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The Changing Face of ‘Integration’ in a Mobile Europe

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Amidst the rising tide of anti-immigration across all of Europe – which now includes Eastern and Southern Europeans as much as familiar targets such as Muslims or undocumented Africans – there has been little questioning of the dominant mainstream progressive response to the consequences of migration: that ‘integration’ is the best and most realistic solution for nations now having to accommodate the populations who have moved into or around Europe during the past two highly mobile decades of the 1990s and 2000s.¹

This short discussion piece revisits my own work

1 Text of keynote presentation at the Austrian Ministry of Integration policy conference, “Europe on the Move: Participation and Integration of EU citizens” (May 2013); and panel presentation at the 2013 Dahrendorf Colloquium, “Combining Freedom and Diversity: Lessons from Experience in Britain, Canada, France, Germany and the United States,” St. Anthony’s College, Oxford University (May 2013). It is a synthesis of ideas that will be presented in a forthcoming volume of collected essays (Favell 2014).

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of the 1990s that identified the rising power – and problems – of the national integration paradigm (Favell 1998; 2001; 2003), which has come to be the dominant post-migration policy approach in all of Europe. The notion of integration is deeply embedded in nation-building stories at the heart of the European nation-state, but there has always been an anachronistic aspect of integrationist thinking, out of touch with changing realities of migration on the ground. This ideological gap has often produced pathologies of politics and policymaking, which force diverse migration and settlement patterns into inappropriate categories and terms of debate. The blithe social theoretical naivety of promoters of the concept also contributes to its ineffectiveness. Yet, as I argue here, the continuing success of the term in contemporary politics has only become more problematic in relation to the new forms of migration and mobility ascendant in Europe in the 1990s and 2000s.

Alarm bells should already be ringing given the obvious origins of the term in the classic sociology of Emile Durkheim and his theorization of late nineteenth-century processes of nation-building: how the rapidly modernizing and industrializing European societies of that era – characterized by increasing differentiation, complexity, diversity, and social change – might still function as integrated ‘organic’ units, unified by abstract political or moral values. These values are best expressed in the modern, democratic notion of national citizenship: with citizenship as a status given to individuals in society, enabling their full participation and recognition as members, and affirming their political identity as a self-contained ‘nation-state-society’. As befitted the modern nation-building aspirations of European societies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these societies imagined themselves as bounded, container-like units, made up of specific population on a given territory: insiders were citizens, outsiders were foreigners; the process of national integration was one focused on the progressive inclusion of all different social groups and minorities (particularly women, working classes, and regional minorities) into an inclusive notion of national citizenship,

a progressive historical narrative most famously formulated in the postwar era by the British sociologist T. H. Marshall.

In many ways, we might see the ‘good old days’ of the 1950s and 60s as the apogee of national citizenship within the container nation-state, with the development of strongly inclusive and broadly egalitarian liberal democratic welfare states in the Europe of that era. Crucially, though, the worker immigrants that helped these successful liberal capitalist democracies to grow during that era were an anomaly in the picture; foreigners who had crossed the borders of the state and who fulfilled a function in the society, but were still substantially excluded from citizenship, existing in an unclear and tense relation to their hosts. After the immigration stop across Europe in the early 1970s, however, the Marshallian triptych was hesitantly, and often with great conflict, extended to these populations (and their families). The conception of national integration henceforth began to include immigrants.

Integration, I would argue, almost invariably implies a social theory and narrative of this kind: a conception of a bounded national society that can be defined by its more or less inclusive rules of membership, but which also for functional reasons imposes social closure to non-members and demands a certain socialization – bluntly put, a nationalization – of the (new) insider population. My simple point is that integration now – after the ‘global era’ of the 1990s and 2000s – cannot be what it was. During this era, the world has changed; a new stage of globalization has swept through the old, bounded, container nation-state-society, further individualizing society, loosening social bonds, rendering borders more porous, and seeing a flattening of time and space, which enables these individuals to be far more mobile – in both physical and virtual terms – in relation to their national societies and social identities.

One of the signal features of this globalization has been macro-regional integration (the other confusing use of this term), which, during the 1990s and 2000s, has not been unique to Europe. But Europe – in the shape of the European Union (EU)

– has been quite unique in terms of legal/political institutional developments that have decisively changed the nature of migration into and around the continent. The advance of the EU saw, with the establishment of the Single European Act of 1986 and the Maastricht Treaty of 1993, the completion of a single market space across Europe that enabled the full extension of rights of movement of persons to all EU citizens; as one of the canonical four factors of mobility – capital, goods, services, and persons – theorized by economists as the drivers of economic development in an integrating Europe. All European citizens could in theory live and work freely of their own choice in any of the EU member states: an act which transformed, in legal and political terms, if not always in sociological reality, all such mobile individuals from external immigrants crossing state borders into internal free movers within a single, expanding economic space (i.e., labor market).

Added to this were the momentous consequences of 1989 and all that: the ending of the East-West division of Europe and the geopolitical healing of the continent, via a process of further European integration that would include numerous new member states (and potentially many other candidate states) through enlargement (achieved for 12 new members in 2004 and 2008). This accession, via the extension of EU legal *acquis*, would mean that that the mobilities of the free European space would eventually extend to all the citizens of the new member states, which included major migrant-sending countries such as Poland, Romania, and the Baltic states. Although steep accession barriers to immediate freedom of movement were imposed in many countries, the legal and political reality was that henceforth all European mobile populations from these new member states must *also* turn from being immigrants into free movers, if and when they were able to use their new rights of citizenship to move West. Moreover, the concentric ‘neighborhood’-building logic of expansive EU policies toward countries bordering the EU-27 meant that, via new economic agreements, border cooperation and visa regimes, conceptually at least, transnational migrations from close neighbors such as the

Ukraine, Morocco, Serbia or Turkey might also *potentially* be thought of in terms of internal European free movement rather than immigration.

There is, however, little trace of this legal-political construction in current debates across Europe about ‘integration’. The new internal migrants of Europe are simply blurred clumsily into both settled, long-term ethnic minority populations and newer global immigrations from around the planet. The reaction in national contexts to the pressures of these diverse new and old migrations has been reactionary and singular: the strong return and re-articulation of highly nationalized conceptions of integration, in many countries entailing new conditions on migrant populations – both European and non-European – desiring long-term residence. These include strict language competence conditions; humiliating citizenship tests demanding arcane knowledge of national ‘core’ cultures; conditionality on upholding particular moralities and political loyalties; spotlessly clean criminal records; and endless grand debates about national identity and the threat of ‘backward’ foreign values, such as Islamic beliefs or the criminality of Roma populations. I would read all this as an index of a growing national anxiety in the face of the rampant mobilities of the global era: anachronistic, rearguard attempts at nation-building in the nineteenth century mould, imposing unified ideas of national ‘culture’ and conditions of citizenship on the most vulnerable part of the population; a wholly symbolic gesture, since they could never be imposed in this way on ordinary national citizens. The reality of highly fragmented, very un-Durkheimian porous and multi-leveled modern societies we now live in, is that most ordinary ‘native’ citizens are highly globalized, flexible and mobile individuals, who often enjoy an almost *à la carte* choice of the rights and benefits, duties and obligations associated with national citizenship or participation in mainstream national society.

Clearly, there are highly problematic issues about the unfair and unrealistic imposition of integration norms on non-European migrant populations under these conditions. But even

if they were justifiable in functional terms (i.e., equipping them for the labor market, or improving school performance of students), it is still necessary to ask if they are *at all* appropriate for the new EU movers: free-moving EU citizens living and working in other European countries, who are clearly not in a legal or political sense, *im*-migrants in Europe.

Sociologically speaking, of course, this is a normative hypothesis, generated by an abstract economic theory of European integration, which must be tested. My research strategy was always to start with the ideal case scenario (Favell 2008) – the most privileged and unproblematic free movers – and move backward in terms of human capital or social power relative to the ‘integrating; host society. The ideal type of EU free mover is not difficult to find. They are incarnated, for instance, in the almost un-remarked presence of young West European free movers who, during the post-Maastricht 1990s and 2000s, used their free-movement opportunities in increasing numbers to move to rich, highly globalized northwestern cities of the continent. A case in point would be the droves of young French people who, during London’s boom and the ongoing sclerosis of the French economy, moved to Britain – or, we might say, hopped across the Channel – to seek their fortune in the swinging, economic capital of Europe, London. Massively attractive in economic terms, London’s labor market was also uniquely open and accessible to EU citizens in all kinds of high- and low-end service sector jobs, as well as creative, educational and high-tech work. They duly became the ideal high-performing population of migration theory legend, with selection mechanisms to make economists drool: uniformly young, highly talented, ambitious and dynamic, largely costless, out-performing natives, and unlikely to stay and settle permanently. In terms of demographic and economic dynamics, London essentially became the European New York City in this period: matching the number one global city all the way statistically between 2000 and 2005.

So what might ‘integration’ mean for these highly mobile Europeans, in distinction to classic non-European immigrants? It is a simple empirical

question when you talk to them, something that quickly falsifies much of the national integration paradigm. They do not see themselves as ‘migrants’ at all. Naturalization (becoming British) is a completely irrelevant question; they have no interest or compulsion to ‘integrate’ into Britain or (even less likely) England. What they do see themselves as integrating into is a conception of the city: into a global and off-shore European London, into which anyone and everyone can become a Londoner. The integration issues that matter to them are all labor-market related: the uncompromised recognition of imported skills and education; measures to combat the informal advantages of local insiders (the ‘old boy’ parochialism rife in Europe, but supposedly less in London); unquestioned access to the welfare benefits of ordinary employees; and some kind of solution to the longer-term, still missing ‘social securities’, which are the factors that most often break the mobility project and send people back home – dealing with raising children in a foreign city, reliance on peculiar or untrusted medical services, and the long-term confusions surrounding the mobility of European pensions (the EU’s most significant failure in the creation of EU free movement rights).

The EU movers were, in other words, *invisible* migrants – for whom ‘integration’ as it is largely conceived was irrelevant. The telling point here of course is to measure other European migrants in relation to this benchmark. Clearly, being French rather than Balkan matters in this context. When high-skilled Turks, or even free-moving skilled Polish, anxiously bet on obtaining British citizenship and start to plot long-term settlement for their spouses and children, putting themselves through an humiliating naturalization process in which they (often emotionally) betray their own identities and transnational lifestyles, we are no longer in the Europe of the EU. Rather, we are in an old, hierarchical Europe of colonial nation-states where, rudely put, being British makes you superior to being Polish or Turkish.

For a while, however, this was not the outcome of the dramatic Polish migration to the booming British economy in the mid 2000s: more

than half a million registered, certainly more off the books. There was still a moment between 2004 and 2006 when normal political hostilities to immigration were suspended and the idealized economic theory of migration in the EU came true, in Britain (and Ireland) only, and for this particular labor movement: a win-win-win scenario, in which Polish workers moved freely and took over niches in the British economy; the British economy boomed on the back of a workforce substituting nationals in jobs they didn't want to do or couldn't do half as well; and money, people, and influence flowed freely back into a fast-moving Polish economy. Of course, this moment is past. British politics is now dominated by its anti-EU drift: with the UK Independence Party taking more than 20 percent of the votes in the 2013 local elections on the back of an openly xenophobic (but not racist) platform howling against 'Europeans' who take 'our' jobs and steal 'our' benefits, and even mobilizing the support of established British ethnic and racial minorities. And sociologically speaking (again, in terms of specific research I have been involved in, i.e., Favell and Elrick 2008; Favell and Nebe 2009) – excepting arguably that brief moment in Britain during the 2000s – new Polish migrations and certainly Romanian migrations have never really sustained the purity of the economic theory of migration. Even before the economic downtown of 2008, Poles and Romanians have, in their experience of everyday interactions, always been differentiated and discriminated ethnically from other Europeans as 'Poles' and 'Romanians' from the 'East'; they face downward mobility relative to their skills and origin status in their home countries, albeit while earning well; there is a chronic mismatch of human capital in much of the work they end up doing (doctors driving taxis), and they are systematically filtered into exploitative roles in the secondary labor market, more often dirtier, dumber, and more

dangerous than the work of nationals. And, even highly skilled movers – a much larger part of East-West migration than is ever recognized – continue to complain of prejudice and glass ceilings, even relative to West European foreigners. In other words, their experience still resembles what we expect of 'normal', unfair immigration processes typical anywhere else.

The routine and growing discrimination faced by Poles and Romanians as they seek to pursue their fortunes as EU citizens is more than just a sociological disappointment; it is stark proof that Europe has failed. Perhaps it was too much to hope that they would become 'invisible' Europeans like the others; but the prognosis is, in fact, even worse. Now, the residual barriers, the ad-hoc profiling, the illegal quotas and informal restrictions – in short, the routine public hostility – is all now no longer only looking East; it is also looking South, with resentments and prejudices surfacing, which were barely concealed beneath the surface in proudly 'Nordic' countries such as Denmark – but also now also in Britain and Germany. The target now also includes Greek and Portuguese movers, and soon maybe young, highly qualified Spaniards and Italians. They are all becoming visible again: turning into immigrants who no longer enjoy unconditional European citizenship; migrants who are no longer free to be just European residents, and whose tolerated presence may be henceforth conditional on their willingness to integrate.

European citizenship was always a weak institution, but it contained a European ideal that the continent is rapidly forgetting. Europe fails when all EU movers are not treated equally as EU nationals; but it also fails when they are viewed or treated as immigrants and foreigners in a Europe that is supposed, simply and unconditionally, to be their homeland.

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