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Immigrant Integration in Western Europe

In many countries today, debate rages on who really belongs to society and who doesn't. Specific to Western Europe in the last few decades is an increasing emphasis on the opposition between the national society and immigrants in need of "integration." In public discourse, this has been made explicit in recent years as a move from a supposed "multiculturalism" toward "integration." In all cases, a particular notion of "society" is put forward in the sense that it is always already unproblematically presupposed, although its unproblematic character is maintained only through the problematization of what it excludes. Often, this image of society is at once a national society, which is presumed to have particular historical roots, while it is also a society claiming certain universal values, such as liberty, tolerance, and democracy. Critiques of "failed immigrant integration" in mass media, state policies, and politics, as visible, for instance, in Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, articulate the national society over against an "outside" of "nonintegrated." But French "unintegrated" immigrants, for instance, are not part of Germany or Belgium, so where are they when they are "outside"? What does it mean to assume that *here* is a society that, also after immigration, by and large remains what it is so long as immigrants, who are *there*, can be "integrated" in it? What invisible barriers separate "immigrants", who reside within the territory of the nation-state, from "natives"? Which conceptions of citizenship are needed in order to assume the simultaneous presence and nonpresence – or not-yet-presence – of immigrants in society? Why does "integration" always only concern those generally regarded as "others," that is, immigrants, mental patients, criminals, and so on? Which conceptions of culture are active in the imagination of society and the call for adaptation or assimilation by immigrants? If, as it has generally

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functioned, "society" is a sociological container concept, encompass-
ing all of social life, then what is its residue? Does society overlap with
the group of people bound by culture or religion? Or is it perhaps more
fruitful and realistic to say that societies are riven by difference and
sometimes conflict? Could it be that the imagination of society under
the sign of immigrant integration is a way of "whitewashing" Western
European societies, of purifying them according to ideal images enter-
tained by dominant middle classes? Is "integration" not a political way
of separating what dominant groups want from parts of everyday
social life they don't want but that are nonetheless inescapably a part
of that life? And, amid all of this, what should the role of social science
be? What should the status of "immigrant integration" be in social
scientific research? And what role should be given to the concept of
society in social theory?

By asking such questions, this book critiques what I shall call
immigrant integration imaginaries. That is, it both foregrounds the
sociological assumptions in the imagination of societies and their
unintegrated immigrants and it critiques the ways in which the concept
of immigrant integration renders the imagination of society possible. In
a time when the very idea of bounded national societies is contested,
immigrant integration can serve as a prism though which processes of
boundary maintenance and social closure can be observed. One of the
ways in which Western European national societies (re)articulate their
identities is by highlighting what supposedly does not properly belong
to them. By imagining what they are not, an image of what they are
becomes available for meaning making and (or, perhaps, including) for
governing. They do so by invoking "integration," a concept stemming
from a vocabulary ideally suited to articulate boundaries and internal
cohesion. The concept of "integration" allows the identification of
what does not belong. Western European societies diagnose themselves
as under threat from immigrants they perceive as "not yet present in
society," although these immigrants are part and parcel of the social
process in these societies. Immigrants present in the nation-state are
considered as still "outside society," just like imprisoned criminals are
said to eventually "return to society," as if prison were not a consti-
tutive part of society. Such ways of seeing, and the practices with which
they are connected, are productive to the extent that they identify what
"society" is and who properly belongs to it. Immigrant integration
becomes the object of scrutiny in elaborate knowledge forms that

I shall call forms of *moral monitoring*. A critical look at moral moni-
toring reveals that the asymmetries reported by social scientific studies
of immigrant integration in Western Europe are a priori introduced
into them. They operate, for instance, with what I shall call a *dispen-
sation of integration*, meaning that only the extent to which non-
natives are "integrated" is researched. Thereby, it is assumed that there
exists a "society" that is whole and healthy, and that only immigrants
are in some ways at a remove from it. Small wonder that the findings
of such studies reflect exactly that. When feelings of "belonging to
society" are measured only among immigrants and their children, any
feelings of not quite belonging become visible only for such persons,
now coded as "ethnic groups" lacking in "integration." The dispensa-
tion of integration highlights a crucial aspect of integration imagin-
aries: it makes clear that the difference at stake is *not the difference
between well-integrated persons and not well-integrated ones*, but
between *those for whom integration is not an issue at all and those
for whom it is*. The dispensation of integration thus contributes
to a constant effort at "unmasking" those who are merely "passing"
(Garfinkel 1967) as true members of society. You may encounter
"them" on the street, but they are not really "in" society. They consti-
tute today's "vagrants" and "psychotics," who were deemed "non-
productive liabilities" by Robert Merton. What he called "asocialized
persons who are *in* society but not *of* it" (Merton 1968: 142–144) very
much resembles the way immigrant integration and society figure
in dominant forms of social imagination. Such unmasking efforts
strengthen the ideological plausibility of the dominant imagination
of society, for if it is possible to unmask the fake membership of
society immigrants, and if it is possible to show, by means of social
scientific scrutiny, their fictive Europeanness, then *imaginaries of
"society" and of "Europeanness" themselves are naturalized as
really existing beyond the status of imaginary fictions*. The legiti-
mate definition and limits of "society" and of what it means to be
"European" are therefore at stake in Western European discourses
of immigrant integration and in the often accompanying denounce-
ments of "multiculturalism." Theoretically, what is at stake is the
difference between the two theorists just mentioned: Garfinkel's
emphasis on passing and performativity and Merton's emphasis
on a delineated society with integrated parts. The latter will appear
here in the form of contemporary social scientific accounts of

immigrant integration. The former will be developed in the direction of the performative effects of forms of social imagination.

This book seeks to visit those sites at which society imagines itself by problematizing itself. It looks for the discursive spaces in which society imagines itself as endangered, as wanting in "integration" and "cohesion." In recent decades, immigrant integration has evolved into a primary vehicle for the imagination of national societies in Western Europe. Integration imaginaries, as I will call modes of imagining society through the integration of, mostly but not exclusively, immigrants, always imagine society as under threat, as facing problems, and they operate through apparatuses of meaning making that bear striking similarities to forms of medical monitoring. As I will argue in Chapter 2, "integration" is a concept that comes out of a long history of organicist thought in which society is rendered analogous to a human body. These days, then, diagnoses of immigrant integration abound, often on the basis of extended forms of monitoring. In part, diagnoses of society have been produced by social science; in part they spring from public debates over the nation, citizenship, or religion. But these debates have increasingly come to overlap each other in debates of immigrant integration, which has in recent decades become one of the main issues around which collective self-reflection has centered. The social science of immigrant integration constitutes one of the most interesting sites of investigation in this book. It is one field in which "society" is actively imagined. Where immigrant integration is measured, "society" is the measure. Measurements of integration, which go on to play an important role in policy and political discourse, construct an image of society. One example of such image construction concerns measurements of integration in the Netherlands, which presuppose the "secular" character of Dutch society. In this measurement of immigrant integration, "secular" is defined simply as "not religious." This means, in effect, that one million (self-defined) Muslims in the Netherlands are, by definition, not well integrated and thereby reside at a certain distance from society. Of course, it also means that Christians would not be members of society, but Dutch integration research focuses on specific groups of "non-Western immigrants." So while the standard of "society" is never measured as such, it is used as a yardstick by which to measure, and judge, immigrants and their position vis-à-vis society. The same logic is active when measuring the socioeconomic position of migrants and doing so in terms of their

"integration": why would a relatively low socioeconomic position
(read: class position) mean one is "less integrated" in society? Why
would a certain class background be a reason to conclude that a person
exists at a certain distance from "society"? Society, in this logic, is
constructed as a closed body that may be inhabited or invaded by
foreign influences that remain essentially "outside" the social body.
So it is quite common in discourses of immigrant integration to assume
that, while immigrants are "here," they yet remain "outside society."
Underneath the usually unquestioned acceptance of "society" as a kind
of container of social life lies a continuous work of boundary main-
tenance and of the sorting out of belonging. Under the guise of
description, the social science of integration produces a thoroughly
prescriptive account of society. And when politicians from both the
left and the right call for an overcoming of "cultural, ethnic and
religious divisions" by furthering "integration into society," they
reproduce a similar imagination within the political system.

What this book therefore does *not* seek to do is to analyze "immig-
rant integration." It does not seek to understand how far certain
"ethnic groups" are "integrated" or to what extent others are not
and what the causes of such (lack of) integration might be. Rather,
my aim is to analyze the phenomenon of a society observing itself in
terms of such integration – a society that appears only able to observe
itself through the articulation of its difference to that which isn't
properly "integrated." For while the main case chosen here is that of
immigrant integration – which is by far the most salient of contempor-
ary discourses of integration – it is not the only existing one. In fact,
"integration" has become something of a master concept identifying all
who in one way or another appear "unadjusted to society." The
unemployed, the poor, the young, the elderly, those who do not use
computers, those convicted of crimes, and those in mental institutions,
to name a few categories, are subject to "(re)integration in society."
Public concern over immigrant integration, then, is one possible lens
through which the social construction of the national society, as well as
its contestations, can be perceived. In recent years, that public concern
has largely taken the form of a denouncement of "multiculturalism" in
countries such as Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden,
Denmark, Norway, and the United Kingdom. But did these countries
ever share a multiculturalist policy? They hardly did, and so we should
not take the similarity in the many denouncements of multiculturalism

as indicating a really existing multiculturalism. Multiculturalism in Europe has rather been a political ploy. More specifically, what West-ern European countries share is a rhetoric of what can be called *multiculturealism* that functions as a mechanism of exclusion. Multi-culturealism is a rhetoric that insists that there was a multiculturalism, which failed, and that we should be realists about this instead of politically correct. In current debates in Western Europe, "multicul-turalism" is not primarily a type of policy, and neither is it a political philosophy. Most of all, it is a rhetorical trope of recent invention. Denouncing a multiculturalism that in most cases never existed, often even in the form of a confession ("yes, we were naïve multiculturalists, but now we have become realists"), proves a particularly potent means of instituting hegemonic constructions of national society versus non-belonging cultural aliens.

A Study in Social Imagination

This book is titled "Imagined Societies." These two words correspond to two related claims. The first is that what can be called social imagination is a key process in all social life. As such, this title shares affinities with Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1991) and Ezrahi's *Imagined Democracies* (2015). The second is that "society" is not an entity that exists independently of its imagination. For a society to exist, to have effects, and to make a difference, it needs to be imagined. And as a consequence, the difference "society" makes and the effects it has are effects of the imagination. But what does that mean? Does it mean society is a mere "phantom of the imagination"? What is the substance of social imagination? The way I use social imagination here is intended to make use of both connotations that traditionally accrue to the imagination. The first is, indeed, that it concerns imagining things that are absent. In this sense, *imaginatio* became the scholastic translation of what Plato had discussed as a *phantom* or *fantasy* (Casey 2000: 15–16) – a connection still evident in Husserl's treatise on fantasy (2006: 84–85). This connotation recurs throughout the con-ceptual history of the imagination. At the same time, the concept of imagination has often contained a creative potential, even a potential to create institutions. According to Maguire, in Pascal, and later in Rousseau and Tocqueville, the imagination "is the basis of the self's appearance in the world, as well as the primary medium of relation

between the self and others. Imagination is the agent of persuasion and often the creator of law, justice, and happiness in the world, especially through acts of writing and reading" (Maguire 2006: 10–11). Such an institutional creativity is much more evident when imagination is used in the sense of social imagination. This occurs, for instance, when Benedict Anderson (1991) considers nations to be "imagined communities." For Anderson, nations need imagination, for instance, through mass media, because of their scale. They cannot be perceived the way one could know and be visually familiar with all the members of a small community. Anderson highlights how education and media systems therefore become crucial vehicles for the imagination of the nation. From a slightly different angle, Cornelius Castoriadis has discussed "social imaginary significations," by which he means a certain type of performative creation that works through the imagination. That is to say that it "cannot be accounted for by reality, by rationality, or by the laws of symbolism ... it has no need to be clarified in concepts or in representations in order to exist; it is operative in the practice and in the doing of the society considered as a meaning that organizes human behaviour and social relations, independently of its existence "for the consciousness" of that society" (Castoriadis 1987: 141). For Castoriadis, there exists a "magma" of significations that is not preordered into what he calls an ensemblist-identitarian conception of society, but that is rather immanent to society (Castoriadis 1987: 175–177, 367, 370). For my purposes here, it is important to note that what Castoriadis calls the "imaginary institution of society" not only refers to lofty ideals of the communal questioning of the social and moral bond. It also produces a Master Signifier that orders social space along power differentials.

More recently and influentially, Charles Taylor has analyzed modernity in terms of its "modern social imaginaries." By such imaginaries, Taylor intends "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations" (Taylor 2004: 23). In other words, Taylor argues, a "social imaginary" is to be considered as what philosophers have called a "background," which involves the fundamental assumptions made in social life. By speaking of "imaginaries," Taylor wishes to draw attention to the fact that people indeed "imagine" the broader social context in which they

are enmeshed, much like nations, in Anderson's account, need to be imagined because they cannot be "seen" or engaged with in their entirety. Taylor also notes how social imaginaries are "carried in images, stories, and legends" (Taylor 2004: 23). Examples of social forms occurring under modern social imaginaries that Taylor discusses in his book are the market economy, the public sphere, and the self-governing people. He thereby indicates that social imaginaries, and modern imaginaries in particular, are complex. For he argues that under conditions of modernity, "society" is no longer necessarily imagined as an equivalent to the polity:

There will be more than one way in which the same body of systematically interacting human beings can be considered as forming an entity, a society. We can speak of them as an economy or a state or a civil society ... or just as a society or a culture. "Society" has been unhooked from "polity" and now floats free through a number of different applications. (Taylor 2004: 79)

Yet despite the fact that "society" can thus be imagined in a variety of ways that are at times contradictory, Taylor's conception of social imaginaries veers toward a consensus-driven concept that foregoes struggle and conflict over the dominant forms of social imagination, as well as the conflict inherent in the domination exerted by existing social imaginaries. First of all, while Taylor admits that "society" needs imagining, it at the same time forms the apparently stable basis or context of imagination. This becomes apparent when Taylor describes a social imaginary as "what enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society" (Taylor 2004: 2). Clearly, "society" occurs twice in Taylor's account, both as that which needs to be imagined in order to be and as that within which this imagining takes place. Consider, for instance, the following description of a social imaginary: "the social imaginary is ... shared by large groups of people, if not the whole society" (Taylor 2004: 23). And such a "shared" background operates in particularly consensual ways, especially when, as Taylor says, "the social imaginary is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy" (Taylor 2004: 23). My approach here, while inspired by Taylor's account, differs from his in two ways. First of all, it seeks to highlight the often violent character of dominant social imaginaries. As Castoriadis also emphasizes, rather than being

akin to relatively unproblematic, Durkheimian collective representations, social imaginaries are forms of domination, and as such they may also be contested. Rather than "shared" or "common" understandings to which "legitimacy" accrues quasi-automatically, they involve struggle and, often, active juxtaposition. Rather than unitary images of social life, they may involve dual images of, on the one hand, a "society," and on the other "immigrant groups in need of integration in society." And their imagining such oppositions may be forms of governing by division. The second way in which my approach to social imagination differs from Taylor's social imaginaries, and, a propos, from Castoriadis's description of social imaginary significations, is my refusal to accept "society" as the context of the imagination. If "society" exists only in and through a work of imagining, it is theoretically unsatisfactory, at the end of the day, to assume that this work takes place within the confines of "society."

For this reason, I shall take my cue in this respect from Niklas Luhmann's systems theory, which deals explicitly with the paradoxes and the concomitant blind spots that occur when "society" describes itself, supposedly, from within itself. According to Luhmann, social systems involve forms of self-observation and reflexive self-description that involve not only the making of boundaries between themselves and their environment – as all social systems necessarily do – but also the "re-entry" of the distinction between system and environment in the communications that make up the social system. As Luhmann says:

> self-descriptions constitute an imaginary reality. Otherwise they could not solve the logical problems of self-implication. But that doesn't preclude the acceptance of their projections in the social system, especially as there are no other ways of self-assessment. (Luhmann 2002: 203)

Luhmann thus calls "self-descriptions" those "imaginary constructions" that signify the unity of a social system (Luhmann 1997: 867). Precisely because "society" is not a neutral descriptor, the abstract notion of "social system" is helpful here. It avoids the duplication that ensues when it is assumed that *what* is imagined (society) is also that *in which* the imagination occurs. Social systems do not operate, according to Luhmann, on the basis of an objective grasp of their environment. Rather, that environment is always a system-internal construction. In other words, social systems operate through a crucial work of social imagination.

At this point, it is good to circumscribe what I mean by the concepts of immigrant integration imaginaries, social imagination, and image. For Luhmann, such imagination takes place at the level of communication. For Taylor, it involves images, stories, and legends. Here I shall often use the notion of "image," but not in the immediate, common-sensical sense of a figure given to binocular visual perception. Images can be mental, but, more importantly here, they can be ideogrammatic, narrative, or discursive as well. They entail recognizable configurations of persons, actions, signs, and objects that can travel across different carrier media. Immigrant immigration imaginaries are associative webs of meaning and of contestation in which such images figure. By "social imagination" I mean, in a more limited sense, the professionalized and routinized forms of producing images that constitute the core of, in this case, immigrant integration imaginaries. In this book, the professional context of social imagination largely concerns social science itself. Precisely because immigrant integration imaginaries are intricately connected to notions of society, they are crucially connected to the core concerns of social science. Sociology, for instance, has since its inception centered on the imagination of precisely that object which emerges from the imagination of immigrant integration: society. Both in social science and in social life at large, then, "society" has been a highly consequential form of imagination. Those considered "outside society" because they are "not well integrated" undergo real effects from this, and these effects are not the result of an objective position that is then merely named in neutral terms as "unintegrated."

Social imaginaries, then, are not "mere phantoms"; they are fundamental to the ways we orient ourselves in social life toward each other and toward "the other." But to say that "society" is an object of a social imagination is to say that it does not constitute a readily observable entity or domain "out there." Maurice Blanchot's approach to the imaginary is helpful in clarifying what the status of its objects is. For Blanchot, one of two versions of what he calls the imaginary involves a distance to the object imagined (Blanchot 1988: 341–355). It highlights its absence, but that absence is the only way in which the presence of the object announces itself. Therefore, for Blanchot, the imaginary deals with a real whose only positivity operates by means of negativity. In a quasi-organicist language typical, too, of integration imaginaries that we shall encounter at various points in this book, Blanchot accordingly likens an image to a corpse, the presence of