assimilation policy that had previously been pursued, in favour of one of the most thoughtful and balanced attempts to reconcile a liberal universalist ideal of citizenship with multifaceted cultural identity claims. It was, accordingly, a composite and synthetic reform package.

The new amalgamated immigration and integration policy was guided by the slogan of “Equality, Freedom of Choice, and Partnership,” boldly paraphrasing the “*Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*” of the French Revolution. This expressed a vision of creating a synergy between an inclusive welfare system, a liberal and universalist citizenship, with social rights at the centre, and a multicultural understanding of the Swedish national community (Ålund & Schierup, 1991, p. 2ff). The principles of the three policy goals have been summarised by Tomas Hammar (1985, p. 33) in the following way:

The goal of equality implies the continued efforts to give immigrants the same living standard as the rest of the population. The goal of freedom of choice implies that public initiatives are to be taken to assure members of ethnic and linguistic minorities domiciled in Sweden a genuine choice between retaining and developing

their cultural identity and assuming a Swedish cultural identity. The goal of partnership implies that the different immigrant and minority groups on the one hand and the native population on the other both benefit from working together.

In combination with a reform of the Swedish electoral system in 1976 (Ericsson, 2021), with enfranchisement¹ as an assumed tool for integration, the ambition was, accordingly, to guarantee substantial access to almost all rights of citizenship (social, labour, cultural, political), even for resident aliens. The reform package would guarantee, it was predicted, access to equal rights for everyone living within the country's borders, regardless of origin, and be a safeguard against discrimination and racism. A generous asylum policy and rules for family unification were supported by guarantees of rapid naturalisation and full citizenship based on residence criteria.

Access to full citizenship was, in line with this policy approach, formulated as demonstrably void of national symbolism, and with naturalisation being an easy, largely administrative affair without restrictions in terms of formalised integration requirements regarding language, knowledge, or employment (Borevi et al., 2017). A stable corporate structure and the country's regulated labour-market policies were supposed to guarantee immigrants social and economic security and a protection against discrimination (Ålund & Schierup, 1991, p. 115). The reforms promised, moreover, equal opportunity to engage in civil society with respect for ethnic identities and their cultural expression, in a way that would make it possible to create synergies between social rights and cultural diversity as societal resources. The principles of freedom of choice and partnership were supported by a series of measures concerning, *inter alia*, access to education for children in the language spoken in their home (*hemspråksundervisning*) (Ekstrand, 1980), support for migrants concerning access to and use of the media in their respective "home languages," and extended support for organising. Immigrants' ethnic organisations were assigned with a role as potential facilitators of integration (Sandberg et al., 2023; Ålund & Schierup, 1991, p. 113ff).

... And Their Real Implementation

During the post-war period, Sweden for long owned a progressive shimmer internationally. The famed so-called "Swedish model" of the inclusive welfare state – with a large public sector, a strong trade union movement, and the centrality of collective agreements, and with a remarkable ambition to achieve an even distribution of income and wealth independent of background (Schierup & Scarpa, 2017; Schierup & Ålund, 2011) – has been praised internationally for its forward-looking ambitions concerning equality and social inclusion (e.g. Sunkara, 2019). In *Paradoxes of Multiculturalism*, a story of another Sweden was presented, caught in the gap between inclusive visions and exclusionary realities.

It was obvious that the Swedish model – as it had been implemented since the 1970s – exposed several tensions. An actually existing multiculturalism had been transformed through a series of institutional practices into a bureaucratic "Tower of Babel," bearing an imprint of coloniality, a conglomerate of ethno-nationally

defined collectives, so-called “immigrant organisations,” which were monitored and depoliticised through a system of conditioned public support (Ålund & Schierup, 1991, p. 113ff). At the same time, an administration of an unequal ethnic division of labour was underway, illustrating the shortcomings of the Swedish welfare and labour market model when it came to ensuring equal conditions and protection against discrimination (Ålund & Schierup, 1991, p. 21ff; Schierup & Paulson, 1994). This unequal division of labour, matched by similar patterns in the housing market and in an increasingly segregated school system, jeopardised the vision of “equality” (Ålund & Schierup, 1991, p. 2ff). Urban polarisation based on class, ethnicity, and race had emerged as a socio-geographical expression of the lack of equality, cooperation, and freedom of choice. A racialising discourse was framing “immigrant culture” as an obstacle to “partnership,” and a gender-stigmatising political and media discourse problematised the standing and agency of “immigrant women” (Ålund & Schierup, 1991, p. 47ff).

The Swedish visions for a multicultural welfare society harboured utopian promises. It would create a balance between universalism and particularism.² But in practice, according to the critical scrutiny in *Paradoxes of Multiculturalism*, a hierarchical division of the population in ethno-cultural terms was becoming increasingly evident and, by extension, a polarising stratification of the welfare state in terms of both substantial civil rights and opportunities. Policy implementation was compromised by discriminatory institutional practices that singled out “immigrants” as “problems,” reminiscent of coloniality, based on stereotypical ideas of ethnicity, origin, gender make-up, culture, and religion. The effects became increasingly severe as a significantly weakened welfare state and an increasing racialisation of refugees from Asia and Africa in the 1990s was exacerbated by an exclusionary public debate and structurally embedded discrimination in the labour market (SOU, 2005, p. 56; Behtoui et al., 2018; Schierup et al., 2006).

In connection with the reshaping of the labour market policy model, influential politicians had towards the end of the 1980s advocated a modification of a hitherto rights-based asylum policy, in favour of a more pragmatic market adaptation. A selection procedure was envisaged that would give preference to what were judged to be particularly suitable asylum seekers, corresponding to the need for labour in different niches of the labour market. In addition, ideas were put forward that asylum status should be conditional on a substantially tightened “workfareist”³ policy (Ålund & Schierup, 1991, p. 21ff). Although these political inputs did not have an immediate impact, they foreshadowed a longer-term development that came to fruition in connection with the so-called “refugee crisis” in 2015, connected with the war in Syria (Schierup & Scarpa, 2017).

The shortcomings of Swedish multiculturalism, discussed in *Paradoxes of Multiculturalism*, can be linked to ideas about the nation as an imagined cultural community, about “Swedishness” in contrast to people who have come to be called “immigrants.” Not least, over time, a homogenising view of the “immigrant woman” as a passive and restrained bearer of tradition had become established (Ålund & Schierup, 1991, p. 47ff). This had helped to consolidate a racialising social stratification, while at the same time making invisible a history characterised

by resistance and solidarity. Similarly, young people born and/or raised in Sweden had come to be called “immigrant youth” and sorted into predetermined stigmatising “cultural” boxes – as “criminal boys” and “passive girls” respectively (Ålund & Schierup, 1991, p. 89ff).⁴

In its scrutiny of the changing social climate of the 1980s, *Paradoxes of Multiculturalism* attends, moreover, to the worrying reality that violent proto-Nazi grassroots movements had increasingly begun to make themselves heard. They marched in the streets and burned refugee camps. A right-wing populist party, New Democracy, emerged on the political scene and managed to enter Parliament after the 1991 election, largely thanks to a harsh nationalist tone directed against Swedish immigration and integration policy, with a rhetoric supported by arguments about a problematic presence of non-adaptable culturally deviant “foreigners.”⁵ At the beginning of the 1990s, we could thus face the scenario of a completely different society than the inclusive welfare state that Sweden has long stood for internationally, discerning dimly, already then, a coming “end of Swedish exceptionalism” (Schierup & Ålund, 2011).

On the other hand, the emergence of alternative identity work in the form of the establishment of networks and new cross-border cultural expressions could be observed, not the least among young people living in the stigmatised peripheries of cities. A new political subjectivity took shape. In the light of contemporary studies of young people in the UK’s inner cities (Gilroy, 1987), the development in Sweden in the 1990s seemed to point in a similar direction, that is a development where cultural expressions crossed socio-cultural boundaries and supported an alternative performance on the public stage.

Systemic Transformation: A Drama in Several Acts

Today, when we look back on the three decades that have passed since *Paradoxes of Multiculturalism* was published, we can note that over time, the development described in the book has accelerated, rather than slowed down. We have both internationally and in Sweden witnessed how claims that “multiculturalism has failed” have been repeated as a seemingly given truth and thus come to function as a constant excuse of all sorts of political betrayals. As in the early 1990s, these commandments bear witness more to a glaring gap between utopian rhetoric and crass reality, than to a vibrant, social, and cultural diversity of society. This shows that the criticism that could be directed at academia, mass media, and politics in the early 1990s has become increasingly topical and acute. In the 2000s, we see in Sweden, contemporary Europe and in large parts of the rest of the world, a “global apartheid” emerging (Bak Jørgensen & Schierup, 2022). A divided society is being consolidated through the racialisation of the Others, a still-ongoing nationalist-populist uniformity and a continued erosion of civil rights through austerity policies, dismantling, and privatisation of welfare.

However, the shift in immigration policy in the early 1990s, to today’s moral policy collapse, does not follow a straight line. The 1990s were marked by the deep economic crisis and the neoliberal turn that gained momentum with the crisis.

The crisis and the marketisation reforms introduced in its wake came to shake up the entire Swedish welfare model. At the same time, in the 1990s, a new migration and integration policy was formulated, inspired by those-days' US progressivism (Schierup & Ålund, 2011). The new "integration policy" that replaced the reform package of the 1970s had the explicit aim of breaking with stereotypical categorisations on ethno-cultural grounds. However, "culture" continued to be exploited as a kind of floating signifier in a political struggle to define the meaning of "integration" (Dahlstedt, 2005). Sweden came in the 1990s to adopt a variant of Anglo-American diversity management. It was integrated with the establishment of a UK inspired, "third way" political hegemony (Schierup et al., 2006, Chapter 8), instrumentalised in the commodification and depoliticisation of civil society (Schierup et al., 2021; cf. Mitchell, 1993), in parallel with the proliferation of low-wage racial niches within an increasingly ethnically segmented labour market.

After 2000, the development of such "occupational ghettos" (Feuchtwang, 1982) has been cemented, not least through the legally uncertain practice for the import of foreign labour introduced by the Labour Migration Act in 2008 (Schierup & Scarpa, 2017, p. 64). It is a law that the Swedish blue-collar confederation (the LO) claimed would bring with it both wage dumping, hyper-exploitation of migrant labour, and, in addition, increase in racism (Klepke, 2019). This development turnaround was followed by a drastic tightening of the asylum system in the aftermath of the 2015 "refugee crisis" (Schierup & Scarpa, 2017, p. 65ff). Asylum seekers are now systematically locked into increasingly precarious segments of the labour market, connected with austere income requirements. In the long run, the development has laid a foundation for the emergence of a neoconservative alliance, today (2024) in power – which merges the national populism of the far-right, populist party The Sweden Democrats, with the heartfelt issues of a neoliberal, but at the same time increasingly neoconservative political right, as well as Swedish big capital. This alliance actively advocates a welfare state that makes a clear distinction between deserving and undeserving – on the one hand, civic and social privileges reserved for increasingly narrowly defined deserving indigenous citizens, and on the other, vulnerable and precarious undeserving "foreigners," deprived of basic civil rights.

A crucial difference between the early 2020s and the early 1990s is that both established right-wing parties, and Social Democrats now explicitly pursue a political struggle within a rhetorical terrain previously occupied by the populist extreme right. A national-populist agenda has taken over an increasing part of the political field as the established parties have appropriated The Sweden Democrats' agenda in a competition for the votes of a disoriented electorate, for which an appeal for welfare state solidarity seems increasingly less convincing. The key point here is that of the nation as a narrowly defined and exclusively cultural community – increasingly distant from the liberal philosophical roots and basic institutional conditions for an inclusive democracy. Trapped in this "post-political" state (Tesfahuney & Dahlstedt, 2008), the established political parties have increasingly abandoned visions of solidarity, equality, and social justice.

Nation in Reshuffle

The transformation that the Swedish model has undergone since the early 1990s was followed up in the collected volume *Reimagineering the Nation* (Ålund et al., 2017), which takes on the task of examining central dimensions of the political and social upheavals that have taken place in Sweden over more than three decades. What emerges is a profound crisis of solidarity, which has in many ways been fuelled by a market-liberal policy transforming Sweden from one of the world's most egalitarian countries to the OECD country that has shown the fastest increase in inequality since the mid-1990s (Therborn, 2018). It is, with reference to the historian Karl Polanyi (Polanyi, 1944/2001), a "great transformation," with parallels to the economic and political crisis of the 1930s. The book ties together various historical events that laid the foundation for the Sweden we live in today: starting with the massacre of demonstrating workers in Ådalen in 1931, which was the prelude to a great compact between labour and capital in 1938 (*Saltsjöbadsavtalet*), further through the rise of a powerful labour movement and its importance for the construction of the Swedish welfare state, and including the social transformation of recent decades, made possible by the neoliberal reform agenda that has gained ground since the early 1990s. From one crisis to another, Antonio Gramsci's (Gramsci, 1971) well-known understanding of crisis aptly captures this event: likened to a protracted interregnum where the old order fades away while what is to come has not yet been given any clear outlines.

"Migration as a problem" appears in this light as a cover for a social and political crisis linked to the profound transformation of the Swedish welfare model caused by a protracted and multifarious systemic change. The transformation has meant a weakening of a traditionally strong organisation of civil society, which had previously been the driving force in the reform work that led to the gradual expansion of the welfare state. As an illustrative example, state funding for migrant organisations has recently been put to an end, as efforts of such organisations are seen as counterproductive in terms of integration into Swedish society (Dahlstedt & Fejes, 2024). Neoliberal ideas, put into practice, have paved the way for precarious conditions in a racialised labour market, the erosion of the humanitarian basis of refugee policy, and an increasingly glaring inequality within a market-driven school system (Dahlstedt & Trumberg, 2017). This comes together with deteriorating living conditions in cities that are figuratively falling apart.

Over the past three decades, we have seen housing segregation increase and how young people's conditions have increasingly come to differ, depending on where they live, which parents they have, their origin, skin colour, and their family's educational background. In parallel with this increasing polarisation, there is a vigorous political debate about "deviant behaviour" and crime (Dahlstedt, 2018). In the public debate, the problems are located on the precarious peripheries of cities, in a way that disconnects the perceived problems from their structural, social contexts, since they appear to be caused *per se* by the culturally deviant suburb and its inhabitants. The victims of an oppressive system change are blamed for their own vulnerability. To address the problems, various types of measures have been

developed, specifically aimed at these so-called “outsidership areas” (*utanförska-psområden*). The demands for tougher measures have succeeded each other and have led to a post-political outbidding carousel where parties compete to formulate the most repressive measures, with promises of the fastest and most visible effect in the short term. Long-term structure-oriented preventive work has been overshadowed in this merry-go-round.

It is a development that, with the takeover of government by right-wing and centre-right parties (2022) in alliance with The Sweden Democrats, can be envisaged to become exacerbated by implementation of the so-called “Tidö Agreement” (2022). This neo-conservative political compact harbours a number of discriminatory goals, including special legislation relating particularly to the nation’s most disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods. It envisages, among others, forms of securitisation outlawed in Sweden in general, and legally enforced area-based discrimination concerning housing and social policy. This has come in tandem with an ongoing (2024) governmental inquiry that has been given the task to investigate the possibility of forcing employees across the country’s welfare institutions to report all people who do not have a residence permit, that is a legal right to reside in the country, to the Migration Agency. The investigation has also been tasked with examining the possibilities for possible sanctions on employees who do not comply with the new rules that are proposed to apply (Justisdepartementet, 2024). The proposal has attracted opposition, not least from trade unions representing employees on the front line of the country’s welfare institutional system, including health care, schools, and social services (Ragnegård et al., 2023).

An exacerbated austerity in migration, refugee, and labour market legislation and policies legitimises further an ongoing precarisation of labour and livelihoods, and racial super-exploitation in occupational ghettos. It induces thus a dynamic of neo-apartheidisation, calling to memory John Rex’s dire warning referred to in the introduction of this chapter. It implicates, in effect, the end of an époque of inclusionary politics envisioned by the political reforms of the Swedish model of the welfare state initiated in 1975.

Renaissance from the Margin

In parallel with this development, we can witness how alternative dreams of a different society are taking shape, including through anti-racist mobilisation in workplaces, solidarity with undocumented migrants, and, not least, through the organisation of young people in the peripheries of cities. After the financial crisis in 2008, marginalised urban areas became the scene of political resistance, both in the form of violent expressions of discontent by urban uprisings (2009 and 2013) and in the form of organised activism that has profiled itself as a new urban justice movement (León Rosales & Ålund, 2017). Through popular education and political mobilisation, young people confront the image of their stigmatised neighbourhoods as culturally “deviant.” These same neighbourhoods become seats of an urban justice movement, involving progressive creation of a cohesive social and geographical space of identity and resistance where the oppressed of the city can “straighten

their backs in dignity” (Sernhede et al., 2019). With its focus on awareness raising and education in the struggle for a just society, this local community movement could be compared to the early labour movement (Schierup et al., 2021).

The community movement is about grassroots mobilisation revolving around cultural stigma, racialised spatial segregation, discrimination, and social injustice (Sernhede et al., 2019). The movement expresses a locally rooted, but translocally branched, resistance to the exclusion that affects the residents and not least the young in suburban areas around Sweden (León Rosales & Ålund, 2017). Through this, the suburb’s young people invoke their right to live on equal terms through a countermovement with demands for their own voice. A particularly dramatic expression of the demand for justice was the uprising that took place in Stockholm in 2013. The uprising began as a spontaneous resistance to stigmatisation and police violence linked to an increasingly tangible erosion of social justice and democracy (Schierup et al., 2014), but also helped to bring a more articulate anti-racist organisation into the public spotlight, supported by young people on the peripheries of cities – a kind of “renaissance from the margins,” where both trans-local and international activist networks were interwoven (León Rosales & Ålund, 2017; Sernhede et al., 2019).

We cannot know with certainty what effects the organising that has taken place within the urban justice movement has had. Nevertheless, we believe that the imprint that this movement has made in the public debate gives hope, as young people organise themselves and raise demands for social justice and civil rights in a way that reminds of and draws inspiration from the former Swedish labour movement (Schierup et al., 2022). The dreams, visions, and achievements of the past are linked here to a contemporary struggle to reconquer the country that once seemed exemplary.

Finally, let us turn back to the issue of culture. Culture is continuously being created, recreated, and intersected with other social categories, such as race, class, and gender (Hall, 1992, p. 255). As we have already pointed out with reference to the position taken in *Paradoxes of Multiculturalism*, the cultural forms that develop in multicultural contexts are expressions of a complex interplay between oppressive social conditions, structurally grounded inequality, and racialising stigmatisation. Based on these conditions, social communities, new bridging cultural identities, and political solidarities develop.

The urban justice movement has expanded beyond the local struggles of marginalised urban neighbourhoods. It is the expression of a search for democratic renewal. It conveys a vision that has been given new expressions in the present, led to new alliances between old and new representatives of civil society, and taken up new struggles for the restoration of democracy and welfare as universal values (Schierup et al., 2022). One example is the broad popular mobilisation opposed to dispossession through privatisation of public housing, threatening the livelihoods of the nation’s dispossessed. It co-initiated a national protest movement against a government proposal for legislation (2020–2021) that would entail a market-driven rent setting in the housing sector. An important role in this mobilisation was occupied by the Social Centre in Folkets Husby (Husby of the People), in the Stockholm

suburb of Husby – the place where the mentioned 2013 urban uprising started, through one of its driving member organisations, “Ort till Ort” (Neighbourhood to Neighbourhood). In collaboration with Hyresgästföreningen (the national tenants’ organisation), Norra Järva District Council, “Välfärdsalliansen” (the welfare alliance) and Ort till Ort arranged a start-up meeting in Folkets Husby for residents in Stockholm in February 2020. The mobilisation continued with demonstrations, which on 18 April 2021 took place in 150 locations around Sweden. The demonstrations brought together more than 70 organisations, networks, and local associations – a popular mobilisation with international ramifications that crosses generations and brings together a diversity of local communities, civil rights organisations, established civil society organisations, and trade unions.

Conviviality Beyond Rhetoric

The Swedish experience relating to the reception and accommodation of migrants and asylum seekers represents the rise and fall of a specific Nordic version of a liberal multiculturalism. It offered a ramified body of substantial rights of citizenship – civil, political, cultural, social, and labour rights – that was based on the extensive political reform programme formalised in the mid-1970s. It was for long coupled with a generous policy of asylum. However, as discussed in the preceding, we have step by step seen a disciplinary neo-liberalism consolidating and merging with a budding neo-conservative moral-political hegemony and forging the breaking up of a comprehensive pact of inclusive citizenship.

This trajectory demonstrates that Sweden has now caught up with the erosion or fragmentation of citizenship and with exclusionary policies of migration and asylum across Europe. The way in which “culture” and “difference” are conceptualised in dominant political and mass media narratives appears to prove that the prescient critique we directed towards dominant discourses on migration and culture in *Paradoxes of Multiculturalism*, published three decades ago, is as timely as they were.

The book brought out that structurally grounded ethnic/racial inequalities came to be represented in terms of “blame the victim” cultural stereotypes. It demonstrated how “culture” had become conceptualised as self-contained, homogeneous, and static, thus forging a discursive ground for today’s understanding of ethnicity, culture, and identity in politics and media, divorced from structural and institutional disjunctions. This was sanctioned in media and political discourse and became the basis of popular common sense, institutional practice and technocratic management, grounding an unequal ethnic division of labour.

We see this development as foregrounding an ominous conjuncture, in the situation of political, economic, and social crisis, referred to in the beginning of this chapter. It was the moment at which leading centre-right politicians came to announce migration, multiculturalism, and “diversity” as a threat to *our* cultural unity, social cohesion, core values, and equality. We have argued that this signifies the growth of an ethnonationalist trend across Europe, and in Sweden, as a stratagem of crisis management taking recourse to a racialising cultural essentialism (Ålund, 2003),

disengaged from social context and structurally grounded precarisation of livelihoods and labour (Schierup & Ålund, 2011; Schierup et al., 2021). A categorial interpretation of social conflict, explained in terms of “culture”—divorced from class and structurally grounded divisions—has currently become the dominant political narrative across centre-right and centre-left in Sweden (Schierup et al., 2021), focused on migration as the primary cause for a social system falling apart, and with securitisation and militant policing in an unruly multi-ethnic suburbia as prevalent instruments of crisis management.

Some of today’s most fateful questions can thus be related to the dilemma of the Swedish transformation, sketched in *Paradoxes of Multiculturalism*; that is how the real diversity of society and its socio-cultural dynamics are reduced and shrunk into a stereotypical culturalisation of all social relations, which effectively conceals an ongoing albeit multifaceted process of social exclusion of migrants and post-migrants. We described, along these lines, the early 1990s as a crucial historical crossroad, at which “culture” had come to serve as an ideological “battleground” for the political struggle (Wallerstein, 1990), not only in a crisis-ridden national welfare state like Sweden, but in a broader global context. It was a stage in history where the outlines of a new political order began to appear increasingly evident in Europe. We saw Fortress Europe’s obscure scenario favouring discriminatory administrative practices, stimulating regressive populist movements, and eroding the conditions for an alternative organisation against racism and systemic segregation. But it was also a conjuncture that provoked the awakening of new, more inclusive solidarities, developing across racialising divisions.

We saw, across the chapters of *Paradoxes of Multiculturalism*, these emerging solidarities as a potential for change, especially if they could facilitate dialogue between new and old popular movements, which in turn could both cross and connect different levels—from the local to the supranational (Schierup et al., 2023). We discussed theoretical and analytical approaches and categories, connecting the universal and the particular and making visible and inclusive the voices, experiences, and needs of the most disadvantaged. We described stigmatising alienation as a basis for a responsive mutual recognition among Sweden’s ethno-racial “others,” and the impending emergence of new transversal social solidarity movements (Ålund & Schierup, 1991, p. 137ff). Against this background, we concluded the final chapter of the book with a future scenario envisaging the emergence of a diversity of anti-racist movements, outside, within, and through the state. With this budding emergence, we envisioned a democratisation of the state and a possible development of a more inclusive trans-ethnic society, locally, regionally, and globally.

During the 2000s, we have indeed seen the contours of such an alternative scenario coming to fruition, among other, as related to above, through the mobilisation of new inventive justice movements across Sweden’s disadvantaged multi-ethnic suburbia, transversing boundaries of race, ethnicity, gender, and locality. It is a popular mobilisation and resistance to the dominant hegemony that has brought forward an alternative understanding of conditions for social inclusion, an

understanding that brings to light the pertinence of transversal agency as a response to the dismantling of the welfare state and the apartheidisation of cities and society (Schierup et al., 2021). It reflects an “intersectionality of struggles,” as expressed by Alessandrini (2023, p. 297).

It is a current development that confronts a polarising social segmentation and its connection with racialising boundaries in terms of “culture,” disconnected from structurally conditioned local and global conditions. Mobilisation against these dystopian forces brings to the fore a new vision of a transversal multiculturality not just in terms of agency but in terms of the reality of cultural conviviality. It may succeed to unbury some of the inclusive visions and principles of what a liberal Swedish multiculturalism originally promised to be, amalgamated with a more radical anti-racism and anti-coloniality. Such visions are indeed needed, in contrast to current conceptions of belonging and participation in society, as a hope for the future, with other models of migration and integration possible, not only to imagine but also to put into practice.

Notes

- 1 Guaranteeing voting rights for all to municipal and regional assemblies after three years of documented and uninterrupted sojourn in Sweden (Sveriges Riksdag, 1975).
- 2 Principles discussed by, for example Kymlicka (1995) in the influential book *Multicultural citizenship: A liberal theory of minority rights*.
- 3 The concept of Welfare, originally introduced in Anglo-Saxon countries, implies that income protection against unemployment is made conditional on job-seeking efforts, with a constant disciplinary monitoring of recipients' cases and the imposition of sanctions in the event of non-compliance with eligibility rules (e.g. Schierup & Scarpa, 2017, p. 55ff). It was a principle up for discussion by the end of the 1980s, related to Swedish refugee policy, yet only brought into institutional practice following the so-called “refugee crisis” of 2015–2016. It implicates a profound change in the management of asylum, which has become an increasingly globalised practice (e.g. Schierup et al., 2023). It entails to conditional residence and economic support for asylum seekers and temporarily protected refugees on engagement in (in reality, most often low-wage and precarious) employment (Scarpa & Schierup, 2017).
- 4 These issues have been further discussed in Ålund (1991) on migrant and ethnic minority women's social conditions, networks, and agency in Stockholm, and in Ålund (1997) on gender, youth, agency, and syncretic culture. See also for example Mulinari and Lundqvist (2017), on discourses, politics, and institutional practices in Sweden stigmatising, discriminating, and racialising allegedly “burdensome” and “threatening,” “migrant women” in the Swedish welfare state.
- 5 See further, for example (Schierup & Ålund, 2011), on neo-liberalism and nationalist populism, Berggren and Neergaard on right-wing extremism (2015), Rydgren and van der Meiden on the rise of populism in Sweden (2019), and Schierup and Paulson (1994) on racism in the workplace. For a comprehensive international perspective on immigration, neoliberalism, and the rise of the populist right, see Joppke (2021b).

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Part III

Whose belonging?



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7 A Folk Psychological Analysis of Migration-Related Narratives in Bulgaria

Who Gets to Belong?

Leda Kuneva and Maria Stoyanova

Introduction

Bulgaria's experience of the 2015 European refugee crisis and the 2022 Ukrainian refugee crisis (UNHCR, 2023; Spindler, 2015) was not only one of economic, political, and legal dimensions. In the immediate periods after the beginning of these two crises, as well as to this day, a significant social phenomenon came to light. A study from 2017 points out that Bulgarians understood the so-called "refugee problem" through the lens of "othering" (Erolova, 2017) – a negative process of differentiation between Bulgarians (and Europeans) and migrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees (MASR) from the Global South. This process is not, however, specific to the Global South MASR. It has long existed in the way Bulgarians set themselves apart from the Roma and the Turkish minorities at the national level (Erolova, 2017; Kligman, 2001; Lambrev, et al., 2018). However, in 2022, "othering" broke out of its religious and ethnic bonds and attached to Ukrainian refugees – representatives of a white, Christian nation, close in culture, language, and traditions to Bulgarians.

As witnesses to this new manifestation of a familiar social pathology, we wanted to study this differentiation and establish any differences in public opinion towards Global South and Ukrainian MASR. At an informal level, living in Bulgaria in 2022–2023 allowed us to have contact with various narratives that were emerging in Bulgarians' perceptions towards Ukrainian refugees – we heard talk of brotherhood and innocence, but also resentment and discontent. We hypothesised that our research would uncover a dominance of positive narratives about Ukrainians during the first months of the Ukrainian conflict that would then gradually diminish and disappear almost completely, aligning with the historically negative narratives around Global South MASR.

We chose a qualitative methodology based on online and social media observation in the period of 24 February 2022 to 24 February 2023 (the year following the start of the Ukrainian conflict). In this chapter we discuss the results of the observation through two datasets (280 comments associated with online media articles, and 150 comments on public Telegram channels), divided into segments for the two MASR groups, sorted by positive/negative sentiment, and categorised into different themes. We interrelate the discussion of the narratives we have identified with elements of Bulgarian folk psychology – the lasting convictions that

Bulgarians hold about themselves and associated behaviours and attitudes. We discuss negative-sentiment narratives such as othering; aggression, brutality, and death; wider issues in conjunction with migration; and quasi-positive-sentiment narratives of solidarity and the idea of “good” versus “bad” migrants, concluding that migrants belonging in Bulgarian society is incredibly difficult to achieve.

Situating Narratives: A Socio-Political Environment Bleeding into Lasting Perceptions

Migration-related narratives are expansively understood as diverse, heterogeneous, and dynamic perceptions, identities, repeated “truths,” explanations, stories, systems, beliefs, and tools of collective identity that are continuously communicated, refabricated, passed on, formed, and reformed by a multitude of actors (Akanle, 2018; Cantat, 2015; Farini, 2019; Kuneva et al., 2022; Mitzen, 2018). This definition evolved from work under the Horizon 2020 PERCEPTIONS project¹ – an initiative dedicated to studying (mis)perceptions about migration. The present chapter is inspired by the results of a systematic literature review (SLR), covering some 211 studies of migration-related narratives (Bayerl et al., 2020). We are interested in the host-country narratives, as an indication of the content we might see in our study: from fearing migrants as terrorists, criminals, a threat to solidarity and the upholding of human rights, and the idea of deserving versus undeserving migrants. Here, narratives are important as instruments for constructing a sense of belonging and establishing belonging “criteria” (Cantat, 2015; Mitzen, 2018). This research gave us a foundation for examining what such beliefs may mean for belonging in Bulgaria.

Bulgaria is a country geographically located on the crossroad between Europe and Asia. This strategic location has determined its development in multiple aspects – politically, culturally, socioeconomically. Since its establishment, the medieval Bulgarian state was based on the union between different ethnic groups – the Bulgar, Slavic, and Thracian tribes. Migration patterns have influenced Bulgarian national and cultural identity through the historical coexistence of diverse ethnic communities (Mancheva, 2020; Nakova, 2019). However, in the increasingly multicultural environment caused by recent migration events, we observe the introduction of new “others.” MASR constitute the group of foreigners whose cultural identities, behavioural, and social norms are seen as unfamiliar to locals. Consequently, the newcomers are often perceived to be a danger or disturbance to established orders (Balabanov & Lendzhova, 2018; Mancheva, 2020; Nakova, 2019), or a security threat because of economic concerns rather than assimilation challenges (Kyuchukov, 2016). This is confirmed by surveys conducted by UNHCR among Bulgarians in 2020.

The plurality of factors in the formulation of perceptions towards migration and MASR in Bulgaria allude to the need to choose a frame through which to understand the formulation of migration-related narratives and the impact of these narratives on MASR belonging. Common prisms of thinking can include legal and policy landscapes, intra-state ethnic diversity, state wealth, and welfare system quality. Our literature review has, however, established that it is not objective

conditions, but the perceptions of them that can give rise to migration-related narratives. Such perceptions are embedded in the concept of Bulgarian folk psychology. Folk psychology is another concept of fluid definition, which Todorova describes as “the general and specific features in the national character” (2011, p. 117). This definition calls for refinement, so we take existing identity work (Balabanov & Lendzhova, 2018; Kaneva & Popescu, 2011; Sotirova, 2018) to think about folk psychology as the enduring beliefs that Bulgarians hold about themselves and the behaviours and attitudes arising from them. This prism houses our study.

Method and Overview of Results

Our study relies on online and social media observation in spaces or platforms where user-generated content is displayed (Weller, 2015). Here we discuss the results of a review of comments associated with 20 migration-related articles in 7 online media outlets, and 5 public Telegram channels. The study covers the period of 24 February 2022 to 24 February 2023 with data collected in May 2023. From an ethical point of view, we limit the study to “public spaces where people may expect to be observed by strangers” (University of Edinburgh, Centre for Data, Culture & Society, 2021; Mahoney et al., 2022) to mitigate the need for explicit consent. On issues of anonymity, vulnerable populations, and harm, we follow established ethical guidance for Internet-facilitated research (British Psychological Society, 2021; Townsend & Wallace, n.d.; Moreno et al., 2013). We purposefully do not include direct quotes to mitigate de-anonymisation, and rely on public, post-moderation content on platforms that do not require registration.

We partnered with the Bulgarian company Identrics to collect the data. The reference list for online media included 15 outlets (with open public comment section for unregistered users, comment section moderation, and availability of Terms and Conditions and/or Privacy Policy) and indicative news articles. Due to the large amount of data collected (>50,000 data points), the gathering was limited based on timeline, engagement with migration-related issues, and comment availability – 37 articles covering both MASR groups. Technical limitations excluded 8 media outlets and 17 articles; 2,294 comments were collected. For 18 articles, the relevancy review included all comments (842 comments). For the remaining 2 articles, which included 500+ comments, a random number generator was used to determine 84 comments per article to be included in the review.

Thus, our review included 1,000 comments, of which 720 were excluded due to no or limited relevance to the subject matter of this study or neutral sentiment, duplication, and extreme profanity and/or toxicity (e.g. comments containing no-context profanity, links to pornographic websites, etc.); 280 comments were included:

- Comments about Global South MASR: 22.14% of the total, of which:
 - Negative portrayals of Global South MASR: 91.93%
 - Positive portrayals of Global South MASR: 8.07%

- Comments about Ukrainian MASR: 71.43% of the total, of which:
 - Negative portrayals of Ukrainian MASR: 92.50%
 - Positive portrayals of Ukrainian MASR: 7.50%
- Context comments: 6.43% of the total.

The reference list for the social media observation included 30 Telegram channels identified as such that do or are likely to discuss migration-related topics. Data points count range from <1,000 to >38,000, which required a keyword search in five randomly selected channels according to a list of 10 keywords: migrant(s), refugee(s), Ukrainian(s), war, border(s), migration, invader(s), Afghan(s), Syrian(s), Urki/Ukri; in Bulgarian language: мигрант(и), бежан/-ец/-ци, украин/-ец/-ци, война, границ/-а/-и, миграция, пришъл/-ец/-ци, афганистан/-ец/-ци, сири/-ец/-ци, Урки/Укри. This yielded 3,090 submissions; 2,558 comments were excluded due to factual discussion or links to war-related news, leaving 532 comments for review. Of these, 150 posts were deemed relevant to the study:

- Comments about Global South MASR: 38.67% of the total, of which:
 - Negative portrayals of Global South MASR: 94.83%
 - Positive portrayals of Global South MASR: 5.17%
- Comments about Ukrainian MASR: 56.00% of the total, of which:
 - Negative portrayals of Ukrainian MASR: 89.29%
 - Positive portrayals of Ukrainian MASR: 10.71%
- Context comments: 5.33% of the total.

We used a combination of non-automated sentiment and thematic content analysis. The eligible comments were divided in two segments: comments addressing Global South MASR and comments addressing Ukrainian MASR. The comments were then subdivided into two sentiment groups – positive and negative. Supplementary context comments were reviewed separately. The comments were coded in English language and assigned to themes. Quantitative analysis was implemented to show theme frequency. Insights from the sentiment and thematic analysis were discussed in conjunction with context comments and existing literature on Bulgarian folk psychology.

The Bulgarian Perspective: Who Gets to Belong?

Our initial hypothesis foresaw predominantly positive opinions towards Ukrainian refugees in the early months of the conflict that would over time converge with those towards Global South MASR. Our findings disproved this hypothesis. Negative comments towards Ukrainians are just as likely to appear in the early months of the study period (March to June 2022) as they are later on. In fact, the largest number of negative comments towards Ukrainians in our online media sample are

from the beginning of May and June 2022. The small number of positive comments is dispersed throughout the whole period, showing no clear moment of support.

A Brief Interlude: Quasi-Positive Narratives and Fractured Acceptance

Our online media dataset contains a small number of comments carrying positive sentiment – 5 comments in the Global South MASR segment, and 15 comments in the Ukrainian MASR segment. On Telegram, there are three and nine comments, respectively. In our Global South MASR segments, we observe solidarity themes in comments that call for help, non-discrimination, and, most importantly, humane and equal treatment. In the Ukrainian MASR segments, positive sentiment comments support more varied narratives – from solidarity, and brotherhood, to economic value, and the idea of innocence. These opinions often build a gendered image of Ukrainian MASR as innocent, unproblematic women and children (encountered in 13.33% of positive Ukrainian MASR comments on online media articles) from a brothering nation (20%). Ukrainian migrants and refugees are also seen as good for the tourism sector in Bulgaria (20%). Corresponding themes are observed on Telegram.

We titled this section “quasi-positive” narratives to communicate the implication of “good” and “bad” migrants. While we discuss this phenomenon in more detail in the following section, it is worth noting a key dissimilarity between the positive comments in our Global South MASR online media segment and those in our Ukrainian MASR segment. Unlike the comments we sorted in our negative sentiment sub-segment for Global South MASR, comparisons between Global South MASR and Ukrainian MASR defend equitable and better treatment, instead of equal, but collectively worse treatment – a dissatisfaction with the double standard of treatment (80% of positive Global South MASR comments), similar to what we see on Telegram. In contrast, positive comments for Ukrainian MASR are likely to be critical towards Global South MASR and cite positive traits that Ukrainians have that differentiate them from “other” migrant groups and bring them closer to “us,” thus supporting a narrative of the “good” and “bad” migrants – those that are culturally similar to “us” and those that are foreign. Finally, we see the idea of “good” versus “bad” migrants at the intra-group level, as comments are more likely to empathise with “real” Ukrainian refugees – those that commenters perceive as truly in need of help, and the “false” refugees that have ample financial means.

A Long Intolerance: Negative Narratives and the Idea of Otherness

Qualifications and Descriptions

Our analysis aimed to uncover the way Bulgarians speak about and describe migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees from both geographic regions. Firstly, when speaking about Global South MASR in online media comments, Bulgarians are likely to use the term “migrant” (“мигрант”), while they are less likely to

attach “migrant,” “refugee,” or “asylum seeker” to Ukrainians. Ukrainian MASR are most commonly referred to as “Ukrainians,” followed by a derogative amalgamation of “Ukrainians” and the name of a malevolent species from J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* (Orcs) – Urks or Ukrs (“Урку,” “Укру”), the derogative “hohli” (“хохлы”) – a Russian paternalist term for Ukrainians, and only then followed by “Ukrainian refugees.” These observations are supported by our findings from Telegram with the divergence of “refugee” appearing more frequently.

“Derogatory, insulting, or otherwise negative qualifications” are the most common category for Ukrainians (23.78% of online media negative comments for this group) and the fourth most common for Global South MASR (8.77%). Common narratives in the online media Ukrainian dataset are the comparison of migrants to “waste,” explicit and implicit allegations of promiscuity and sex work, and references to laziness, joblessness, parasitism, expressed through insulting and profane language. These negative qualifications are sometimes associated with return narratives, that is due to their negative characteristics Ukrainian refugees should be sent back to their country and/or the frontlines (association present in 3.78% of all negative comments about Ukrainians). For Global South MASR, while comparisons to “waste” do persist, we see more references to Global South MASR being violent, as well as more comments containing ethnic discrimination – this is mirrored in the Telegram dataset.

Other themes in our online media dataset also show how Bulgarians compare the two groups. Narratives identify Global South MASR as criminals (24.56% of all negative Global South MASR comments), terrorists and fanatics (5.26%), savages (5.26%), and a pest (1.75%). A similar sentiment is observable on Telegram, where Global South MASR are labelled as criminals (20.00% of all negative comments about Global South MASR), terrorists and fanatics (5.45%), and savages (3.64%). Dehumanisation is also observed through emojis depicting monkeys, which appear 11 times in the 55 negative comments about Global South MASR.

On the Ukrainian MASR side, in online media comments, migrants and refugees are commonly described as ungrateful (18.38% of all negative comments about Ukrainian MASR), as well as fascists (5.59%), “false” refugees (3.24%), Nazis (3.24%), criminals (2.70%), substance abusers (1.08%), and animals (1.08%). Interestingly, while the criminality narrative overlaps for the two groups, it is associated with different behaviour – irregular border crossing for Global South MASR and sex work for Ukrainian MASR. Ukrainian migrants and refugees bearing sexualised characteristics is also reflected in the narrative that describes migrants as carriers of diseases. In the case of Global South MASR, those are unspecified “illnesses;” but in the case of Ukrainian MASR comments specifically address named sexually transmitted and infectious diseases. Finally, some negative descriptions of Ukrainian MASR carry misogynist undertones, accusing Ukrainian women of materialism and immorality – something not observed for Global South MASR. In the case of Telegram comments, comments identifying Ukrainians as criminals (5.33% of negative comments about Ukrainian MASR), fascists or Nazis (8.00%), and a national security threat (6.67%) are significantly less numerous compared to those about economic concerns. Notably, narratives about sex work

and promiscuity are not present, but Ukrainian MASR are similarly associated with illness and sexually transmitted diseases (8.00% of all comments about Ukrainian MASR).

Otherness

As Bayerl et al. (2020, p. 43) write in the PERCEPTIONS SLR, the concept of the “Other” is used to construct a hierarchy and reaffirm a divide between two social or cultural groups in the same locality. In our study, Global South and Ukrainian MASR are differentiated from Europeans, Bulgarians, and each other.

The second most common theme in both our Ukrainian segments (23.24% of negative comments about Ukrainians on online media and 26.67% on Telegram) pitches Ukrainians versus Bulgarians in a dichotomy of the “lazy,” “rich” Ukrainians, who receive benefits from the Bulgarian government, and the hard-working Bulgarians, who live in poverty. The figure of the Bulgarian retiree is evoked to communicate ideas of dire need and scarcity, and is contrasted to the Ukrainians, drawing a line between migrants who “thrive” and Bulgarians who “barely survive.” As Ukrainian refugees in Bulgaria were housed in seaside hotels during the first months of the conflict (OECD, 2022), dissent among Bulgarians also arose in relation to the contrast with “Bulgarian children who had never seen the sea.” In September 2022, central regions in Bulgaria were affected by severe floods (Deutsche Welle, 2022), coinciding with the planned relocation of the Ukrainian refugees from hotels to state-contracted tourist or municipal facilities (FRA, 2022). In this context, citizens accused the government of overlooking those affected by the floods and overfocusing on undeserving Ukrainian refugees. This notion that the Ukrainians are not really in need of help is well represented in our online media and Telegram samples (respectively, 12.43% and 26.67% of negative comments about Ukrainians). Narratives of Ukrainians as false refugees, not truly in need of help, and undeserving of the help create a curious manifestation of othering on the axes of neediness and desert.

The type of othering that we observe in the Global South MASR segment of both our online media and Telegram datasets is much more familiar, as it follows a line of ethnic and religious discrimination (Erolova, 2017, p. 361; Ilieva, 2022). Opposition pairs of Global South MASR versus Bulgarians and Global South MASR versus Europeans evoke the dichotomy of uncivilised versus civilised. The differentiation between Bulgarians/Europeans and Global South MASR is often linked with associations of the latter with savages, sexual abusers, barbarians, criminals, and biblical pests. Intertwined with this imagery is the feeling of being threatened by an undefined (or perhaps, undefinable) cultural, economic, social, and political subversion (Alkopher & Blanc, 2017; Fiedler, 2019; Kazharski, 2018) – a few submissions in our datasets push the narrative of migrants as “the end” of Europe and/or civilised society.

Ukrainian and Global South MASR are also pitched against each other, creating an eclectic image of the “good” and the “bad” migrant. There is no agreement on who personifies the desirable and the undesirable migrant. Global South MASR

are unfavourably compared to Ukrainians in 8.77% of negative comments associated with online media articles, and in 5.17% of Telegram comments. As Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov stated mere days after the beginning of the conflict, Ukrainians are “intelligent, they are educated” and they “are not the refugees we are used to” (Bathke, 2022; Paré, 2022). Similarly, Ukrainians in our dataset are often seen as educated, well-mannered, heroic defenders of their country, law-abiding, white. This image is then contrasted to Global South MASR described through discriminatory language, drawn in opposition to police and law. Importantly, when Bulgarians address this contrast between the groups, the language is often gendered – it is Global South men that are “bad” migrants, while Ukrainian men are seen as heroic, and their wives – as “good,” “unproblematic” migrants.

Alternatively, our Ukrainian MASR segment shows an unfavourable comparison of Ukrainians with Global South MASR. Almost 10% of all negative comments in the Ukrainian online media segment and close to 3% of the corresponding Telegram segment attest to this, with Ukrainians painted as ungrateful, spoiled, and capricious unlike the humble Global South refugee – content with the conditions in Bulgarian refugee camps. In this narrative, the “good” migrant is a less needy one, one that settles, and that stays off the news and off the streets (particularly vis-à-vis protests (Solakova, 2022). Ultimately, the perceived neediness of Ukrainians leads to the drawing of parallels with the Bulgarian Roma in a small percentage of online media submissions (1.62% of negative comments about Ukrainian MASR) – a long-standing “Other” in Bulgarian society (Hart & Srivakash, 2018; Kligman, 2001; Lambrev et al., 2018).

Aggression, Brutality, and Home-Grown Thanatophilia

The most harrowing aspect of our study are narratives of aggression, brutality, and death. We use the term “thanatophilia” – an affinity or love of death – to describe a fixation with killing migrants. While this theme is entirely absent in our Telegram dataset, the narrative that migrants should be killed or deserve death is extremely common in our online media observation – it is the most frequently encountered theme in our Global South MASR segment (35.09% of negative Global South MASR comments) and the seventh most engaged with theme in the Ukrainian MASR segment (5.95% of negative Ukrainian MASR comments).

The idea of death as a solution to (irregular) migration is not isolated. Firstly, the perceptions of Global South MASR as criminals, terrorists, and fanatics evoke the “need” for punishment with the public drifting to an extreme – something not uncommon in places such as borders, concentration camps, war zones, and prisons (Hönig, 2014; Passavant, 2007; Salter, 2008). Secondly, the way Global South MASR are described in our dataset speaks of inferiority and inhumanity (something akin to Arendt (1958) and Agamben’s (1995) “bare life”), which could also be seen as a justification for death. This understanding is further underpinned by the mentions of the killing techniques of the Holocaust such as labour camps and gas chambers. Finally, narratives about migration as a wave, threat, and danger can also prompt the perceived need for severe punishment.

While references to death are less common in the Ukrainian online media segment, they are often encountered in opinions supporting Russia or as a measure of “cleansing” society from fascists and Nazis. Death in relation to Ukrainian MASR is also discussed by reference to narratives around Ukrainian men’s “rightful place” at the frontlines, desertion punishment, and the necessity of sending refugees (minors included) back to conflict zones. Unlike the Global South MASR segment where death is an ultimate, but largely singular form of punishment, the data from the Ukrainian segment also address other forms of aggression and brutality – torture, beating, public humiliation, and sexual abuse, often described in explicit and vulgar terms, directed at both adults and children, and reminiscent of the brutalities of Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib (Maran, 2006; Puar, 2005). As well, 1.62% of negative online media comments about Ukrainian MASR make references to the Holocaust, calling for “a Jewish treatment” of Ukrainians.

Wider Issues in Conjunction with Migration

Some examples of wider issues in conjunction with migration include governmental corruption, anti-Western sentiments, socialism nostalgia, far-right political predilection, non-governmental organisations and civil society as “foreign agents,” and anti-feminist sentiments. In the few sources on Bulgarian folk psychology we could identify as relevant and reliable (Sotirova, 2018; Todorova, 2011), we find alignment between hostile migration narratives and characteristics of folk psychology.

Here, we discuss three manifestations – the geographical division, fear, and traditionalism/nationalism. Firstly, the idea that Bulgaria is located at the cross-roads of two continents, and “at the gateway to Asia” (Kaneva & Popescu, 2011, pp. 201–202; Sotirova, 2018, p. 8), spurs a perception of being located between two opposites – geographically, yes, but also culturally, religiously, ethnically. This then permeates social life as a process of differentiation of “us” versus “others.” Sotirova argues that Bulgarian folk psychology contains the idea of othering as “a tactic for explaining social issues” (2018, p. 3) and we see this in our data. The Bulgarians in our study do “othering” in an elaborate dance of discontent, hostility, and blame, situating themselves among many opposites. As discussed in the previous section, we observe recurring narratives of both Global South and Ukrainian MASR as sociocultural opposites of Bulgarians, but migration-related comments in our research also build the dichotomy of Bulgaria versus the West – the latter as “an enabler” of migration. In reactions to news about the Ukrainians in Bulgaria, for instance, we encounter the idea that Western governance and values exacerbate migration problems (e.g. lax migration policies, worsening migration flows towards Bulgaria, and pushing the country into debt to provide for Ukrainian refugees). Those that voice support for the Russian side in the 2022 conflict often draw lines between a vilified West of corruption and impoverishment and a benevolent East of order and low crime rates. The vilification of the West and Bulgarian civil society (as foreign pro-Western agents) is evident in our Global South segment, where parallels are drawn between the current treatment of MASR (NGO support

and social funding) and the treatment of criminals by the Socialist regime (police brutality and incarceration).

The second face of Bulgarian folk psychology is fear. Fear is deeply encoded into Bulgarian mentality through pagan micro-rituals and God-fearing mind-sets (Todorova, 2011), but it also communicates an apprehension of the foreign. In existing public opinion research among Bulgarians, migration-related perceptions of danger are common (Balabanov & Lendzhova, 2018; Capital, 2016; Kyuchukov, 2016). In our study the narrative of migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers as a threat or danger is entangled with the need for radical solutions and policy. It is thus not surprising to see far-right political parties (e.g. Vazrazhdane [Възраждане]) enmeshed with such thanatophilic narratives, as embodiments of “the politics of fear and the overproduction of othering” (Krasteva, 2016, p. 179). Although rare, the link between hostile opinions towards MASR and the support for political groups that promote restrictive migration policies is indicative of a bigger process whereby fear of the unknown gets politicised and transitions from the private sphere into public life. Curiously, we see this link in our Ukrainian MASR segments across both spaces of study.

Connected to this is the idea of traditionalism and nationalism. On the one hand, traditionalism has to do with the idea of aversion to change (Todorova, 2011) – a condition disrupted by the presence of migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers in the country, participating in social life. On the other, nationalism can be seen as a knee-jerk reaction to this disruption, as a clear message of who “we” are as contrasted to all the “others.” We see clear nationalist sentiments in our analysis in the common negative comparison between Bulgarians and Global South or Ukrainian MASR, as well as between Bulgaria and the West in socio-political terms. And when far-right political parties are keen on framing themselves in nationalist/traditionalist terms not only in relation to migration, but to other issues (Krasteva, 2023; Merdjanova, 2022), they speak to these processes of othering, differentiation, and dichotomised, fearful identity building.

From most opinions included in our study, we can conclude that Bulgarians want to differentiate themselves from Global South MASR (who are unlike “us”), Ukrainian MASR (who are closer to “us,” but still unlike “us”), and the West and Western values (which do not serve “our” interests). We only found partial alignment with a political East in a handful of comments containing pro-Russian sentiments.

A Road Ahead: The Social Challenge to Belonging in Bulgaria

When debating challenges to migrant integration in Bulgaria, we usually think about dysfunctional policies, financial limitations, and a political deprioritisation of the issue. Rarely do we consider that the true challenge of integration is one of social character. Our observation of online media articles and Telegram channels shed light on the dimensions of hostility that Bulgarians express in online public spaces. We observed intolerant reactions to two groups of MASR offered starkly different treatment by the Bulgarian government. Hence, the problem of the

difficult integration into society, the problem of being able to belong in Bulgarian society, is not entirely one of flawed policies. It is also one of public perceptions towards migrants and migration, and the resulting narratives of intolerance.

At the beginning of this research process, we chose the lens of folk psychology instead of any other conventional prism in reflection of our positionality as Bulgarian-born and Bulgaria-living researchers who witness informal manifestations of folk psychology in daily life. Choosing this point of view enables us to explore the way Bulgarians experience and think about migration in deeply qualitative ways. Although we do not use posters' real words for ethical reasons, we leave ample space for readers to paint a picture about the level of profanity and hostility.

This analysis, albeit brief, also provides insights about the idea of MASR belonging in Bulgarian society. On the one hand, vestiges of solidarity remain and attach to both of the groups that we studied with support for humane living conditions and sufficient governmental help. On the other hand, however, it seems that the Bulgarian public express preference for the specific type of MASR that can be afforded the opportunity of belonging – someone innocent, unproblematic, truly needy, female or underage, white, Christian, and so forth. In the context of the small number of positive sentiment comments, however, these conclusions remain to be tested in the future.

In discussing the narratives that we observed, we identify the following implications of our research:

- For policy-makers: Holistic solutions for migration should address social manifestations of hostility and intolerance in their diversity. Wider efforts to tackle discriminatory dispositions throughout Bulgarian society are necessary pre-requisites for successful migration and integration policies. Contrary to Kaneva and Popescu's (2011) argument, the similarly hostile reactions towards two groups of MASR supported in vastly different ways cannot be traced back to the "social costs" of migration as an ultimate explanation.
- For civil society and non-governmental organisations: A vital part of integration efforts is the work of actively untangling and disproving harmful narratives. This essential soft endeavour must accompany other more tangible measures of supporting MASR in Bulgaria and can be done through awareness-raising and dialogue among policy-makers, host society groups, and individuals of relative community power. Having difficult conversations, challenging long-standing norms and myths, fact checking, countering dis/misinformation, and giving voice and visibility to alternative narratives are just some examples of methods in this space.
- For the academic and research community: Deeper research into positive narratives, opinions shared on other platforms, different time periods, and the evolution of narratives over longer timeframes should be undertaken to develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of society's dispositions towards MASR belonging. Working with opinion-makers at a more individualised and detailed level can also enable asking the "why's" and "how's" of supporting particular narratives and elucidating the factors for the formation of opinions,

fables, stories, and perceptions that get reinforced by each person, in every comment, through time.

Conclusion

Taken together, this analysis of migration-related narratives – from the folk psychological to the political, from the supportive to the hostile, from the moderate to the profane – allows a peek into the possibility of migrant, refugee, or asylum-seeker belonging in Bulgaria, or rather, the impossibility of it. Our study shows that contrary to our initial hypothesis, tolerance is not even an ephemeral stage in the process of refusing belonging, as intolerance, othering, fear, and aversion to change have taken root in Bulgarian mentality long before events that lead to migration flows into the country started to take place.

In this chapter we questioned the types of positive and negative narratives about migration that are shared in two types of online public spaces in Bulgaria – forums on online news sites, and open Telegram channels; we examined their meanings, and their interrelatedness to wider folk psychological traits and socio-political phenomena from the location-specific origins of othering, the insistence on traditionalism, and the politics of fear, to the support of far-right political formations, and the distrust towards the West. At this conclusive stage, it is worth musing upon the differences between our findings and the results of direct participation studies on attitudes towards migration in Bulgaria (Kyuchukov, 2016; UNHCR, 2020). Where the latter found clear evidence of acceptance and solidarity, we found scarce traces of positive dispositions. Where they framed Bulgarian society as open to cultural diversity and various ethnic groups, we saw hostility and xenophobia. The “why’s” of this contrast remain for future research to discover, but we speculate that in public spaces where people tend not to think about the possibility of research observation, opinions tend to be less reserved. The almost complete anonymity that these spaces offer is another factor that we suspect might have bearing upon the extreme and profane character of submissions. We also assume that being prompted by a news story about a particular event can also influence the character of associated user-generated content.

Finally, returning to the implications of our research, this chapter shines a spotlight into an issue that is often deprioritised in migration and integration conversations among policy-makers, namely the social aspect of acceptance and belonging. Who gets to belong? We asked at the very beginning. The answer is specific, and it is rooted in long-standing, self-reinforcing processes of othering and identity creation through this othering – it is only those that are intrinsically like “us” that can “pass the test” and achieve “belonging.” And even then, this belonging is not unlimited.

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8 Transethnic Migrant Activism and Commoning in Trondheim

Agata Kochaniewicz

Introduction

While Norway is proud to be one of the wealthiest countries in the world, as well as a progressive welfare state known for its commitment to gender equality, this nation-branding strategy has been criticised by researchers, and postcolonial and indigenous feminists as “Nordic exceptionalism” (Gullestad, 2005; Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012; Keskinen et al., 2021). What is left unspoken is Norway’s involvement in the ongoing colonial project, including the continuous colonisation of the Sámi population and racialisation practices in education, labour market, media, art, and politics (Dankertsen, 2019; Fjellheim, 2023; McIntosh, 2015; Josef, 2019; Keskinen, 2022; Midtbøen, 2016; Olwig, 2011). Further, in public discourse, migrants and racialised “others” often find themselves in the heart of debates on “the problem of immigrant integration,” a new form of nationalism based on opposition and hostility towards Muslims and Islam, and as subjects of deportation laboratories that target migrants of specific ethnic and religious backgrounds (Bangstad, 2015, 2019; McIntosh, 2015; Musiol, 2020). Within this discourse, contemporary Norwegian migration politics can be characterised by withdrawal from multiculturalism and emphasis on “Norwegian values” (Hernández-Carretero, 2023; Stokke, 2012). It is embedded in everyday practices where migrant integration and belonging depend on adopting the Norwegian identity, understood as sameness and whiteness (Gullestad, 2006; McIntosh, 2015). This racialised logic of inclusion and exclusion is a long-lasting racialisation of “Scandinavia” that is met by a dynamic resistance.

In the chapter, I analyse different ways in which migrants’ resist racialisation practices and the homogenising practices termed “imagined sameness.” Marianne Gullestad’s concept of “imagined sameness” is related to the characteristic of the Norwegian state, based on egalitarian individualism, where the central value concepts are “likeness” and “similarity.” It implies that people must consider themselves the same to feel of equal value and where differences are played down (Gullestad, 2002, pp. 46–47). Specifically, I focus on three examples of transethnic migrant activism: community-based public debates, digital activism, and the production of polylingual literature events within public institution. I explore the tools, driving forces, and activities of activism that migrants use to change representations of their communities and white normativity in Norwegian society.

In addition, I investigate what kind of communities, politics, and coalitions are (im)possible in this activism.

Theoretical Framework: Transethnic Activism and Commoning

My analyses of activism come from Trondheim, where this study has been conducted. It revolves around common spaces for interaction, created by local migrant actors from journalists, cultural workers, grassroots activists, artists, students, and academics from different ethnic communities. They come together to understand and challenge discourses imposed on them, with a strategy that Donna Haraway characterises as “staying with the trouble,” building networks, and forging coalitions across minority groups (2016). I draw on the research by Suvi Keskinen devoted to the ways in which racialised subjects perform resistance in Nordic countries, which she conceptualises as “postethnic activism” (Keskinen, 2021, 2022). She argues that “postethnic activism” developed as a form of critique of the normative whiteness as a self-image of national identities of the Nordic countries (Keskinen, 2021, 2022). Since, in my research, the solidarity building across minoritised groups goes across ethnic identities, I see these practices as transethnic, not postethnic, cutting across community boundaries. Nonetheless, Keskinen’s study is a crucial model, as it shows how particular ethnic group membership is re-signified in the racialisation processes that categorise people as “non-European,” “immigrant,” and “different” based on accent, phenotype, family name, dress, culture, or religion, despite some being raised or born in Nordic countries. I understand racialisation as a process of differentiation of various social groups by essentialising, and sometimes biologising, them, which re-enacts and stabilises the boundaries and hierarchies in the world (see the discussions in the Scandinavian context: Leinonen & Toivanen, 2014; Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012; van Riemsdijk, 2010). In response, activism that aims to challenge such exclusions is not based on ethnic origin or diaspora but seeks to create new spaces of belonging and political activism and re-politicise questions of race, class, and gender in different ways (Keskinen, 2022, pp. 3–5).

Through transethnic activism, migrants created practices of “commoning” that are collective practices of generating and reclaiming commons (De Angelis, 2017; Armiero, 2021), producing social infrastructure for inclusion and care. Such practices are grounded in Indigenous, Black, Caribbean, and African diaspora philosophies (Hartman, 2020; Sheller, 2022) and were always part of the migration experience (Hardt & Negri, 2017). Stavros Stavrides see commons as a third category of space, going beyond dualisms of private/public, object/subject, nature/culture or individual/collective and operating on various scales and “forms of proximity” (2016, p. 260). Examples of commoning practices from Trondheim focus on encouraging different people to meet, get to know each other, and build grounds for mutual awareness (Stavrides, 2016, p. 41). It is a reaction to the humiliation of marginalised ethnic, sexual and migrant identities, and their exclusion from city spaces. I am interested in how this kind of commoning pushes mobility and social justice boundaries (Sheller, 2022; Tan, 2022). As Lauren Berlant emphasises, the commons are “*a powerful vehicle for troubling troubled times*,” meaning that it is

a challenging activity to convey a world together, especially in the times of growing nationalism, neoliberal politics, and racial capitalism (2016, p. 395). Although many contradictions arise from co-creating and reclaiming commons, these practices provide spaces to imagine different futures. By centring the political claims of those racialised “others” and multiple and “unheroic” forms of resistance and practices of commoning, I explore the radical potential for different futures (e.g. Çağatay et al., 2022; Majewska, 2021; Scott, 1985).

Methodology and Research Positionality

The chapter is informed by ethnographic research conducted in Trondheim between 2019 and 2022 for a PhD thesis on the meaning of migrants’ informal networking practices. I used methods of participant observations, semi-structured, in-depth interviews, and activist research (Hale, 2006). During the fieldwork, I participated in different debates, discussions, workshops, social media forums, demonstrations, and events organised by activists and cultural workers. Overall, I conducted eight semi-structured interviews with five women and three men with migrant backgrounds from the Middle East, North America, South and Eastern Europe, and West Africa. The majority of research participant’s names and countries of origin are anonymised. However, the original names of public persons (with their consent) and organisations and initiatives are provided to make visible the small-scale, informal initiatives or less recognised organisations that are often overlooked in the literature on migrants’ struggles. Decolonial methodologies point out that naming activists and other important characters in the studied marginalised communities is an approach that emphasises the importance of their knowledge and avoids extratraditional knowledge production (Keskinen, 2022). This topic deserves complex analyses, which unfortunately are beyond the scope of this chapter. Most interviewees lived in Norway for over five years and were in their 20s, 30s and 40s. They had different statuses: two were born and raised in Norway, while others came from outside the EU, as labour migrants or asylum seekers, and belonged to groups racialised as non-white or “others.” They work partly, entirely, or voluntarily in the cultural sector in Trondheim. Most of them were educated and had an academic background. The common middle-class background was an important factor that brought them together in the mobilisation. Class is understood as a cultural category defined by the different kinds of economic, cultural, and social resources or “capitals” (Bourdieu, 1986) that people obtain.

The research process was committed beyond academic endeavours, bridging the activist/academic divide by looking at them in relational terms as permeable constructs, not as separate worlds (Çağatay et al., 2022; Joseph-Salisbury & Connally, 2021). I was invited by a friend I met on a Norwegian language course to work together on The Multicultural Life project, which is part of the chapter. It was an essential space for sharing solidarity, expressing disappointment and anger, and reflecting on national and urban politics and our different positionalities. I engaged in the social arenas where the “inclusion” of migrants was discussed, published an opinion piece about The Multicultural Life debates in the local newspaper

(Kochaniewicz, 2021a) and moderated two discussions with minority activists on different experiences and understandings of multiculturalism in Norway. As a woman migrant from Poland who has been living in Norway for six years, I share and identify with some of the experiences of my research participants. On the one hand, I experience the social prestige and privilege of knowledge production as a white academic worker from the EU. On the other side, there are many moments in and beyond academia, in my search for housing, the pandemic experience, and administrative communication, when I am read as a “Polish migrant” when the examined policies target me (see Kochaniewicz, 2023).¹ This sparked my interest to ask questions that challenge the “Nordic exceptionalism” and examine power structures that allow Norwegians to deny the existence of racism and structural discrimination (Keskinen, 2022; Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012).

Background: Situating Migrants in Trondheim

The study devoted to initiatives formed by migrants from different ethnic, gender, and national backgrounds was conducted in Trondheim, Tråante in Sámi, the third largest city in Norway, with a population of 214,565 (Trondheim Municipality, 2024). Trondheim is a multicultural city where migrants constitute 18.04% of the population, with the largest group from Poland, followed by Syrians, Turkish and Eritreans (Statistics Norway, 2024). The population of international migrants is diverse regarding country of origin, ethnicity, class, and education. The city’s cosmopolitan character is related to increased migrations after implementing the free labour movement in 2004 in the European Economic Area and the reception of significant numbers of asylum seekers. In 2022 because of the war in Ukraine, the need for settlement of new refugees grew considerably. Trondheim settled 667 refugees coming mostly from Ukraine, but also from countries like Syria and Eritrea (Trøndelag in Numbers, 2023). Also, the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, the largest public university in the country, and the Foundation for Scientific and Industrial Research recruit students, researchers, and professionals worldwide. Trondheim city areas are not as segregated as other Scandinavian cities like Oslo or Copenhagen. This has implications for the development of urban activism that is less focused on individual neighbourhoods and seeks to forge coalitions across minority groups living in different parts of the city.

Transethnic Activism and Commoning in Trondheim

In the following, I explore three different forms of transethnic activism – in the public space, online, and within public institution – focusing on what reclaiming “commons” and the practices of commoning mean in each. I am interested in the tools the activists use – such as public debates, podcasts, and polylingual literature events – the individual and collective motivations that drive these initiatives, the process of building their collaborations and networks, and the public impact of such migrant activism.

The Multicultural Life: Community-Based Public Debates

The public spaces in Trondheim have not been welcoming to perspectives from racialised minority communities or open to migrants discussing their situated experiences. In response, migrants and racialised “others” created initiatives to share their stories and make collective discussions where they could challenge hegemonic understandings and practices.

The Multicultural Life (*Flerkulturelt liv*) project was launched by six Trondheim residents of different ethnic, educational, and occupational backgrounds to share common experiences and discuss issues of identities, diversity, multiculturalism, (mis)representation, and racism in the local context. It was initiated in 2021 and sponsored by Trondheim’s municipality. The project was based on monthly talks with local activists, practitioners, and representatives of different institutions on timely questions of social justice and everyday lives in the city. Debates were organised in Mangfoldshuset Trøndelag (House of Diversity Trøndelag), an NGO organisation and home to many inclusion initiatives where residents can hang out, eat, play, and share stories about living in the city. One of the initiators of The Multicultural Life platform is Ali, who is studying for a master’s degree in social sciences. He has lived in Trondheim for five years and came as an asylum seeker from the Middle East. Like many other asylum seekers, he went through the state introduction program. He worked as a teaching assistant helping migrant children in primary school and as a volunteer in many culture-related NGO organisations and institutions. When I asked him, during the interview in Mangfoldshuset, about his reasons for creating a Multicultural Life, he said:

The idea was to have a debate with more colourful audiences, not just an upper-class white event I see in the city, but the event that could have meaning for many people from different classes and different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. . . . We were preparing it for three months, and we discussed it a lot! About reception centres, traumas, racism at work, the language of media . . . it was a long process. You can just sit and think about all these things and discriminations that you experienced, but it causes very psychological problems. To do something with friends, it helped me. . . . For example, I wanted to ask how media works here, like I am a Muslim man who is living in this society. I am a case in media each day, not with my name but with my ethnic background . . . , but who is writing about me? Is there anyone who wants to know my problems here? Is there anyone who wants to listen? *Ali*

The example Ali gave about homogenous and racialised ways of representing Muslim men in media resulted in a debate in October 2021 about migrants and media (mis)representation, where different local journalists were invited for discussion. Talking about Norwegian media, panellists discussed diversity competence, the balance of power, and language, asking who tells the stories about migrants and minorities and how. They criticised that the responsibility for talking and

interviewing various minorities is often on journalists with minority backgrounds and not part of the work of all editorial teams (for similar findings about minority journalists, see Keskinen, 2022). During the debate, a Norwegian journalist from Trondheim's most-read newspaper, *Adresseavisen*, criticised the newsrooms in her workplace, but also generally Norwegian newsrooms, claiming that they are not good in *mangfoldskompetanse* (diversity competence) and highlighting it as everyday work. Learning with journalists about how the labour division is shaped in the newspaper illuminated that the storytelling practices of journalists are linked to specific fields like health or identity, where "migrant identity" is a separate category devoid of the notions of class and race. Such practice refuses to take up an analytical frame that could bring together, for instance, the commonalities of precarious conditions for migrants and non-migrants (Çaglar & Glick Schiller, 2018). Exceptionalisation of migrants' experiences reinforces the logic of otherness, serving as an exercise of description, classification, and monitoring. It provides the "factual architecture" for the problematisation of migrant others becoming tied in an unobvious way to racist discourses and practices (Schinkel, 2018).

During the debates, the common was built around understanding how racialised, gendered, and class-based processes shape social relations, politics, institutions, culture, and embodied lives. Organisers and guests questioned the majority's hegemonic opinions, often appearing neutral. Collectively, they linked various practices to the dehumanisation of racialised others and reattached them to wider structural forces. Dehumanisation occurs in subtle, routinised ways when minorities' stories and aspirations are discursively differentiated from those of majority citizen populations (Collins, 2022; Schinkel, 2018) in newsrooms, integration programs and workplaces. The Multicultural Life project was a space for producing counterpublics that emphasised the process of creating political agency and involved transforming structures of representation, centring experiences of heterogeneous groups (Majewska, 2021). Creating a platform for those who are racialised as "others" is a political act and creates a space where questions about and the creation of political agendas occur. The Multicultural Life was an important initiative to discuss other ways of living together in the context of workplace, local society, and times of pandemic. People engaged in the initiative created community representations that resonated with the ones involved. The space of Mangfoldshuset was essential for creating networks of support and emplacement in the political and social life of the city. The networks connected migrants and non-migrants with artists, journalists, and people who could and provided resources. People also exchanged resources and contacts like psychologists, lawyers, and musicians to practice. As a result of collaboration between the initiative and the local conservative newspaper *Adresseavisen*, two events resulted in critical articles on "integration" written by migrants and co-organisers (Kochaniewicz, 2021b). The informal space was inviting for exchanges, music, dance, and food, nurturing a sense of belonging. It centred literally on different bodies on stage together. It became an opportunity for the fractured migrant community coming from many countries, continents, and different classes, educational backgrounds, sexualities, and ethnicities to become an audience for each other and to nurture a sense of solidarity. At

the same, it is essential to note that none of the politicians from the local parties and the municipality who funded the project attended the events. However, organisers were inviting them to each of the events. Organising debates also involved a practice of cultural labour exploitation. Even though the municipality funded the project, the budget was minimal, making the organisers work as volunteers. It is striking how much funds are invested in other cultural events in the city, which are far from multicultural and represent mainly white Norwegian voices. The organisation of The Multicultural Life series and other inclusion debates dynamics clashes with the limited implication of municipal and cultural institutions. In that sense, the debates were also places of visible neglect and institutionally shaped space “for minorities.”

Podcasts About Culture: Digital Media Activism

Under the conditions of largely unequal access to symbolic resources and structural disadvantages related to race, gender, and class, the process of representation should not be separated from the power to represent (Titley, 2019). For example, research shows that in the mainstream media in Norway, migrants’ voices represent around 2% of stories, which tend to be problem centred (Sharmen, 2020). This is why the development of independent digital media platforms became another essential space for migrant activism and politics of representation (Fotopoulos, 2016; Hall et al., 2013). Establishing media sites, podcasts, or video channels became relatively easy and inexpensive, opening possibilities for independent content production and gathering audiences beyond the gatekeeping systems of media houses and institutions (Keskinen, 2022, p. 83). Instead of relying on hegemonic representations, digital media platforms offer migrants and racialised others effective tools for collective actions. I bring an example of a freelance digital media site launched by Azra Halilović and Anna Lian, where journalist content and podcasts are created to transform and challenge the whiteness of the cultural scene in Trondheim and reflect on everyday matters from diverse perspectives.

Azra Halilović is a freelance performance artist, writer, and podcaster. She has lived in Trondheim for 30 years and came as a refugee after the war in Yugoslavia. She studied theatre and worked with documentary theatre art. Her motivation to create change comes from the need to disrupt the inequalities in cultural production, which is part of her field. Observing the scene for over 20 years, Azra realised that with her name and accent, she does not have the same chances as ethnic Norwegians and that the diversity and equal opportunities approach is not included in “how institutions think,” to use an expression of anthropologist Mary Douglas (1986). Together with her friend Anna, she created a podcast and media site where they talk about Norwegian art and culture called “Anna and Azra roll up their sleeves” (in Norwegian, “Azra og Anna bretter opp ermene”). When discussing art exhibitions, theatre performances, and talking with artists and curators, they realised that Trondheim’s cultural life heavily lacks diversity representation. When they did podcast sessions with leaders of the institutions, they seemed not to recognise it as a problem. As a result, Azra and the co-host of the podcast, out of

anger at that kind of attitude, turned their eyes onto the practices of cultural institutions, their embedded whiteness, and their role in public services. Inspired by the research done by the Norwegian newspaper *Klassekampen* (The Class Struggle) about immigrant representation on the boards of directors for cultural institutions funded by the government (Brække, 2020), they decided to look closer at the topic of representation in the boards in Trondheim. The research results regarding diversity were very disappointing – only 1 out of 105 board members had a non-Western background (Lian, 2020). It is striking when 18.04% of the city residents are migrants (Statistics Norway, 2024). They challenged the organisation of the institutions and their embedded homogeneity and whiteness, which resulted in the displacement of various minority voices from the public narratives. Another significant initiative in Trondheim is the Afryea Collective, a female-led creative group dedicated to strengthening identity, promoting diversity, and building community. In 2020, the collective gathered and shared stories from youth about their experiences with racism in Norwegian society. These stories, shared on digital platforms, sparked important debates at both local and national political levels, further emphasizing the need for structural changes.

In public discourse, counting is a central strategy for the individualised measurements of migrant integration, thoroughly purified from notions of class and race (Schinkel, 2018). There are a number of publications and statistics produced by The Norwegian Statistical Central Bureau measuring migrants “sociocultural” and “socioeconomic” integration. For instance, through the social and criminal statistics “second generation migrants” are presented as either “dangerous criminals” (in the case of male migrants) or passive victims of Muslim patriarchs (in the case of female migrants) (Gullestad, 2002). Such discourses contribute to the process of individualisation of integration by turning it into the responsibility of individuals such as migrants, their children, or convicted criminals (Schinkel, 2018).

According to Schinkel (2018), this apparatus of moral monitoring is a neocolonial practice aiming to visualise and produce otherness. Azra and other people creating the media-independent site used this space to perform reverse measurements to turn the gaze from individualised migrant subjects to structural and institutional racism. Data was a technology for exposing the gap between official descriptions of the organisations and what they do (Ahmed, 2012). It was a practice of counter-mapping, exposing the differentiation in access to various forms of capital and everyday racism (Musiol, 2020). Examples of return-of-the-gaze ethics have a long history and originated from decolonising poetics and practices of multiple intellectuals like Frantz Fanon, bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldúa, or Sadiya Hartman and were a way out of formerly colonised subject position (Amad, 2013, pp. 51–52).

Azra and her podcast co-host included many people and perspectives in their freelance podcast project. They invited youths with a minority background to do podcasts where they become critiques of art presented in local cultural institutions. They met art producers and directors of cultural institutions and learned what it means to resonate with art. Discussing art became an extension of politics; they could point to structural oppression by analysing cultural landscapes in the city.

During a video call with two podcasters, Gulnara and Simona, who were born in Norway to migrant parents and often experience being racialised, they related that:

A big argument in the discussions is that not many (artists and visitors) have minority backgrounds because they are not interested in arts. Like if you go and watch theatre and it is not reflecting you, and it is not reflecting reality, and you cannot relate to it, then you will not go, so a lot of the time, the theatre was packed with old white people, and it was very sad. It was very lack of representation, and that was one of our top points, every time we did our podcast there was a question of representation because it was a big thing for us. But we had many important conversations with directors and artists and just showing our faces and sparkling the conversation I think it is a start. . . . Not all institutions were like that; there were some doing a decent job in terms of representation. We went to many art exhibitions and a lot of them were from outside and with African backgrounds, Asian backgrounds. *Gulnara*

I think it (doing podcast) has taught us a lot of things, how to stand up for ourselves, what our rights are, what we can demand, when we go to the university now, we are still lacking representation in pensum (curriculum). Now we will focus on decolonising pensum. It is a toolbox. *Simona*

Gulnara and Simona emphasise issues of representation in art institutions and how their non-white bodies often fell “out of place” within those spaces (Puwar, 2004). They would like to see relatable art (and now when they are studying at the university, also curriculum). “Relatable” means that they resonate somehow with those stories, actors, and diverse cultural codes performed. The implication that they heard from institutional representatives during the recording podcast that people with minority backgrounds are not interested in art is again re-describing institutional problems to those who are not included. Doing the podcast was a reverse storytelling practice about bodies that disappear from specific spaces, about their desires, and enabled site-specific critical reflection. Podcasting as a medium was a tool to transform the “conditions of listening” in public spaces (Musiol, 2020, p. 4). Musiol argues that situational, embodied, and spatial reception of voices is important. She further argues that the reception of the voice depends on the recognition within bodies and cultural codes that constitute these encounters (Musiol, 2020, p. 4). The critical storytelling practice was beyond terms of “conditional hospitality.” No one had to welcome them on any conditions. They did not have to return the hospitality by identifying with the institution. Rather opposite, they questioned inequalities and criticised those who deny “rights to art” to people like them. Simona, like Ahmed, calls this claim-making practice and the challenge of the lack of representation a toolbox for “getting diversity into circulation” demanding a space that is not given (2012). Their podcast was enthusiastically received in many parts of Norway, and artists and youths with minority backgrounds inspired by the podcast created similar projects.

With the development of digital media, the possibilities and scope to reach wider audiences and create critical content have significantly broadened. The example of “Anna and Azra roll up their sleeves” podcasts provides tools for self-expression

and function as supportive spaces for independent discussions and counterpublics (Keskinen, 2022; Majewska, 2021).² Such digital platforms developed into practical tools for spreading anti-racist views and analysing local power structures, becoming an essential source of knowledge for racialised “others.” However, being the bearer instead of the object of the gaze does not assure the end of oppressive power structures. Nevertheless, I argue that practices involved in digital media sites were not based on binaries “us/them.” They embodied an exchange, interaction, and relay. Data production and podcasts on digital media are one means of circulating information and counteracting displacements of minority voices and competencies. Moving beyond simplistic politics of reversal, they “rehearse other modes and styles of reception and hospitality” (Musiol, 2020, p. 20).

Literature for Inclusion Polylingual Events: Commoning the Public Institution

Public cultural institutions are urban commons that should provide the same opportunities for everyone instead of benefiting and representing just the white majority. Therefore, entering and reclaiming it by racialised persons underrepresented in these institutions is an act of resistance. In this example, I explore Literature for Inclusion (in Norwegian “Litteratur for inkluderung”) initiated by Gulabuddin Sukhanwar – an activist, writer, and poet – an initiative based in the Literature House in Trondheim. This polylingual literature project can be read as an example of “commoning the institution.” For commoning practices to be significant within the institution, they must become a collective struggle to re-appropriate its practices and expand the networks of sharing and collaboration (Stavrides, 2016).

Gulabuddin came as an asylum seeker from the Middle East and has lived in Trondheim for seven years. He studied social science at NTNU and participated in the migration literature initiative run by NTNU for Refugees/Academic Guest Network called Of Borders and Travelers.³ When he arrived in Norway, he went through the introductory program for asylum seekers, where he realised that culture and literature are not valued as a contribution to the official programs for refugees and migrants. In the introductory programs, participants are guided and presented to different sectors of the labour market, often irrespective of previous education and expertise, creating the conditions for failure or precariousness for newly arrived migrants (McIntosh, 2015). The assimilationist tendencies in introductory programs embodied in teaching Norwegian, transmitting local cultural traditions, values, and codes, and through “organised forgetting” of political, educational, and cultural competencies of migrants represent an effort to promote social cohesion (Gullestad, 2006; Hernández-Carretero, 2023). Diminishing differences and emphasising similarities is a Norwegian approach to egalitarianism, based on a view called by Gullestad (2002) “equality as sameness” and is affecting the everyday life of migrants in Norway. As mentioned earlier, in the case of Azra, many cultural institutions in Trondheim are grounded upon this abstract equality understood as sameness. When Gulabuddin was invited to work in the House of Literature, he dedicated his work to making literature and art a common public good, especially for various minorities in the city. Together with many communities and individual

artists, they created one of the most extensive literature and storytelling initiatives that engaged many people of different backgrounds and languages typically excluded from Trondheim's cultural life. With networks of people Gulabuddin knew from previous experiences, he built a community of multilingual storytellers and the most significant project in Norway. Just in 2019, the initiative offered 64 events with over 2,100 participants involving many languages spoken: English, Arabic, Spanish, Italian, Eritrean, Persian, Polish, Azerbaijani, and Norwegian (Musiol, 2020, p. 30). The project included many initiatives ranging from discussions on urgent issues related to migration, and society called "inclusion debates," theatre for children, teaching Arabic language, talks with writers of different backgrounds, mobile library seminars, and workshops about home and belonging. Within those events, migrants and racialised minorities often gave seminars about their professions as writers, lawyers, and activists, which they struggled to continue in Norway. One of the characteristics of Literature for Inclusion was flexibility and constant expansion involving different "newcomers" and communities in the space, thus opening the circles of commoning (Stavrides, 2016, p. 44). The project also included a Poetry Nights (in Norwegian Poesikveld) grassroots storytelling initiative run by Olga Lehmann a poet, psychologist, and migrant herself. The idea was that anyone could come to listen or perform their reflections, poems, stories, or pieces of favourite writers in any language. During the interview, Kasia, one of the regular participants, told me it was an important space for her because she could share pieces of her culture from Poland. That was one of the few spaces where she did not feel perceived as a stereotype of a Polish migrant and could express her interests, which were given value. She reflected on poetry evenings:

First, I thought what am I doing here? I don't understand anything. But then I sat down and looked at those people getting so emotional speaking their languages, be they Farsi, Pashtu, or Italian. I went to perform in Polish, and it was powerful, I didn't fully understand it, but I resonated. It was like a call 'hey, it is mine, look, it is my culture, experience it a little!' And it doesn't matter if it was a shopkeeper, taxi driver, or kindergarten teacher; we have something to share. Or when they organised a meeting with a translator to Norwegian of the Polish writer and Nobel winner Olga Tokarczuk. I felt so happy to hear pieces of her writing in Norwegian and observe the audience's reaction. It made me proud. *Kasia*

As Kasia describes, spoken word poetry has been an important form of self-expression. It brought migrants together, and through practices of performing and listening, they could share, heal, and reflect. It became a space where people could be together in public and listen to languages without necessarily understanding them and without facing the fear of being judged (Musiol, 2020, p. 22). For Kasia, it was important that everyone was free to share what they wanted and reveal their interests beyond sharing collective precariousness positionality within Norwegian society. Her comment reveals the social strata of migranthood in the city as unrecognised urban citizens of Trondheim. I participated in the Poetry Nights and listened to how urban poets address mental health, marginalisation,

belonging, dreams, passions, and magic, using creative spoken word poetry. The multilingual poetic event offers alternative modes of existence and, together with other events, provides the potential to transform existing institutional practices. However, collaboration can be ambiguous, especially when working with public cultural institutions. During our conversation, Gulabuddin reflected on the struggles related to work “to institutionalise the multitude.”

They approached me because of my background as a minority immigrant and cultural activist to build bridges between communities. And then when I got the job, I felt somehow more responsible than in an ordinary job, because if you apply for a job, then you have a certain assignment to do, but if you are chosen, I have to give back to the very core idea that it is about, inclusion and diversity, it is something to promote, build for myself, for the city and the institution. . . . And sometimes, it is challenging because my project has limited resources. I am telling them that look, if you are trying to promote inclusion, equality, and accessibility, you have to think in this box. I see that I am inviting a Norwegian writer paying NOK 5000, inviting an immigrant writer – sometimes for free and sometimes for only NOK 200. And some people get annoyed that I am promoting voluntary work.

Gulabuddin

He argues that the condition on which he was invited and appointed for work made him feel more responsible and indebted to the organisation. The gift economy is a powerful tool to assert the power that institutions give to others, which is simultaneously a power to expect or demand a return. In this unequal exchange, personal commitment can be a proving device; if they choose him, he should be committed and grateful. The description of the work to “create bridges between communities” reveals that the labour expected involves doing things within an institution (Ahmed, 2012, p. 25) and staying within its frame of acting, avoiding profound changes in the institution’s structures or content. It shows that responsibility for diversity and equality is unequally distributed, throwing responsibility on the “committed individual” who embodies diversity. Since the institution values Gulabuddin’s work less, he has to turn to voluntary labour to work with people already in precarious positions. The distribution of work and funds is connected to racialised precarity and hierarchies within the workplace. If the work of racialised people bringing diverse perspectives is less valued, it means that they inhabit institutional spaces that are also less valued (Ahmed, 2012, p. 4). Also, collective ways of working do not match such neoliberal rationalities. Gulabuddin always presents himself as working with many members of communities in Trondheim, but local politicians and funders of the project frame him as an individualised actor. Massimo de Angelis, in an interview about the commons, calls this a subordination of commoning, often given by the management of institutions, neoliberal policies, the requirement of the market, and social measures coming from outside of commoning practices, which in turn become practices of “distorted commoning.” He claims that, even within the capitalist system, different practices of commoning are taking place. He further emphasises that more important than looking at commoning within the spheres of commons is to ask how we

can “reclaim the commons of our production that are distorted through the imposition of capital’s measure of things” (An Architectur, 2010).

Literature for Inclusion is part of the institution that superficially puts diversity issues in its strategic plans and fails to challenge its own ways of operating without reproducing power relations. The neoliberal logic and commodification of difference within the project are often part of the context in which transethnic activism and commoning practices develop. However, we need to recognise the unique work of Literature for Inclusion, which addresses issues of accessibility of art and literature and explores alternative ways of participation. Many people who participated in the events produced “uncommon knowledge” about how they are represented and (mis)recognised by the structures of power and experiences they share. As migrants are often considered bodies out of place (Puwar, 2004), artistic practices like Literature for Inclusion can transform these unequal power relations into spaces of commons. It is vital to capture ambivalences that constitute practices of commoning in cultural institutions. It helps us to pay attention to how community, sharing, and collaboration exist in the commoning of the institution in tension with and along with exploitation, power imbalances, and racism.

Subverting Homogeneity: Transethnic Community-Building and Commoning

The idea to change representations and push new cultural and political perspectives to the public sphere has brought together migrants from different ethnic communities in Trondheim. They created initiatives where narratives about “who can belong” and on what terms were rewritten and reimagined, establishing alternative archives that record silenced narratives of Norwegianness. In the context of widespread ignorance of colonial and racial histories and denials of structural racism, the examples of transethnic activism in Trondheim have contributed to challenging the popular understanding of the nation, community, and racelessness. In the described initiatives, heterogeneity is not a liberal principle of fetishised difference, but it became a powerful element to dismantle the individualistic and often heroic vision of political agency. Instead, through practices of commoning, in the form of sharing poetry, digital spaces, debates, or the production of podcasts, migrants create counterpublics and transform institutional spaces, negotiate (im)possible identities, and create new assemblages. I believe these practices and strategies show other models of agency and teach us how to unlearn our assumptions about who can do politics and how. At the same time, migrants wanted to make sense of their own lives and positionalities and find connections and networks that would bring visions for a better future. In the different forms of transethnic activism – in the public space, online, and within public institutions – they could explore their multiple belongings and participate in different communities, which resonate with the complexities of their situatedness.

We should not ignore contradictions and ambiguities arising from reclaiming commons. Activists’ experiences revealed that practices of commoning remain fragile spaces under threat of new enclosures, through producing new forms of precarity and excessive voluntary work or by being re-appropriated by the neoliberal

logic of public institutions. It is related to the problematic shift from a bureaucratic state to governing through a combination of state and civil society actors, which results in outsourcing and exploitation, and was criticised by many researchers and activists themselves (Hernández-Carretero, 2023; Scheuerman, 2018). As a result of public-private partnerships, the space for civil society actors has opened, often benefited by large NGOs, but also grassroots initiatives like Multicultural Life and the production of podcasts, which were able to expand their activities with public funding. The activists receiving funding actively question such logic of neoliberalisation but still make usage of the possibilities, making sites for political projects. I read these initiatives as platforms for creating a subversive toolkit: for imagining new possibilities, tactics for creating collaborations, thematising the feelings and experiences of marginalised communities, and making their own representations. Further, those different forms of transethnic activism bring togetherness as an idea for the future, which is definitely participatory and born in social struggles.

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Notes

- 1 Precarisation of labour conditions and racialisation practices of migrants from Poland in Norway is well researched (Andersson & Rye, 2023; Goździak & Main, 2021; Main & Czerniejewska, 2017; van Riemsdijk, 2010).
- 2 The Diversity Show is another platform on social media where migrant and racialised youths from Trondheim staged many important community-based talks about experiences and strategies for navigating national, racial, and gendered identities in Norway.
- 3 The course aimed to mobilise the civic potential of humanities and explore various literary geographies and storytelling practices (Musiol, 2020, pp. 20–21).

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9 The Instrumental Use of Incorporation Philosophies in a Multicultural Norway

Becoming Norwegian or
Running in Place?

Alexander Gamst Page and Sobh Chahboun

Introduction

In post-migration societies, a central part of public and political discourse centres on whether, how, and to what extent minorities incorporate into mainstream society (Kriesi, 2016). Incorporation is a complex and protean set of phenomena rather than a linear process, which touches on many aspects of post-migration societies. Discourses arise, vehemently politicised and contentious, related to topics such as minorities' socioeconomic marginalisation, their societal inclusion, and to what extent they should have their own identity, culture, and values. In addition, while such debates are being carried out, the people who are at their core are present in society, and may follow, be affected by, and even participate in said debates. In this way, the discourse surrounding incorporation affects how it is carried out. At the same time, the very complexity and multifaceted nature of incorporation allows people with opposing views to frame their opinions as they choose. Whatever point one wishes to make, there will be some piece of data available to support it, even if it must be taken out of context in order to "work." This enables people to interpret reality in the way that best supports their own position, and, crucially, discredits that of their ideological opponents. This last point is pivotal. The emotionally charged, contentious nature of these discourses cause many to frame those that disagree with themselves as antagonists, partly shaping their own opinions and arguments in opposition to this "other." Often, this leads to both sides appearing to speak at cross-purposes, as close inspection will reveal that they are operating with completely different conceptions of their core term. However, this may be intentional, and they may have actively chosen a certain conceptualisation because it is the one that most suits their needs. For instance, we may imagine a discussion on incorporation, where it becomes clear that each interlocutor defines it differently. One party is speaking of socioeconomic convergence, the other of cultural adjustment. This is likely because each finds that it best serves their argument to frame incorporation in these disparate terms.

This chapter presents an example of such a discourse around socioeconomic and sociocultural incorporation (see Kadarik, 2019). The former measures incorporation by such metrics as employment, income, educational levels, homeownership

and so forth, which has the benefit of being clear and measurable. However, the latter aspect of incorporation, becoming a part of a new society in a social or cultural sense, is less clear. Indeed, there will typically be great disagreement as to what a nation's culture is, and thus what being a part of it actually means. While socioeconomic incorporation seems to be the official goal in Norway (Barstad & Molstad, 2020), politicians' statements centred on sociocultural issues are more visible. In this regard we find that societal discourse in a diverse country such as Norway becomes centred on what types and degrees of difference are acceptable, how much is it reasonable to expect migrants to adapt, and at what point integration can be said to be "complete."

This chapter explores these issues by asking how volunteer organisations conceptualise incorporation, and how this arises out of an oppositional dialogue with a hypothetical "other." The study is based on 20 interviews with organisations dealing with the integration and inclusion of Norwegian Muslims. Some of these organisations were religious, others secular, which we might expect to affect the understanding of the role religion plays in incorporation. It would also be expected that, as all participating organisations are run by and/or for minorities, these will find themselves ideologically at odds with the immigration- and diversity-sceptical government that was in power during data-collection. However, there was an unexpected disparity in the way religious and secular organisations conceptualised incorporation. These seemed ideologically compatible, but nevertheless imply different standards as to how incorporation should be gauged. This philosophical position on how Muslims should be incorporated was simpler and more straightforward among the religious organisations. It was geared towards the wish to retain a specifically Muslim identity, and also an apparent goal to position themselves in opposition to Islam-critical voices in the societal discourse. Such voices become discursive "others" in opposition to whom pro-diversity actors can frame their positions. The essence of this framing, which will be explored in this chapter, may be likened to Zenon's second paradox of motion, where Achilles is trying to overtake a tortoise. In Zenon's thought experiment, whenever Achilles closes the gap, the time taken has allowed the tortoise to advance, if only infinitesimally. This leaves Achilles eternally doomed to chase the tortoise, forever shortening the gap, but never quite catching up. Likewise, the discourses presented by the discursive other would perpetually extend the criteria needed to be considered part of a society, with the effect that Muslims could never become fully Norwegian.

Central Analytical Concepts

Incorporation

The first question that must be addressed is why use the term "incorporation" rather than "integration." The first reason for this is to avoid confusion, as there is no agreed-upon definition of integration. Indeed, various authors use the term very differently, with some using it narrowly to refer to a diversity management strategy with a pro-diversity outlook, often juxtaposed with assimilationism (Barstad &

Molstad, 2020). Others use it as an umbrella term encompassing all approaches as to how receiving societies should engage with migrants, and on what terms they and their descendants should be made part of society. This latter usage is quite close to how incorporation is used here, so why not simply use “integration” in this broader sense? This brings us to the second reason, which is that integration has become a politically and emotionally loaded term. Indeed, some of the participants took exception to its usage, arguing that it was used to otherise non-white Norwegians. When the term arose in the interviews, it elicited passionate statements such as “I was born in Norway. In what sense do I need to integrate?” With these issues in mind, we find that “incorporation” is preferable, avoiding much of the baggage that might follow other available terms.

“Incorporation” is thus used here in a wide sense, an umbrella term metaphorically referring to a process where a foreign object becomes a part of the body proper. The way in which it is used in this chapter refers to the degree to which minorities participate in a society alongside the majority in any number of ways, determined by how a given speaker delineates it (Enes et al., 2019). In this chapter, it refers to integration and inclusion of both migrants and their Norwegian descendants. On a wider level, incorporation deals with how the various members of Norwegian society conceptualise difference. How much difference is acceptable before the other becomes “the other”? From the various organisations interviewed for this study, we see that incorporation work can mean a great many things. The work of these organisations ranged from helping individuals with job applications to attempting to affect public discourse concerning minorities on a societal level.

Socioeconomic and Sociocultural

For the purposes of this chapter, we may broadly differentiate between socioeconomic and sociocultural incorporation, concepts that might be abstracted to incorporation in general. The socioeconomic side focuses on factors such as labour market participation, employment outcomes, income levels, and educational attainment (e.g. Bevelander & Veenman, 2006; Gollopenni & Haller, 2020). It seems uncontroversial that employment and movement towards socioeconomic parity is an important part of becoming incorporated into a new society (see Kahlenberg, 2006). We know that a great number of social problems arise from socioeconomic differences (Alstadsæter et al., 2020; Bartelink et al., 2020; Draine et al., 2002), and as such it seems reasonable that much hardship can be alleviated by minorities gaining similar educational, employment, and income levels as the majority population. Simultaneously, the sociocultural side delves into the processes through which migrants adapt to the cultural norms, values, and practices of the host society (e.g. Alba & Nee, 2003; Borsch et al., 2019). Although this is not explicitly stated, the way in which these topics are discussed often implies a linear process where the obligation for adaptation is solely on the minority (Spencer & Charsley, 2016).

Incorporation in Norway

Norway had traditionally not been an attractive destination for migrants, and large-scale labour migration only began in the 1970s, when the more desirable destinations began to restrict entry (Brochman, 2003). Initially, the workers who came in this era were assumed to be temporary (Brochman, 2003), which may explain the relatively liberal tack taken by the Norwegian government at this time. The first government white paper on migrant workers (St. Meld. 39, 1973–1974) covered both socioeconomic and sociocultural issues, noting that they should have the opportunity to retain linguistic and cultural distinctness, and also have the same rights and accesses as the majority population.

As labour migrants were, at this point, not considered permanent settlers, full socioeconomic parity was not emphasised. Nevertheless, there has been progress on that point, albeit slow and incremental. While the situation has improved, people with immigrant backgrounds on average have lower wages, lower levels of education (Bye, 2021), and lower levels of employment (Statistics Norway, 2021) and experience significant discrimination in the workplace (Midtbøen & Kitterød, 2019). That being said, when invoking socioeconomic criteria, this must logically imply an endpoint to incorporation. Whether one views education levels, income or representation in political office as the relevant metric, it follows that once a minority reaches the required levels, they are, by definition, incorporated. In sociocultural terms, however, things are somewhat more complicated. The metrics for what sociocultural parity demands are highly subjective and disputed. Norwegian society in general seems to place privacy highly as a cultural value, and as such, most will regard what migrants do in their own homes as their own business (Gullestad, 1986). However, displays of difference that enter the public sphere elicit stronger responses. Issues such as whether it is acceptable to wave the flags of other countries on Constitution Day or whether police officers can wear hijabs or turbans while on duty have repeatedly been subjects of vehement debate, with right-wing political actors often taking a central position on the negative (Aslam, 2023; Forbord, 2019; Warberg-Knoll, 2013).

Assimilation versus Multiculturalism

The discourses as to what comprises sociocultural incorporation tend to align themselves along the metric of assimilation versus multiculturalism in terms of how much cultural idiosyncrasy a society “should” allow. Assimilationism has been the norm in many European societies. This was the idea that minorities should adopt the language, beliefs, customs, and so forth of the majority, often along with an ideology of “civilising” these minorities (Bø, 2011). Multiculturalism arose as a repudiation of assimilationism. While there are many conceptions of multiculturalism, the overarching commonality is the principle that minority groups should be free to retain cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and/or religious identities distinct from those of the majority (e.g. Kymlicka & Wayland, 1996). In everyday parlance, these are sometimes referred to as the “melting pot” and the “salad bowl” models, but this is somewhat misleading. Both are philosophies in how to understand difference.

Multiculturalism is illustrated with the salad bowl. The ingredients are mixed together, yet each remains distinct, retaining its own properties, its own “identity.” Multiculturalism sees difference as beneficial to society, or at least harmless, whereas assimilation sees it as threatening to national cohesion. Therefore, assimilationism intends that new elements that enter society should set aside their idiosyncrasies, instead adopting the properties of the majority. In this way, the melting pot is not an apt metaphor for assimilationism, as there is no intention that minority elements should merge with those of the majority. When mixing Norwegian and Pakistani, assimilationism does not call for a Norwegian–Pakistani alloy; it calls for the “Pakistaniness” to be burned away, so that the “Norwegianess” is all that remains. In this way, assimilationism demands that the substance of the minority should be transmuted into being homousian with that of the majority. In Norway, and indeed many other countries, this is especially clear when discussing Islam.

Is Islam Compatible with “Western” Values?

While Islam is Norway’s largest minority religion, the most recent figures place it as only comprising between 2.8% and 4.7% of the population (Østby & Dalgård, 2017). However, Muslim immigrants and their descendants are given disproportionate space in political discourse. The Progress Party especially have capitalised on immigrant-critical rhetoric for political gain, where Islam is presented as irreconcilable with Norwegian values (Jupskås, 2016). In this narrative, the Muslim world is conceptualised as a monolith, in ideological opposition to an equally monolithic “West” (Scharbrodt, 2011). This is used to feed a construct of an antagonistic clash of civilisation versus barbarism, where the Muslim world is depicted as a threat (Tuastad, 2010), a proverbial enemy at the gates, or, more apropos, enemy within the gates (Bangstad & Darwish, 2023).

Multiple European countries display a particularly negative image of Islam and Muslims. Findings from France, Germany (Adida et al., 2016), and Holland (Maliepaard & Phalet, 2012) illustrate this, along with a widespread view that Islam is incompatible with European values, which would suggest a further belief that Muslims as a people are incompatible unless they set their religion aside. Such findings are mirrored in Norway, with greater scepticism towards those Muslims who are perceived as particularly religious (Brekke & Mohn, 2018; Brekke et al., 2020). As to whether Islam fits in with Norwegian values, only 6% answered that it was fully compatible, and 29% said that it was somewhat compatible, significantly lower than for any other religion (Brekke & Fladmoe, 2022). This would further suggest that, while Islam-critical policies are associated with the right wing, the belief that Islam is incompatible must statistically be prevalent also among those that vote for centre and left-wing parties.

Method

This chapter is based on 20 semi-structured interviews with leaders of organisations working with incorporation of Norwegian Muslims. The organisations that were invited to participate were selected so as to have a participant sample that

was diverse in different ways. For instance, the organisations vary in size, some being local branches of global NGOs, others being run by just a handful of people. They also vary in focus, some dealing only with Muslims, others with minorities in general. They also vary in religiosity, with some being Muslim organisations, others non-Muslim religious organisations, and some secular. The intention was also to capture different levels of operation, with some working at a local or municipal level, others at a national or international level. For the local level, two cities, Oslo and Drammen, were chosen due to their high proportion of Muslim inhabitants. Another way we intended the sample to be diverse was in terms of ethnicity, and we therefore recruited both majority- and minority-run organisations. However, COVID-restrictions limited the recruitment of the latter. As it was only possible to contact potential participants remotely, those minority-run organisations focusing on more established national groups were easier to reach, as they were far more likely to have websites with up-to-date contact information. This meant that minority participants were predominantly descendants of the migrant workers arriving in the 1970s.

The central disjunctions in this chapter are discernible in the differences in the answers given by religious congregations and the more secular organisations. Among the Muslim participants, we included a number of mosques as long as they, in addition to religious services, also carried out organised activities intended to promote the incorporation of their members, such as community outreach, Norwegian language classes, or Norwegian culture courses. As for the remaining participants, some also had religious connections, such as being church-run charities. However, this is not discernible in their actual day-to-day operations, which are indistinguishable from that of the wholly secular participants. Therefore, these 12 will for simplicity's sake be collectively referred to as secular organisations (Sec. Orgs.) Both the mosques and the Sec.Orgs. will also be differentiated by locus of operation, which were Oslo (O), Drammen (D), or national level (N).

The interviews focused on how the participants conceptualised incorporation, touching on subjects such as how they defined incorporation, as well as what they did to help their members or clients in this regard. Data collection was conducted in the latter half of 2021. Due to COVID restrictions, almost all interviews were conducted remotely. Most interviews lasted approximately one hour, with the shortest being 45 minutes, the longest 90 minutes.

Each interview began with a preliminary session where the interviewees were told about the project and could ask any questions they wanted. Data collection and data management was registered with the Norwegian Centre for Research Data and was carried out in accordance with their ethical guidelines. All organisations are referred to pseudonymously, and care is taken to avoid information that might serve to identify them. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants.

Findings

Participants' Incorporation Work

Once the preliminaries were completed, each interview proper began with the participants being asked their conception of incorporation. This involved a clarification

on terminology. The interviewer explained that the study's usage of incorporation encompasses both integration and inclusion, and that the interviewee was free to use the term that they felt to be more suitable. While there was some variation in the details, nuances, and implications, on a surface level, all participants answered fairly similarly. All presented views that were generally positive to immigration and diversity, which was to be expected given the nature of the organisations. Most of the participants' reflections on incorporation aligned with a generally multicultural ideology, indicating that minorities should be free to retain linguistic, religious, or cultural identities distinct from those of the majority.

"I think it means to include people into society so that they can function as an integrated part of society without having to relinquish their own cultural distinctness." *Sec.Org. O1*

"I suppose both of those, integration and inclusion, are kind of the same thing. It means to let people in, to let people participate in society on their own terms. . . . They can participate in Norwegian society, adapt to Norwegian culture, but still keep some of who they are." *Sec.Org. D1*

"We are living in a democracy, and as such, everyone has rights. If someone wants to speak Swahili to their children, or someone else wants to celebrate Divali, how is that anyone else's business? As long as they adhere to Norwegian laws and function in Norwegian Society, anything else should be up to them" *Sec.Org. N6*

These statements were broadly representative of the types of responses most Sec. Orgs. gave. On the general level, we see here a good deal of agreement between the participants. They all suggest that incorporation should be carried out in a diversity-friendly manner, and that minorities should be free to retain at least some cultural distinctness. Here, these organisations worked in very different ways, but a recurring focus was the need for social interaction.

"In order to be a part of society, you need connections. You have to feel belonging, on an emotional level. We try to arrange social events with those that, maybe, feel they are a little on the outside, and being with other people who feel the same . . . I think it's good for them. They can choose their own level of involvement, you know? Maybe some just want to hang out once in a while, and others want to try to find friends. It's important to find a feeling of belonging. . . . We don't really think so much about where someone is from, what colour they are, their religion, or . . . you know. We just try to take the person as we find them. We try to connect people. If someone has somewhere to go, people to talk to, we think that the rest will kind of . . . you know . . . take care of itself." *Sec.Org. D1*

There were several Sec.Orgs. that worked with social inclusion on an individual level, and for these, this quote is highly representative. The implications of statements such as the one above seem to eschew traditional incorporation frameworks,

but the orientation around social inclusion and belonging seem more in line with a sociocultural understanding of integration. However, it might be said that these participants arrive at this perspective by adopting a somewhat colour-blind perspective, downplaying the importance of ethnicity, religion, and skin colour to inclusion (see Schütze, 2023; Schütze & Osanami Törngren, 2022). We can see this in the fact that, while these participants emphasised people's right to retain district identities if they wished, they also typically said things like,

“We don't really care where someone is from or what they believe. We want to engage with the person as an individual.” *Sec.org. D3*

In this way, while all Sec.Orgs. argue that people should be *free* to retain minority identities, many seem indifferent as to whether anyone *avails* themselves of this, or what these identities actually are. A commonality among the majority-run organisations was that they called for incorporation on an individual level, where religious or group identities was a personal matter. In this way, they are friendly to multiculturalism if this is what the individuals in question want, but at the same time, they seem somewhat indifferent to whether group-based identities are retained or not. Thus, for these participants, “pro-diversity” might be a better moniker.

The Religious' View of Incorporation

The participating mosques, on the other hand, did not conform to the trend outlined here. Firstly, a specifically Muslim identity was very much emphasised in these interviews. Phrases such as “participate in society *as a Muslim*” or “retain one's *Muslim* identity” was frequently dotted throughout the conversations with all the mosques. In addition, these participants diverged from the other organisations in the very way they conceptualised incorporation, placing far less emphasis on the feeling of social inclusion.

“To be integrated, you need to follow society's rules, the laws, and you must participate. Get a job, be a good worker, be a good neighbour. Treat others with respect. Send your children to school, teach them to respect the laws. Some people are always saying ‘that's not enough,’ but how can that not be enough? To participate in society and to respect the rules.” *Mosque D3*

“Some people” here refers to right-wing politicians and right-leaning members of the public, and the interviewee is responding to the view that Norwegian Muslims do not sufficiently take part in Norwegian society.

“For me, integration means adapting to Norwegian laws and Norwegian norms, and that which is . . . but anything that crosses over to go against my religion, that becomes different. . . . For the Mosque, the definition of integration is simply to adapt to Norwegian laws and the society in which you

live . . . to follow the rules that at all times are laid down for us . . . for all of us . . . here in Norway.” *Mosque O1*

The second of these statements touches briefly on religious identity. It should be no surprise that the mosques emphasise the importance of retaining a specifically Muslim identity. This was touched on by all the mosques, with this being a fairly typical representation.

“I was born here, have lived here all my life, speak the language fluently . . . and I use the hijab. In this sense, I have adapted to society. I speak the language, I work, I pay my taxes, and so on. However, I should also be able to keep. . . . I should be able to say that I believe in one God, I believe in the Qur’ān, I like to wear hijab.” *Mosque O4*

These statements share the generally pro-diversity attitude of the Sec.Orgs. However, there are two important differences. Firstly, they show a markedly more concrete and practical view of incorporation than those of the other organisations. Secondly, where many of the Sec.Orgs. use an individualised approach where issues such as faith are to be kept private, the mosques emphasise incorporating specifically as Muslims. We also see the Sec.Orgs. favour “inclusion,” and the mosques “integration,” probably due to the vaguer, more social implications of the former. The main crux of the incorporation they present is getting a job, following the laws, and paying taxes. It is an understanding closer to the socioeconomic model, as it pertains to concrete, objective measures and downplays vague, subjective criteria such as “culture” or “values.” Indeed, these participants were very much aware that some segments of Norwegian society use such metrics to exclude Muslims.

“It may be that no one has a good definition (of integration). Some may define it as becoming the same. For these people, if I have different values from them, then it is bad integration, then I’m not integrated. Even if I have paid more taxes than maybe they have and contributed more than they have, this is not good enough for them.” *Mosque O2*

“Them” in this regard again refers to right-wing voices, politicians, pundits, and the members of the public who take up their rhetoric. We see also see repeated this theme of concrete participation in society through employment and contribution to society through taxes. In this way, the mosques stress many of the same topics as the Sec.Orgs. do, but while there is a tendency for the latter to place more emphasis on feelings, there is a converse trend for the former to emphasise action, what their members actually do. This was framed in opposition to voices in society deriding Muslims for not adapting to Norwegian society, which is generally presented in terms of culture and values. The explanations given mainly revolve around people following laws, working, and being good neighbours. We also see a clear wish that their members should be incorporated as *Muslims*. There was a call from the mosques for a more group-oriented presentation, as opposed to the

individuality presented by the Sec.Orgs. Identity thus becomes more of a group project than individual, as well as being less private and more of a matter of public visibility.

The Spectre of the Discursive “Other”

We have seen in the previous section that the mosques and the Sec.Orgs. have similar ideologies of incorporation, but whose conceptualisation rests on different internal logics. In other respects, as we saw, they are more in tune. However, their statements illustrate that there is a third entity which needs to be considered: the constructed “other” that the participants argue their positions against. In order to understand the participants’ view of incorporation, we must also understand that they seemed to be partly presenting their own views, partly arguing against those of others. In 2013, the reins of power in Norway were inherited by a right-wing coalition government, consisting of the Conservative Party, the Progress Party, the Christian Democrats, and Liberal Party. When conducting the present study, it was clear that many of the participants’ answers were coloured by living in a country run by a government significantly to the right of themselves, and whose priorities were at odds with those of their own organisations. The Progress Party (FrP) was especially seen as problematic. It is the most right-wing of the major Norwegian political parties, well known for controversial and inflammatory statements, and had ascended to government for the first time as part of the populist wave in Europe (Bjerkem, 2016). Because of this, while the Conservative Party led the coalition, statements made by FrP members gained greater visibility and were presented by the participants as indicative of the government’s position as a whole. At the time of data collection, FrP had withdrawn from the government, but their time in power still loomed large in the interviews.

“As for integration, this term has, among many politicians and among the government that is now on its way out, been synonymous with assimilation. The idea that to integrate, they must be like us. And, in anthropological terms, I have always felt that integration is something else. Integration is that we have to give and take and find a common way.” *Sec.org. N5*

We see here that an “other” is identified, that an explicitly assimilatory position is ascribed to them and that the participants’ view is defined in opposition. This exact constellation of features appeared in more than half of the interviews. In more general terms, we see in all interviews a perception that there are people in key positions of power who harbour opinions that are concerningly hostile to diversity. Often, this was conveyed through reference to things that concrete people have said or done. In the first half of the interviews, the most commonly referred to was an infamous Facebook post by Sylvi Listhaug, now FrP party leader, but who at the time was the minister for immigration and integration. “*I believe that those who come to Norway must adjust to our society. Here, we drink alcohol, we eat pork, and we show our faces*” (Listhaug, 2016). While the

intent here is clearly to exclude Muslims, she also alienates Sikhs, Jews, and anyone who for any reason doesn't drink alcohol or eat pork. She presents a narrow understanding of what it meant to be Norwegian, which many of the participants brought up in the interviews in order to repudiate. Especially the Muslim participants were highly aware that the statement served to shut them out from the category of "Norwegian."

Halfway through data collection, a new incident occurred which replaced Listhaug's post as the participants' go-to example. A Progress Party MP had offered a 15-year-old girl 1000kr (about €90) to remove her hijab, so that he could "*see her beautiful hair*" (NTB, 2021). This elicited a great deal of ire from the participants, although, in fairness, it may be unreasonable to ascribe this stunt to FrP as a whole, as it was also criticised within the party (Jensen, 2021). However, it seems that this reaction was more due to the youth of the child, and the crassness of propositioning her in this way in front of her friends, because, if the general message is that the hijab, and by extension Islam, is unwelcome in Norway, this seems fully representative of the Progress Party rhetoric. In fact, it seems less exclusionary than the post by Sylvi Listhaug, which promoted an extremely narrow ideal of "Norwegianess" needed to belong to what Listhaug referred to as "our" society. Listhaug's post is also more indicative of FrP views towards diversity given her position at the time. While the participants don't phrase it in these terms, they also describe this "other" as emphasising cultural similarity, that is a sociocultural approach.

In this way, the participants did not merely formulate their own positions, but pushed back against the perceived positions of those in power. Some organisations were more direct than others.

"Both integration and inclusion are the same thing, really. It means accepting the person as they are. Giving them room to be themselves. It's like, not being one of those that say 'we don't like you because you're brown' or 'we don't like you because you're Muslim.' Of course, they don't actually say that out loud. Out loud, they talk about Islam not fitting in with Norwegian values, or say something like 'people not raised with western values can't function in our culture and become a burden on our society.' They try to make it seem like they have concrete concerns, but it's usually a cover for not liking brown people." Sec.org. D4

From these and similar statements, we see a representation of the government's perceived position as being one motivated by racism and Islamophobia. There was some variation as to whether the participant in question saw this as a systemic issue, or one stemming from "bad apples," but all presented discrimination on the part of those in power as a palpable issue. Nearly all participants also noted that such discriminatory attitudes tended to be aimed at non-white people in general and Muslims in particular. Both from the participants' statements and from the examples they chose to represent assimilatory attitudes, it seems as though the perception is that Muslims are especially excluded as Islam is seen as incompatible with Norwegian culture.

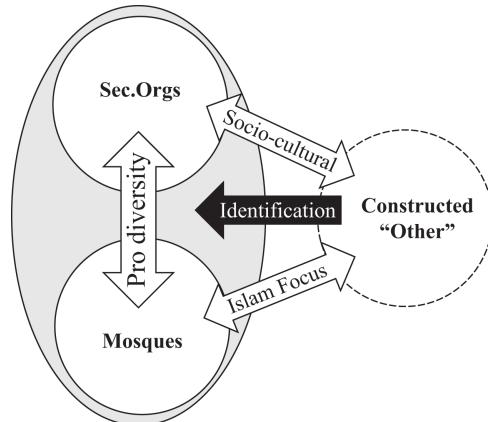


Figure 9.1 Relationship between entities

Three Discourses from Two Voices

From the above, we see three main analytical entities, two being participants of this study, the third, a constructed “other” acting as a dramatic foil to them both. The role of the foil is to define the protagonist by acting as a contrast, and here, the weight that most participants gave this “other” suggests that they are using this entity as a source of identification. Most participants gave rather vague accounts of what they themselves wanted but were much clearer about the assimilatory positions that they did not want.

If we accept this constructed other as its own analytical entity, we see that the three play off each other in interesting ways, each pair having one point of similarity (see Figure 9.1). In this study, only the mosques promote a practice-oriented, concrete view of incorporation. While we see that this is formed in opposition to right-wing discourse, it also differs from the other diversity-friendly participants. One way of making sense of this would be to see it in terms of the diverging self-interests of the different actors. As Muslim religious organisations that work closely with the everyday lives of their members, the mosques will naturally be hampered by the widespread perception that it is problematic to be both Muslim and Norwegian. Most Sec.Orgs avoid this issue by bracketing ethnic and religious belonging, but the mosques cannot do this. Due to their very nature, they need to frame incorporation in a way that allows their members to be both Norwegian and Muslim. In this way of seeing things, it becomes logical that it would be in the mosques’ interest to frame incorporation in clear, objective, and observable ways.

However, we can see in this framing that both the constructed other and the mosques emphasise the Muslim category of these minorities, although they do this for different reasons. As Islamic, religious institutions, the mosques have a powerful vested interest in their members retaining a group identity and a Muslim identity. The “other” is also perceived to wish for this, but so as to make Islam a

fulcrum around which to orient dissent, and to use the group identity so that an attack against one hits all. In this way, both emphasise the centrality of a Muslim identity, although one does so from a pro-diversity position, whereas the other has a diversity-hostile position. The pro-diversity position is one that the mosques share with the Sec.Orgs.

The Sec.Orgs. share with the “other” an emphasis on sociocultural measures of incorporation, although here too, the former is approaching the issue from a pro-diversity standpoint, the latter from a diversity-hostile position. Here, the Sec. Orgs. do vary quite a bit, but those of them that deal with people in their everyday lives mostly focus on their social belonging and inclusion. Here, the goal of the sociocultural focus is to set aside any potential differences, and to make the individual feel part of a community. For the perceived other, the goal is very different, as they use the sociocultural view of incorporation as a way to define “Norwegianess” in a way that excludes Muslim minorities. The very subjective and ephemeral nature of these measures would allow the goalposts to be eternally moved in a way to exclude any non-white person. In the case of Muslims, the majority of the Norwegian population agrees that Islam is incompatible with Norwegian society (Brekke & Fladmoe, 2022). Such attitudes likely have entered into a dialectical relationship with the political rhetoric we have seen, as there is an intense antagonism to Islam among the more visible political voices, which likely both influences and feeds off casual Islamophobia in the general public (Alghamdi, 2015; Jupskås, 2016). Thus, this perspective leaves Norwegian Muslims in the position of Achilles forever trying to catch up to a perpetually advancing tortoise. By contrast, the mosques’ framing of incorporation circumvents this paradox. By eschewing “values” or “culture” in favour of Norwegian laws, adaptation suddenly becomes very clear; if one does not break the clearly defined laws, then one has incorporated. The same might be said of societal participation. If one is gainfully employed, pays taxes, and does not make trouble for one’s neighbours, one contributes to Norwegian society.

Conclusion

It may be unavoidable that any position within the field of migration and diversity becomes couched in societal discourses, and thus framed in an adversarial manner. Possibly, it might further be the case that the partisan bifurcation of politics feeds into the perceptions of the participants in such ways that their arguments must always be shaped in interlocution with an imagined other. In this case, the implied arguments of the participants, especially the Muslim participants, seemed to be modelled as repudiations of right-wing strawmen. This is not to say that these figures were figments of the participants’ imagination, as the attitudes that may be inferred from the participant statements seem fully supported by the real-world actions and statements of the political actors in question. In this instance, we see that the discourses to which the Muslim participants are responding are ones that would eternally seek to exclude them from the category of Norwegianness. In fact, they would go so far as to make Islam antithetical to Norwegian values, drawing

on a centuries-old perceived civilisational opposition to suggest that practicing Islam would automatically exclude one from a Norwegian identity. The cynical elegance of such a framing is that it allows those on the anti-diversity side of the debate to appeal to emotions and deeply rooted prejudices, enabling them to make arguments that seem powerful without actually tying them down to meaning anything at all. This feeds the need of these voices in societal discourse to never allow minority cultural expressions to become a valid part of what it might mean to be Norwegian. The non-Muslim organisations participating in this study, through their colour-blind approach, sidestep this issue. While there seems little doubt that they mean well and seek to support minorities' access to insider status, by bracketing ethnicity and religion, they are by implication claiming neutrality in the debate of how to frame Norwegianness, a debate in which declining to take a position may play into the hands of diversity-critical voices. This is not a criticism, as these organisations exist in the same politicised landscape, work with a variety of groups, and it may not be in their interest to risk alienating other marginalised people by throwing their support wholly behind one group. Mosques, on the other hand, would necessarily face a somewhat different equation. Not only the extreme populist fringes, but mainstream opinion, places them in a position where "Norwegianness" is unattainable. From this starting point, there are only two options: either to change themselves or to reframe the discussion. As we have seen, this is done through a socioeconomic argument, building on objective criteria whose realisation may objectively be observed. Thus, by redirecting incorporation from questions of culture or values, these organisations find a way for their members to retain their Muslim identities, and yet become incorporated with, and find belonging in, Norwegian society.

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10 Undocumented Unaccompanied Migrant Youth from Afghanistan in Sweden

Belonging as the Right to Exist

Mehrdad Darvishpour and Nicole Nunez Borgman

Introduction

In this chapter, we examine how belonging may indeed be a contentious concept by focusing on a phenomenon that calls into question its basic meaning: undocumented migration. We focus on the case of Sweden, where current asylum and migration policy restrictions further limit the already scarce possibilities that undocumented migrants, most of whom are asylum seekers who were not granted asylum, must get by here.

The phenomenon of undocumented migration is a highly contested issue in Europe, which the Swedish case reflects. We approach undocumented migration in a broader framework of belonging where this is related to the very right to stay in a country, to some extent even to exist as a human being. The ethnographic study of young unaccompanied migrants from Afghanistan who struggle to survive in Sweden reflects deep tensions between migration and border policies and other policy areas, such as social services and children's rights. We address how the possibilities for undocumented young migrants to survive, and even develop some kind of belonging, are related to the restrictions in Swedish asylum policies and discourses that demand tougher tactics against migrants.

The more specific aim of this chapter is to explore what belonging means in a context of undocumented migration by focusing on the case of young Afghans, who are an extremely vulnerable group in the Swedish society. Three specific questions were formulated: (1) What risks do these young migrants face and how does undocumented existence further increase their marginalisation? (2) What support do they get from authorities and social institutions such as social services and school? (3) How do the youths handle their social vulnerability and satisfy their social needs?

The Restrictive Shift in Swedish Immigration Policy

Several studies show a general deterioration of asylum seekers' rights, attitudes to immigration, and ethnic diversity in recent decades both in the European Union and in Sweden (e.g. Ahmadi et al., 2018; European Commission and TNS Opinion & Social, 2015; Strömbäck & Theorin, 2018; Meuleman et al., 2009).

Like other EU-members, Swedish migration policies have become gradually more restrictive, legitimised by the discourse of securitisation whereby migration is addressed as a threat. The 2015 “refugee crises” placed the Swedish migration and asylum system at extreme pressure when more than 163,000 refugees arrived. After Germany, Sweden had the greatest number of asylum seekers among the EU countries that year, in relation to the size of the population. On 6 September 2015, the Prime Minister of the new Swedish Social Democratic–Green Party government Stefan Löfven claimed: “My Europe does not build any walls” (Regeringskansliet, 2015). However, soon after, on 24 November, he and his party announced the shift from the EU’s most generous migration policy to one comparable with “normal” low-level EU countries. After 2015, many of the legislative changes have been about adapting to the emergence of a common migration policy within the EU, and common guidelines in asylum policy. “Temporary” border controls were introduced, the decision being extended on several occasions, specified as being in line with minimum standards under EU law (Darvishpour et al., 2023; Schierup & Scarpa, 2017).

In June 2016, in addition to the implementation of stricter border controls, two Swedish laws were changed. One of them entails that a person who has sought asylum and been declined no longer has the right to stay in the country and thereby loses not only the right to accommodation but also the right to daily compensation from the Swedish Migration Agency. The asylum seeker who is not granted a residence permit is thus to be expelled from the country. The other change of law involves a limitation of the asylum seekers’ possibility of getting a residence permit and being reunified with his or her family (Migrationsverket, 2021). The restrictive migration policy has led to the number of asylum seekers decreasing from 162,877 in 2015 to 25,666 in 2017 and 12,991 in 2019 (Migrationsverket, 2021).

Previous Research about Undocumented Immigrants

Undocumented migrants are those who have no legal right to stay in the country. The term “illegal” refugees or “illegal migrant” has been questioned (see for instance Khosravi, 2010) because it reduces people to a legal position instead of recognising their universal right to existence and security. The meaning of living “undocumented” varies significantly from nation to nation, for example in the United States and in Sweden. In the United States, all immigrants who have passed the border with the intention of working and taking up residence in the United States without permission can be considered undocumented or “illegal immigrants” while in Sweden it is not unusual that asylum seekers who are denied a residence permit choose to go underground and thereby live undocumented (Ali Akbar et al., 2016). The concept of “undocumented” is used to explain people who are living in Sweden without a permit. Sometimes, the term “illegal immigrants” is used instead of “undocumented,” which may associate undocumented migration with crime.

International studies in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain show that undocumented existence has a negative influence on adolescents’ self-image, identity, and possibilities of development (e.g. Yoshikawa et al., 2011; Young, 2013;

Abrego, 2008; Gonzales et al., 2013). The vulnerability of adolescents can increase further when they live as unaccompanied and undocumented (Gonzales et al., 2013). These adolescents are excluded from arenas most adolescents have access to, and many feel a need to lie to their surroundings about their situation (Gonzales, 2011).

An international study (Gonzales, 2011; Gonzales et al., 2013) shows that the transition from legally staying in a country as asylum seeker to living as an undocumented migrant may cause turbulence and entails that the adolescents go from having access to some social resources and rights to being left out, ending up in real exclusion and being considered illegal. Thus, there is an increased risk of further marginalisation, and the adolescents can end up in a more vulnerable situation. The study suggests that this transition demands a great adjustment of these adolescents' lifestyle, since their everyday lives and visions of the future change, and new survival strategies are developed. A Canadian study (Young, 2013) also shows how undocumented existence can negatively affect adolescents' identity and belonging. They experience a clash in identifying both as other adolescents and as an excluded, foreign, and non-entitled refugees.

There are no exact facts about undocumented migrants in Sweden; however, a study (Hammarstedt, 2021) estimates a number of up to about 43,500, of which several thousand are children. An overview of knowledge about undocumented migrants in Sweden (Hellgren, 2024) indicates that the existing research in this field is limited. The study shows that these migrants' life situations are greatly influenced by the decisions taken and the actions carried out in policy areas other than migration and border policy, such as social services, housing, school, and health care. Other studies (Nordling & Persdotter, 2021) also show a hardening development where conditions have become tougher for undocumented migrants in Sweden in recent years.

Research on undocumented migrants' existence in Sweden often addresses adults or children/adolescents who are living undocumented together with their parents (e.g. Sigvardsdotter, 2013; Nielsen, 2016; Khosravi, 2010). Nevertheless, research on undocumented unaccompanied children and adolescents in Sweden is relatively limited (e.g. Andersson et al., 2021; Lundberg & Söderman, 2015; Nordling et al., 2017; Söderman, 2019; Vamstad & Karlsson, 2022).

During the years 2013–2016 alone, 1,829 unaccompanied children who were seeking asylum went underground in Sweden (Hammarstedt, 2021). The number of youths who are of age and have gone underground is significantly higher. During May 2016, 93% of the persons registered as missing were boys, the majority of whom are youths with Afghan or Moroccan background (Ali Akbar et al., 2016).

The conditions of living undocumented in Sweden have had a somewhat paradoxical development over the recent decades. On the one hand, the rights of undocumented migrants have improved in some regards. Since 2013, undocumented children in Sweden of ages 6 to 18, for instance, have full rights to education (Prop. 2012/13:58). The right to health care was also expanded in 2013; the regions must offer undocumented minors the same health care as residents, and persons who are of age are entitled to subsidised emergency health care and dental

care. In addition, the regions have the possibility of offering persons of age health care up to the same level as residents (Prop. 2012/13:109). On the other hand, measures for deportation have expanded. In 2016, new measures were developed for a “legally certain and better functioning return of persons whose application for asylum has been declined” (Regeringen, 2016). These entailed among other things an increase in the authority of the police to take fingerprints at internal foreigner controls. Moreover, in October 2016, Sweden and Afghanistan entered an agreement which aims to limit the possibilities of Afghans to migrate and get asylum in Sweden (Samförståndsavtal, 2016).

In Sweden, many unaccompanied adolescents who live undocumented try to replace protection and support from welfare institutions with networks and non-profit organisations or NGOs (Nordling et al., 2017). In a few cases, adolescents who go underground have further contact with social workers such as residence personnel. Nordling et al. (2017) describe the support that unaccompanied undocumented adolescents get as varied and arbitrary. The support is affected more by the relation to the professionals and the engagement of the parties than by the rights of the adolescents. In harmony with this, an international study from the United States (Crawford & Witherspoon Arnold, 2016) indicates that teachers can themselves either obstruct or facilitate the possibility of undocumented students to attend school, which entails a selective result of undocumented adolescents’ access to education.

The constant fear of being deported negatively affects these adolescents’ everyday life in different ways. A study about unaccompanied adolescents living undocumented in Malmö in Sweden (Lundberg & Söderman, 2015) points out that many adolescents refrain from exercising their rights. For example, many adolescents refrain from their right to health care due to fear of getting caught and deported. Another study (Jahanmahan et al., 2019) also suggests that unaccompanied adolescents who live undocumented in Sweden are in an especially vulnerable position. The study shows that the adolescents are afraid of getting searched by the police if they exercise their right to education and health care. At the same time, these studies show that certain adolescents try to reduce the consequences of such social vulnerability by sticking together and strengthening their social network. The risk of being deported can involve a decrease of the mental and sometimes also the physical health of children/adolescents, especially when they refrain from seeking care when needed. Being an unaccompanied adolescent involves greater challenges, partly because many of them have had dramatic experiences during their travels to Sweden and partly because of the absence of parents or a social network. One study shows that several unaccompanied adolescents committed suicide in conjunction with the changes of law which led to the rejection of their applications for asylum (Hagström et al., 2018). At the same time, undocumented adolescents can develop new survival strategies, for instance, developing their own networks (Lundberg & Söderman, 2015; Jahanmahan et al., 2019). The fact that many unaccompanied adolescents are undocumented entails that they are stopped from receiving orientation, which affects how they experience their place in society and how they see their future.

Conceptual Framework

The terms “orientation” and “disorientation” are important aspects in discussions on belonging, inclusion, and exclusion of groups that are already vulnerable. Ahmed (2006) uses the term “dis/orientation” (2010) to point out that those who have access to different arenas and contexts is both changeable and selective and is created through their history and social structures as well as the interplay between the individual and the environment. Different conditions can lead to certain persons gaining access to social resources while others do not. The experiences of the individual are formed in relation to the expectations of the surrounding world and of arrangements such as laws and norms and other structural conditions that the nation state offers (Darvishpour & Westin, 2021).

Ahmed’s concepts of dis/orientation are fruitful for analysing the situation of undocumented adolescents and their experiences of vulnerability. Orientation can be understood as a sense of being secure, anchored in one’s environment and at home. This pertains among other things to the actual place, to meetings with people, and to the possibility of mobility. Disorientation, by contrast, involves experiencing a lack of access, security, resources, and feeling of fellowship and belonging, which for instance migration processes can lead to (Ahmed, 2006).

All humans experience disorientation at times. If the experience of disorientation is extended and remains, however, it can lead to a crisis-like situation. How disorientation is experienced depends among other things on the preconditions and possibilities of the individual to recreate orientation. The question is what affects the possibility of dis/orientation of human beings. Ahmed (2010) maintains that to follow a *track* involves living normatively and according to what is expected. Being off track thus challenges social norms and arrangements. Institutions work as orientation devices while getting off track can increase the risk of *dis/orientation*. *Being stopped* is also an interesting metaphor that Ahmed uses, which includes blockages, hindrances, collisions, and endings of orientation processes (Ahmed, 2010). The term can also be connected to the including/excluding character or the nation-state as sketching frames for who gains access to the resources of the country from the vantage point of citizenship, permits, or at least being a “legal” asylum seeker.

On the other hand, dis/orientation entails that people who lack some aspect of the aforementioned status can be further marginalised by different kinds of social exclusion and deportation from the country (Darvishpour & Westin, 2021). This means that restrictive migration policy and new assimilation policy in the EU and Sweden can exclude vulnerable groups such as undocumented unaccompanied youth from community resources, which can increase the risk of disorientation and deviant behaviour among unaccompanied undocumented youth (Darvishpour et al., 2023). The various types of disorientation presented in this study and elsewhere describe a dehumanisation of undocumented migrants, with horrendous suffering as a result. Sadly, not all are able to make it through this experience, as over 43% of undocumented migrants in Sweden struggle with suicidal thoughts (Andersson et al., 2021). However, others may be able to turn this suffering into an opportunity for personal growth.

The other relevant concept in discussions on belonging, inclusion and exclusion of migrants and refugees is the “securitisation of migration.” The increased number of asylum seekers in Europe has actualised political and social aspects such as human rights, citizenship, power, democracy, and inclusion. National security has been emphasised instead of universal rights; here, we address what is usually called “securitisation” (Darvishpour et al., 2023; Siegel & Nagy, 2018). Although security concerns regarding migration are as old as the projection of social fear on foreigners/strangers/adversaries/others (Buonfino, 2004); classical approaches of security focus on the material dispositions of threat, including the distribution of power, military capabilities, and polarity. A dislocation of the approach can be perceived, which means that immigrants and refugees, especially from Islamic countries, are considered to undermine the national culture, social welfare, and unity. This in turn leads to the idea that refugees pose a threat to the national collective identity (Buonfino, 2004). In addition, we can see a change from the understanding of undocumented immigrant youth as “victims” who we all have a moral obligation to care about and aid, to them being stigmatised as a “threat,” which can increase their exclusion (Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017).

Method

The study is based on semi-structured interviews with five Afghan adolescents with the aim of capturing their thoughts, feelings, creation of meaning, and experiences of undocumented existence. The semi-structured interviews had four areas of focus: from asylum seeking to undocumented existence; living undocumented; self-image and development; and undocumented existence and visions of the future. Selection criteria were that the adolescents should have arrived unaccompanied and have lived undocumented in Sweden, and, at the time of the interviews, be minors. The interviews took place in different parts of Sweden during the spring of 2017. The adolescents lived as undocumented migrants over 2013 to 2017, which is a period marked by a harsher climate towards refugees and migration, as has been discussed earlier. Table 10.1 provides information about the condition of the adolescents at the time of the interviews.

To get contact with participants we used the snowball method. Through persons in our own network, we got in contact with three of the adolescents. To get in contact with more adolescents, information about the study was published in two Facebook groups (e.g. “*Stoppa utvisningarna av afghanska ungdomar*”) that discuss asylum issues and the situation of Afghan adolescents in Sweden. Adolescents who had shown interest in participating in the study and who met the aforementioned criteria received a missive letter which specified the aim of the study and the ethical aspects, written in both Swedish and Dari. Conversations were held with all of the adolescents before the first interview occasion on the basis of the missive letter about the content and design of the study. There was no risk that the adolescents’ vulnerability would increase with the participation of the study. All adolescents participated in the design of the form, location, time, and content of the interviews. They have also contributed with their own texts about their situation, which the

Table 10.1 Information about the interviewed migrant youth

Name	Age at the time of interview	Migration status	Age when they lived undocumented	Approximate time in undocumented existence at the first interview occasion
Doborah	23	Permanent residence permit since December 2015	20–22	2 years
Samir	21	Undocumented	20–	1.5 years
Philip	20	Permanent residence permit since the summer of 2014	16–17	1.5 years
Irfan	18	Undocumented	18–	4 months
Chris	18	Undocumented	18–	1 month

interviews had as a point of departure. The interviews have, in line with the wishes of the adolescents, been conducted at universities, libraries, cafés, and youth residences, sometimes in the presence of one of their friends. We found the adolescents very willing to get their voices heard in their striving to influence the situation for themselves and for other adolescents. The adolescents have themselves chosen fictive names, which further guarantees that their personal data are protected.

All adolescents were interviewed on two separate occasions during the spring of 2017. The primary purpose of interviewing the adolescents during several occasions was to strengthen their trust in the interviewer and to increase their motivation to talk more about their experiences. On each occasion, the interviews went on for between 50 and 80 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Swedish, since the adolescents had a fairly good grasp of the Swedish language. The interviews were transcribed and coded according to guidelines for interpretive phenomenological analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The interview material has been thematised and presented in the results section of the study on the basis of three themes: *1-Exclusion and further marginalisation, 2-Inner and outer disorientation, 3-Struggle for survival*.

Results

Exclusion and Further Marginalisation

When the adolescents' applications are rejected, while they do not leave the country, their status changes to "undocumented." In starting to live undocumented, the adolescents experience a disconnection from the safety they experienced at the residence and as asylum seekers. Instead, they often experience lack of safety, exclusion, and disorientation. To suddenly start living as an undocumented migrant entails for the adolescents that they no longer find a place in their surroundings and that their possibilities of movement are strongly limited. Previously, they had access to the welfare system and thereby to residence personnel, fiduciary, contacts

with authorities, school attendance, dental care, and health care. Philip tells us about how he lost the security, community, and coherence that he had experienced at the youth residence when he started to live undocumented:

“I felt at home. We were so close. Everyone talked to each other, laughed, and joked around and had fun. And then you are supposed to live illegally. . . . It felt like nobody cared about you, no one even asks where you are.”

The transition to living undocumented involves for these adolescents an interruption and halt in the orientation process and getting off track in the integration process, which affects the sense of belonging negatively.

In living off track, there is hardly any completed plan or vision of the future for these adolescents. Irfan repeats the words “I don’t exist,” which suggests that living undocumented in Sweden entails that his human existence is hollowed out both practically and existentially:

“Even if I want to marry someone, I cannot because I do not exist here. If I want to continue my education, I do not exist here. If I want to take driving lessons and get a driver’s licence, I don’t get to do that because I do not exist here. . . . I have a lot of options, but I cannot reach them because I do not exist here; I do not exist on paper.”

The adolescents handle the social vulnerability of undocumented existence in different ways, but they all experience a limitation of their room for action. Regardless of how they approach the matter, they cannot change the fact that undocumented existence limits their possibilities and rights, which Irfan has described as being locked in a cage without the possibility of being able to get out through an effort of one’s own. The story of Irfan and others clearly illustrates how the conditions and policy of the nation-state have an excluding character for those who lack “legal” status, which in a certain regard leads to the adolescents experiencing an extreme marginalisation and dehumanisation of their own condition.

“The four digits [the Swedish ID number contains the person’s date of birth, a birth number, and four control digits] are my life. I don’t need anything more from life. . . . Everything that I want to do, I can do myself only if given the possibility. . . . So the four digits are the key to the lock that keeps me locked up. I totally feel like a bird in a cage. And it is only the four digits that can let me out of this cage.”

Chris expresses the lack of security of an undocumented situation. The support and help that adolescents get depends on their network and the different survival strategies they develop:

“One doesn’t get any help; I get help but not everyone. One doesn’t get help, one doesn’t get money, one is afraid all the time, one cannot go to the hospital.”

The respondents' stories indicate how the transition to an illegal status increases the adolescents' vulnerability, helplessness, and marginalisation. It also illustrates the excluding mechanism of the nation-state by means of a limitation of the adolescents' access to welfare systems, which increases the uncertainty for unaccompanied children and adolescents. The participants' experiences indicate that living as an "illegal" refugee or, more precisely, an undocumented migrant, means a real deterioration in their quality of life and health. The changes in the law after 2015 led to more asylum seekers being rejected and more to lose the rights they have had before as unaccompanied youth.

Inner and Outer Disorientation

The adolescents' experiences of their undocumented existence in Sweden include not only a sense of worry, hopelessness, anxiety, fear of the future and other mental illness, but also conflicts around their own self-image, which depletes their self-esteem in conjunction with other mental and emotional reactions that sometimes take expression in the form of self-cutting behaviour and suicide attempts.

The stories of the adolescents suggest that living undocumented increases the risk for self-contempt. Their exposed situation spawns an anger that is often aimed at themselves. They experience questioning attitudes from their surroundings, and they doubt their own worth and their place in the world. Doborah stresses that he feels superfluous:

“At times, one gets so mad at the people, at all the people, one starts to hate the people. Why does no one accept me? And then I ask myself: is there no place for me?”

Irfan's story shows how exclusion from rights can lead to mental illness and questioning attitudes toward oneself:

“I see that I have a body, that I am a human being, but I have no rights on this earth. . . . When I think about these things, I get very depressed and take antidepressants every day.”

Three of five adolescents have talked about suicide thoughts, suicide attempts, and self-harming behaviour. Philip tells about two suicide attempts after a rejection notice regarding his application for asylum. It becomes clear from the following that a sense of total hopelessness led to him not seeing any other way out than to take his own life:

“I have no way back and no way forward. Sort of standing in between. I just felt so worthless. Why should I live, why? Thinking about suicide isn't all that easy. To even dare to think about taking one's own life. . . . But I even reached the conclusion that yeah, I am going to do that now. Now I am going

to open the window and jump from the sixth floor. Now I am going to take the knife and stab myself until there is no blood left.”

During the first suicide attempt, Philip jumped from a balcony on the sixth floor, but during the fall, his pants got caught in something and it saved his life. On the second attempt, he stabs and cuts himself. He does this in the shower so that no one will be able to interrupt him:

“I thought I was so smart, but I wasn’t. I was in a shower, and I cut off my veins, the big ones. I stabbed myself about six, seven times in the stomach and . . . I was just lying there unconscious and then I noticed that someone opens the door. How did they find out?”

Irfan also tried to take his life on two occasions after a rejection notice. Chris thought of hurting himself. Below, he talks about his friends in similar situations and their self-cutting behaviour:

“I have a lot of friends who do this with razors, all the time and over their bodies. It drives me crazy.”

The scars from self-cutting and suicide attempts can affect adolescents’ mental health and interaction with their surroundings long after the action itself. Philip relates:

“People are going to wonder why those scars are on my body. And what should I answer? Yeah, I tried to kill myself. It would be stupid to tell just anyone, since if you talk about it, they’ll just leave you right away. They would be like; this person is totally sick.”

All this can increase the risk of disorientation and demonstrates how undocumented existence involves a “structural disorientation” phase in the lives of the adolescents, which has a drastic negative effect on their possibilities of development. As we have previously mentioned, increasing the securitisation discourse and more restrictive migration policy have led to a deterioration of the right of asylum and worsening of the situation of undocumented unaccompanied youth, as the participants’ statements illustrate.

Different Strategies to Handle the Situation and the Struggle for Survival

As has been outlined, the adolescents live a precarious existence where they face many challenges related to being unaccompanied and not having a permission to stay and live in Sweden. The adolescents develop different strategies to handle the situation in undocumented existence depending on their personality, network, and personal situation. Some choose extroverted strategies such as using their networks to manage daily life and handle their situation, while others have a more introverted strategy. Doborah, for instance, did not trust the contacts he had been given through

the welfare system, such as a fiduciary and residence staff. Instead, he created his own network, believed in his own abilities, and made sure he stayed focused:

“The most important thing is that one has self-confidence. To fight and not stop. One can change everything. . . I was a fighter. And I always had self-confidence. I have it now, too. Athletics gave me so much and made me so strong. Otherwise, if I had just stayed at home sleeping and just drunk or started smoking, cigarettes or maybe hashish and other things, it would have gotten really bad. Instead, I started working out, I ran outdoors, worked out. I got stronger, kept my body healthy and my brain, too.”

Despite the risk it involves, Doborah went to school and was in active contact with several organisations such as The Red Cross and asylum rights groups during the time he lived undocumented. Doborah’s risk assessment differs especially from Philips’ and Samir’s for whom school attendance was a distant dream:

“If one doesn’t take risks, one doesn’t get anywhere”

A common strategy that emerges is to inform the surrounding world about unaccompanied adolescents ‘situation in undocumented existence as several of the adolescents participate in demonstrations and other political activities to spread information about their situation. Since 2017, several demonstrations and sit-down strikes have taken place in Sweden. The first such action started on 10 August 2017 in Stockholm and continued for months. Hundreds of Afghan unaccompanied and undocumented young migrants participated in the sit-down strike with the aim to prevent deportations of unaccompanied and undocumented migrant youth from Sweden. This demonstration, which was widely reflected in the media, led to some positive changes for both unaccompanied and undocumented migrant youth. In addition to the mentioned activities, participating in this study is also considered as an active strategy for most of the adolescents, as Chris’s statement indicates:

“I want to ask you to spread the whole story. Our entire history, and tell people and show how the situation is in Sweden so that they will find out what happens to us. I am not the only one in this situation, I have a lot of friends who have lots of difficulties, and they really don’t want to live anymore.”

The adolescents have various strategies to lessen the risk of being caught and deported. Regarding health, the common strategy is to put up with it. The adolescents do not seek help since it would involve exposing themselves to the risk of being caught and expelled from the country. The adolescents are making continuous risk assessments where they determine what risk is the greatest and what risks are worth taking. It becomes clear from the following that Philip has refrained from contact with both health care and the police:

“My shoulders were all bloody, I didn’t even dare to go to the hospital. How would I dare to report a crime?”

Philip is different from the other adolescents in that he handled the situation of undocumented existence completely on his own. He did not seek support from social agencies such as school or health care, or from his own contacts in the form of friends or adults. Philip developed a strong self-discipline and distanced himself from everyone else:

“I told myself that maybe you won’t get any food for a long time, and then you have to make do with what you have. You might not have anywhere to sleep and keep warm, just put up with it. You might not be able to keep clean, accept it. . . So that sometimes I had to be pretty brave and strong to be able to make do for about one, two, three weeks, maybe without food to eat and drink.”

Yet another way of handling the social vulnerability is to remove the focus from dreams of a future and development to survival here and now. Philip wrote down his days in undocumented existence in a notebook with the goal of surviving one more day.

The adolescents who have now been granted permanent residence status prove to have a need of distancing themselves from their time as undocumented. Philip says:

“I did not have one single good day. . . I don’t even want to remember what I did and what I ate . . . I think that I will not destroy the now with those days.”

The adolescents have handled their living situation in different ways. Samir and Philip did it by sleeping in public restrooms and train stations. Doborah did it by constantly changing living quarters. Chris and Irfan did it by living with people they knew from before. How they have handled their need for shelter depends among other things on what persons and agencies they have chosen to trust. Handling the living situation in undocumented existence is hard even for those adolescents who are staying at other people’s places because it brings both dependence and indebtedness. Irfan says:

“I live in a family. It feels good but it is really, really hard to be dependent on others, I am completely dependent on others. . . It is very kind of people who want to help me, it is very kind of them but it is really hard for me to accept clothes and money from others because . . . it doesn’t work that way. But I have no other choice today.”

All this indicates the significance of resistance for not becoming a passive victim of the harsh conditions and traumatic experiences. They try “to spread their story,” mobilise their resources, and handle the risks that their undocumented existence involves. Even though the adolescents experience constant obstacles that disorient their coherence and belonging to society, all of them are firmly bent on fighting to live in Sweden and believe that returning to Afghanistan is not an option. Thus, they prepare for a struggle to survive and to stay in Sweden. Chris puts words

on a common attitude to rather fight for a life in Sweden than to be deported to Afghanistan.

“We would rather die in Sweden than in Afghanistan. . . . I never get to flower. That is what it is like being Afghani.”

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to provide an overview of the change of Sweden’s migration policy and how undocumented unaccompanied immigrants handle their situation while increasing the tougher conditions since the end of 2015. Many European states, including Sweden, have undergone a noticeable shift towards a more restrictive immigration policy (see also Ålund et al. in this volume). The discourse on securitisation has increasingly focused on migration as a national threat, which has legitimised the restriction of refugees’ rights. Since the largest wave of refugees arrived in 2015, the media debate has been dominated by discussions of the refugee crisis and chaos in municipalities that could not cope with the large number of refugees. It was also emphasised that the welfare state would be threatened. The harder attitudes towards refugees have legitimised a more restrictive refugee policy in the country. This suggests a shift to an approach which assumes that refugees erode national security, national culture, social welfare, and cohesion. All of this has contributed to worsened conditions for undocumented unaccompanied youth (Darvishpour et al., 2023).

An overall result of our study is that all the interviewed young migrants experience great vulnerability in the form of emergency situations as well as long-term psychological stresses including stress, fear, and loneliness. They live in exclusion, without access to shelter, with limited opportunities to build networks and support relationships, and with limited opportunities to develop self-sufficiency as young adults. The young people’s situation in an undocumented existence means an attempt to reorient themselves in a context where they should not exist. The young people experience stigmatisation, fear, and exclusion. It also appears that the young people’s experiences of undocumented existence negatively affect their own self-image, which coincides with previous research (Young, 2013; Abrego, 2008; Gonzales et al., 2013; Yoshikawa et al., 2011)

In a situation where the state does not assume responsibility for the social situation of the adolescents, they themselves demonstrate great assumption of responsibility. They take responsibility both for their own survival and for unaccompanied adolescents as a group through political activity and forming opinion.

The adolescents’ possibilities of movement and experience of orientation are hindered by living undocumented since the access to different areas is limited and contact with others involves a risk taking. The adolescents have divergent approaches to the risk taking that different contacts involve, and partly as an effect of this, the type of support that unaccompanied adolescents experience while living undocumented differs widely. Nordling et al. (2017) maintain that it is arbitrary what type of support the adolescents get from professional agencies in the welfare

system. We maintain that the contacts are taken, or not taken, from conscious and continual risk assessments. The adolescents in the end make these decisions on their own, and those adolescents who seek support within their own network experience a burdensome dependence and a vulnerability due to the unequal relation they get to those people who help them.

Moreover, the results of our study show that undocumented unaccompanied migrants challenge the structural inequalities and unilateral migration and integration policies that restrain their right to belong. The adolescents develop different strategies of action; some develop their own networks while others isolate in the common goal of surviving and avoiding deportation. Needs of safety, shelter, and health have previously been satisfied by the police, social services, and health care. In undocumented existence, the adolescents experience that they are threatened by social systems that are supposed to protect others but not them. A recurrent approach is that the adolescents do not turn to welfare systems to satisfy their social needs, which is also indicated by other studies (Nordling et al., 2017).

Handling a situation of undocumented existence alone not only involves finding practical solutions or developing new systems of protection, but it also involves keeping a focus on surviving, which precedes all other aspirations. The adolescents handle their social vulnerability by putting up with it. Often they refrain from seeking care, reporting crimes, and going to school, which is also revealed by Lundberg and Söderman's study (2015).

Because the adolescents survive in undocumented existence, it could be maintained that they handle the vulnerability that the situation involves; however, their development is at risk of taking a harmful direction. The experiences that the adolescents gain from living undocumented and the strategies they develop to handle the situation involve both a vulnerability during the time they live undocumented and a further vulnerability in that they acquire painful memories affecting their further personal development.

In the transition from being an asylum seeker to living undocumented, several of the adolescents experience that it is impossible to manage their situation and the vulnerability that awaits them. The adolescents experience a total exclusion from belonging. By starting to live undocumented, the adolescents experience that they are suddenly not even allowed to be in Sweden. All this counteracts the possibilities of orientation of undocumented adolescents. The adolescents' harsher life conditions, severe marginalisation, and self-cutting behaviours and suicide attempts indicate a disorientation process.

The transition already involves the exclusion from the welfare system, since the adolescents lose some contacts and access to several welfare institutions (Nordling et al., 2017). This is also illustrated in our study. Furthermore, it emerges that the adolescents do not have any given space where they experience orientation. By not having their families present, the adolescents can move with ease neither in their surroundings nor in their private sphere; they are alone in their situation and in handling it.

Living outside the established society increases the risk that young people ignore social norms and ideals. In addition to dealing with the interrogation and isolation,

they constantly endure and deal with both direct and indirect threats. As described earlier, the young people continuously make new assessments of the risks they are taking, where the most extreme consequence is that they get caught and expelled, something that is presented to some as mental torture. Our study illustrates how undocumented existence increases the risk for the hollowing out of the adolescents' safety. The question is how the discourse on securitisation as the media usually relays serves to legitimise harsher migration policies and aggravate the undocumented migrant youth's vulnerability (Strömbäck & Theorin, 2018; Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017). More research is necessary to get a deeper understanding of the problem.

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