

A photograph of a group of people, likely migrants, walking away from the camera. They are carrying large backpacks and are dressed in casual clothing. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent orange/red filter.

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Karin Borevi
Ayhan Kaya

Migration and the Politics of Integration

IMISCOE Short Reader

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Migration and the Politics of Integration

IMISCOE Short Reader

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Preface

Migration and integration are central political questions of our time, shaping contemporary debates over belonging, citizenship, and identity across Europe and beyond. Rather than treating integration as a technical policy field or a moment of crisis, this book approaches it as a historically embedded and politically contested arena in which boundaries of membership, values, and power are continuously negotiated. Drawing on Yuval-Davis's concept of the politics of belonging, we conceptualize integration as a multi-scalar set of practices through which inclusion and exclusion are produced, from EU governance and national policy to local institutions and everyday encounters.

The book has grown out of multiple research endeavours—some undertaken in the field, others in policy workshops, archives, and public forums. We have studied political processes and policy changes in different European countries, analysed documents, spoken with policymakers, activists, local officials, migrant community members, and residents of neighbourhoods experiencing rapid demographic change. We have observed first-hand how integration policies can foster participation and mutual recognition in one setting, while producing exclusion and resentment in another. And we have engaged in scholarly debates over the above-mentioned issues. One common conclusion that we draw from all this is that integration cannot be understood apart from the broader politics of integration and the material conditions that shape people's opportunities to participate in social life.

While our empirical focus in this book is primarily on Europe, the questions we address resonate far beyond its borders. Across the world, societies are grappling with how to reconcile human mobility with political membership, how to manage diversity without erasing difference, and how to navigate the tensions between global interconnectedness and national sovereignty. By situating the European experience within comparative and historical contexts, we aim to provide readers with analytical tools that can be adapted to different contexts.

This book is the product of an interdisciplinary conversation—one that draws on work within political theory, sociology, political science, anthropology, history, and migration studies, and more. We write for scholars, students, policymakers, and engaged citizens who seek a deeper understanding of the politics of integration and

the forces that shape it. Our approach combines conceptual analysis with grounded empirical insights, moving between the macro-level of state policies and the micro-level of everyday practices and responses.

The chapters that follow combine theoretical reflection with empirical research conducted in diverse European settings. They engage with debates on nationalism, multiculturalism, interculturalism, populism, securitisation, and resilience, while introducing conceptual frameworks such as Carl Schmitt's ultra-politics and Ulrich Beck's sub-politics. In doing so, we examine both top-down state-led strategies and bottom-up responses by individuals and communities.

We invite you, the reader, to approach the chapters that follow not as a definitive statement on migration and integration, but as an invitation to think critically and historically about the boundaries of belonging. These boundaries are not immutable. They are created and recreated through laws, public discourse, and everyday interactions. Understanding this ongoing negotiation is, we believe, essential to imagining more just and inclusive futures in an age where mobility and diversity are here to stay.

Stockholm, Sweden
Istanbul, Türkiye

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Ayhan Kaya

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Although this book bears the names of two authors, it is in many ways the product of a much wider circle of inspiration and support. Throughout its pages, readers will find traces of the scholars, thinkers, and writers whose works, ideas, and theories have shaped our thinking. We are deeply grateful to all those minds—whether they know it or not—for opening intellectual pathways we have been fortunate to follow.

From the very beginning, we have been sustained by the encouragement of those closest to us. Our families have been a constant source of emotional strength and practical help; without them, this book would never have moved beyond an idea. We owe them more than words can express. Anna Triandafyllidou further deserves a special mention for the trust, support, and encouragement that accompanied us throughout the writing of this work. Our gratitude also goes to Irina Isaakyan, whose steady support was equally important along the way. We are also grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their contribution.

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Abbreviations

AfD	<i>Alternative für Deutschland</i>
AKP	<i>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi</i> (Justice and Development Party)
BNI	Barriers to Naturalisation Index
CIVIX	Civic Integration Policy Index
CPI	Citizenship Policy Index
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
EUROSTAT	Statistical Office of the European Communities
FN	<i>Front National</i>
FPÖ	<i>Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs</i> (Austrian Freedom Party)
FvD	<i>Forum voor Democratie</i> (Forum for Democracy)
GLOBALCIT	Global Citizenship Observatory
ICRI	Indicators of Citizenship Rights for Immigrants
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IPL	Immigration Policy Lab
MIPEX	Migrant Integration Policy Index
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PEGIDA	Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident
PVV	<i>Partij voor de vrijheid</i> (Party for Freedom)
RN	<i>Rassemblement National</i>
UN	United Nations

Chapter 1

Introduction: Understanding the Politics of Integration



Migration and integration have become defining political and social questions of our time. Across Europe and beyond, public debates over belonging, citizenship, and identity are increasingly shaped by the movement of people and how societies respond to this mobility. While these issues are often framed in the language of crisis, they are in fact embedded in much longer histories of nation-building, boundary-making, and political negotiation. This book engages with these deeper dynamics, approaching the politics of integration not as a technical policy matter, but as a contested arena where values, identities, and power are continually renegotiated.

Our point of departure is the recognition that integration is not a one-way process imposed upon migrants, but a multi-scalar set of practices implicating all members of society. Drawing on Nira Yuval-Davis's (2006, 2011) notion of the politics of belonging, we situate integration within the broader struggles over who is recognised as part of the political community and under what conditions. In this book, the aim is to give an overview and analyse some of the most salient of the array of political projects, institutional arrangements, and discursive practices through which notions of integration, belonging, and social cohesion are constructed and contested within particular collectivities. The book includes an interrogation of the historical and ongoing construction of the nation-state as a political and symbolic community, and how integration policies have been developed in Europe. The book also examines how individuals, both of migrant and native origin, respond to the contemporary politics of integration in a European context marked by the rise of right-wing populism and a pervasive politics of fear.

By placing the politics of integration at the centre of inquiry, this book introduces readers to key theoretical perspectives and ongoing debates on migration. Drawing on a wide range of disciplinary approaches, including political science, normative political theory, social anthropology, and political psychology, the volume conceptualises integration not as a linear process, or as affecting migrants alone, but as a politically charged field through which boundaries of belonging, citizenship, and social membership are actively drawn and redrawn. Across the chapters, we engage

with major theoretical debates that have shaped both scholarly and policy discussions, including the cultural, civic, and local turns; concepts of governmentality and resilience; and the roles of nationalism, nativism, and securitisation in structuring integration regimes. In doing so, the book also incorporates emerging analytical frameworks such as Schmittian *ultra-politics* and Beckian *sub-politics*, alongside longstanding debates on multiculturalism, interculturalism, and populism, to illuminate how the politics of integration function as battlegrounds over identity, authority, and the legitimate contours of the political community.

Against this backdrop, the book situates integration within a dense constellation of socio-economic, political, religio-political, civilisational, ethno-cultural, psychological, class-based, and gendered dynamics that jointly shape the boundaries of belonging in contemporary societies. With Europe as its primary geographical focus, the analysis traces how integration is governed, contested, and experienced across multiple scales, ranging from supranational policy frameworks and national citizenship regimes to municipal practices and everyday social encounters. Rather than treating integration as a neutral or technical policy objective, the book examines it as a deeply political process embedded in struggles over recognition, redistribution, and power. Drawing on both classic foundational texts and recent interdisciplinary scholarship, the chapters combine established as well as newer theoretical perspectives with empirical research on contemporary developments, thereby illuminating how shifting political economies, cultural narratives, and affective responses continually redefine who is included, on what terms, and at what cost.

1.1 The Politics of Integration

Drawing on Yuval-Davis's concept of the *politics of belonging*, this book uses the notion of a *politics of integration* to capture the power-laden processes through which migrants and minorities are positioned, evaluated, and governed as (potential) members of the polity. Whereas the politics of belonging concerns the symbolic and institutional boundaries of collective membership, the politics of integration focuses on how these boundaries are operationalised through policy regimes, welfare institutions, and everyday regulatory practices. The concept thus highlights integration not as a neutral process of inclusion, but as a contested field in which norms of citizenship, culture, and deservingness are actively produced and enforced.

Importantly, the politics of integration could be used to analyse not only state-centred and institutionalised measures, but also the actions of nativist actors and some individuals with migrant origins who perceive themselves as marginalised, neglected, alienated, or humiliated by the political centre. These actors articulate their resentment sometimes through opposition to multiculturalism, diversity, and transnational mobility, and sometimes through appeal to religious radicalisation and ethnocultural isolation. By focusing on the politics of integration, the book situates itself in a specific historical moment—one characterised by the ascendancy of populist and nativist sentiments and religious extremism across Europe—highlighting how these

dynamics actively shape debates about belonging, citizenship, and the boundaries of political membership.

The politics of integration concerns how migrant-receiving states define, regulate, and enforce the boundaries of membership, particularly through citizenship regimes and nationalist ideologies, and the resulting dynamics of inclusion and exclusion they produce. Across time and countries, these politics have been guided by different approaches, such as republican, multiculturalist, integrationist, segregationist, intercultural, and assimilationist models. The politics of integration is shaped by deeper, often unspoken, assumptions about who belongs to a political community, how such belonging is defined and institutionalised, and what pathways are available for newcomers to become recognised members of the *demos*.

The politics of integration revolves around three interrelated domains—nationalism, citizenship, and approaches to ethnocultural diversity. The domain of nationalism is fundamentally a question about the boundaries of the *demos*: Who is considered part of “us”? How can “outsiders”, in our case, migrants, be recognised as members? Under what social, legal, and cultural conditions does the transition to becoming a member occur? These questions have occupied political theorists, sociologists, and policymakers for decades and continue to animate public debates across liberal democracies. The role of nationalism is crucial in defining the contours of political membership. Nationalism is not just an ideology or sentiment; it is a boundary-making practice that determines inclusion and exclusion within the imagined community of the nation. As Helga Leitner (1995) has shown, the dominant ideology of nationalism in a given country strongly influences societal attitudes toward foreigners and newcomers. National myths, collective memories, and shared identity markers form what might be called a “tolerance threshold”—a set of tacit limits beyond which difference becomes perceived as threatening.

Citizenship is both a legal status and a set of practices through which membership in a political community is enacted. T. H. Marshall’s classic work *Citizenship and Social Class* (1965/1950) remains a touchstone in this regard, emphasising the importance of rights—civil, political, and social—that developed sequentially in modern nation-states. Hence, formal membership, such as access to national citizenship, does not in itself guarantee social recognition as a member; it is the granting of a substantive bundle of equal rights, particularly social rights, that enables migrants both to regard themselves, and to be regarded by others, as full members of society. Marshall’s framework offered a powerful lens for analysing the mid-20th-century welfare state, but subsequently, scholars have shown that globalisation and intensified human mobility have transformed citizenship into a more plural and fragmented institution, including postnational and transnational forms of belonging that challenge the traditional nation-state-centred model. Citizenship, therefore, is no longer simply a binary of insider versus outsider; it is increasingly multi-layered and negotiated across multiple scales of governance.

In relation to ethnocultural diversity, states have taken various approaches. Each approach embodies a different philosophy of social cohesion and implies different institutional arrangements for granting rights, promoting participation, and fostering a shared sense of belonging. For instance, approaches to integration range from the

assimilationist model, which envisions gradual absorption into a dominant culture (Kivisto, 2005; Park, 1914, 1928), to the republican ideal of difference-blind citizenship (Brubaker, 1992), the multicultural recognition of diversity (Kymlicka, 1995; Parekh, 2000), and the intercultural emphasis on dialogue and evolving identities (Kaya, 2018; Meer & Modood, 2012).

1.2 The Crisis of Conventional Politics

Having outlined the conceptual scope of the *politics of integration*, it is necessary to clarify the focus of the subsequent chapters. At the macro level, the book examines both conventional forms of political engagement—legislative processes, party politics, and institutionalised policymaking—and what can be termed *ultra-politics*, where political actors mobilise existential narratives, crises, or symbolic threats to redefine boundaries of membership and national identity. At the meso and micro levels, the analysis foregrounds *sub-politics*, emphasising unconventional, bottom-up forms of political participation such as grassroots activism, local mobilisations, and informal networks. This focus is particularly relevant for categories of actors who are often overlooked in other studies, including both migrant communities and nativist groups. These actors frequently resort to sub-political strategies because, based on experiences of marginalisation, humiliation, or political alienation, they perceive that conventional democratic channels are unresponsive or exclusionary. By highlighting these dynamics, the book illuminates how the state and societal actors actively shape, contest, and negotiate the politics of integration, both within and outside of formal state structures.

The macro-level processes involved in the politics of integration refer to how states, political actors, and institutions negotiate and regulate the boundaries of membership, national identity, and belonging. From this top-down perspective, politics of integration encompass the formal mechanisms of democratic governance—party politics, legislative debates, government bills, and the formulation and implementation of public policies—that collectively define who is included within the political community and under what conditions. The evolution of the politics of integration, therefore, can be understood as a reflection of these broader political dynamics. These macro-level processes interact with meso- and micro-level responses, where local actors, organisations, and individuals interpret, negotiate, adapt to, or resist policy directives in their everyday lives. Within this multi-scalar framework, the politics of integration implies both a set of institutionalised policy measures and the dynamic interplay between those measures and the lived experiences of migrants and host populations.

The politics of integration involves decision-making and debates over issues like the ones mentioned above (nationalism, citizenship, and approaches to ethnocultural diversity), which take place within the conventional modes of politics, understood in liberal-democratic terms as negotiation, compromise, and the search for common ground within pluralistic societies. In this framework, politics are framed around

balancing rights and responsibilities, fostering inclusion, and managing diversity within the civic order. However, the politics of integration also involves what Carl Schmitt (1996/1932) conceptualised as *ultra-politics*, where belonging to the political community is framed less as a matter of negotiation and more as an existential question of loyalty, security, and homogeneity. Arguably, this mode of politics is increasingly visible in the restrictive turn of European integration policies, and implies that integration is transformed from a process of accommodation into a test of allegiance. Migrants and their descendants are not merely invited to participate in a shared civic life but are often positioned as potential threats, whose presence demands constant scrutiny and conditional acceptance. Questions of identity and loyalty overshadow those of social inclusion and democratic participation. The increased salience of a Schmittian *ultra-politics*, as compared to conventional politics, also implies that migrants and minorities are framed as existential threats to the homogeneity, sovereignty, and security of the nation-state, thereby leading to exclusionary and securitised understandings of integration.

A further dimension concerns the micro-level, where attention shifts to the agency of individuals and the bottom-up forms of political participation. Within this domain, a distinction can be drawn between conventional modes of participation—such as electoral behaviour, membership in political parties, and involvement in civil society organisations—and non-conventional modes, including protest activities, acts of civil disobedience, and emerging social movements. Building on Ulrich Beck (1999), this latter micro-level participation may be conceptualised as *sub-politics*: a domain in which non-institutional actors, such as individuals, grassroots movements, and local networks, intervene in shaping societal transformation beyond the conventional arenas of party politics and state institutions. Within the field of migration and integration, sub-political practices manifest in diverse ways: migrants and established members of the society forging alternative spaces of belonging; informal solidarity networks responding to humanitarian crises; or everyday acts of negotiation and resistance to dominant integration policies and discourses. These sub-political responses highlight how individuals, both with and without migration backgrounds, develop strategies to cope with and challenge the broader societal tensions surrounding migration, belonging, and identity in contemporary Europe.

1.3 Terminology

An exploration of the concept of *integration* is essential for understanding contemporary debates on migration and belonging. The term itself has deep sociological roots, appearing prominently in the works of theorists such as Émile Durkheim (1893, 1912), Georg Simmel (1908), Robert E. Park et al. (1925), Milton Gordon (1947, 1964), Talcott Parsons (1951), and Jürgen Habermas (1999). Derived from the Latin *integer*, meaning “an intact whole,” the term integration has long been understood to denote the concept of a social whole. Within classical sociology, this conceptualisation was embedded in an organicist tradition that conceived society

as an integrated body requiring continuous internal adjustment to accommodate new elements (Schinkel, 2017). From this perspective, the arrival of migrants or “strangers” (Simmel 1908) is not merely an additive process but one that demands transformations across all constituent parts of society. Chapter 2 contains a more thorough discussion of the concept of integration.

In this book, we talk about “natives” and “newcomers.” The term “natives” is here used to denote members of the receiving societies, fully aware that it is an imperfect and contested category. The term risks reifying boundaries and hierarchies between those with and without migration backgrounds, potentially obscuring the historical fact that every society has been shaped by earlier forms of migration, mobility, and intermixture. Our use of this term is therefore pragmatic and heuristic, intended to provide readers with a clear reference point for understanding how these dynamics are articulated in political discourse and social practice. At the same time, we emphasise throughout the book that such categories are not fixed: they are fluid, historically contingent, and continuously renegotiated in everyday encounters, institutional frameworks, and public debates. By foregrounding this tension, we highlight how “natives” and “migrants” are not naturally given or mutually exclusive groups, but rather positions produced, reproduced, and contested within the broader politics of integration.

Drawing on Michel Foucault (1979), the notion of *governmentality* implies that integration emerges not simply as a social outcome but as a technology of governance—a means by which states seek to regulate populations, direct behaviours, and shape identities. In this light, integration becomes a disciplinary mechanism that situates newcomers as subjects who must actively conform and adjust to an existing social order (Schinkel, 2017, 2018). Crucially, the “society” into which migrants are expected to integrate is often tacitly defined as a space that belongs to established residents, thereby reinforcing social boundaries and hierarchical divisions. This Barthian boundary-drawing function of integration has become increasingly visible during the rise of populist politics, where the rhetoric of protecting “our society” against foreign elements serves to legitimise exclusionary policies and nativist nationalism (Kaya, 2019; Mudde, 2004; Rydgren, 2008; Wodak, 2015).

In this book, the term *neoliberalism* refers primarily to processes in which the state retreats from its traditional responsibilities by devolving them to actors at the meso- and micro-levels, while simultaneously retrenching the welfare state. Across Europe and beyond, governments have increasingly shifted the burden of welfare provision—and, in the context of this study, immigrant integration—onto local authorities, NGOs, and, crucially, migrants themselves. Scholars observe that the retreat of responsibility from the “centre” becomes most apparent in times of crisis—be it armed conflict, pandemics, or mass displacement—when local actors and individuals are compelled to shoulder the complex demands of integration, often under the imperative of resilience (Panizzon & Riemsdijk, 2019).

1.4 The Structure of the Book

This book does not present new empirical research but builds on the rich body of existing international literature, with particular attention to recent contributions, including studies conducted by the authors themselves. As it is a Reader, its purpose is to elaborate on and critically engage with these findings rather than to generate original data. By weaving together theoretical perspectives and empirically grounded insights, the book examines how the politics of integration are formulated, contested, and reshaped, situating them within the broader political transformations driven by populism, nativism, securitisation, and evolving understandings of citizenship and belonging.

After this Introduction, Chapter 2 explores the concept of integration, tracing its evolution from classical sociological theory to contemporary debates in migration, citizenship, and social policy. It begins by revisiting early thinkers such as Émile Durkheim, Auguste Comte, and Talcott Parsons, who conceptualised integration as the maintenance of social cohesion and systemic stability. These foundational perspectives viewed integration as a property of society, emphasising normative alignment and collective solidarity rather than issues of migration, cultural diversity, or individual rights. The chapter then examines how political and philosophical traditions expanded the notion of integration to include access to rights, social participation, and belonging. It surveys liberal egalitarian frameworks (Marshall 1950; Rawls, 1971), multicultural perspectives (Kymlicka, 1995; Taylor, 1994), and civic integrationist approaches (Goodman, 2010, 2014; Joppke, 2007), highlighting tensions between individual rights, cultural recognition, and duties. Complementary debates in constitutional patriotism and liberal nationalism further emphasise the role of shared civic values, active participation, and inclusive national identity in sustaining social cohesion and democratic solidarity, while noting the risks of exclusion when national identity becomes ethnically defined. The chapter also considers empirical and methodological approaches to studying integration, from classical assimilation models to contemporary index-based frameworks and indicators. The chapter reviews prominent critiques of integration research, which argue that it has been one-sided in its focus on migrant adaptation and has relied on the assumption of a static, homogeneous host society. Finally, relational and boundary-based approaches are introduced, which conceptualise integration as a dynamic, reciprocal process, highlighting mutual recognition, the graded nature of membership, and the co-construction of belonging within diverse, fluid, and transnational societies.

Chapter 3 examines how migrant integration is embedded in the ongoing construction of nation-states. The question of integrating migrant populations is not simply a matter of social policy but fundamentally intertwined with the processes through which nations define political membership, citizenship, and collective identity. Since the nineteenth century, nation-states have positioned themselves as the primary sites of belonging, binding identity to territory and legal status. The politics of integration thus operate as mechanisms that reveal and negotiate the boundaries of national

membership, determining who belongs and under what conditions. Although scholarly debates often distinguish between civic and ethnic models of nationhood, this chapter shows that contemporary nation-building rarely conforms to such binaries. Modern integration regimes simultaneously draw on civic ideals of shared political commitments and ethnocultural markers of belonging, producing contradictory and contested logics of inclusion. These dynamics are intensified in moments of increased migration, when the visibility of difference politicises questions of identity and belonging. The chapter also traces how exclusionary forms of membership have re-emerged in recent decades with the rise of right-wing populism and nativism, reframing “the people” as a culturally homogeneous entity opposed to racialised and religious “others.” In this climate, integration debates function as proxy arenas for broader struggles over national identity and sovereignty. At the same time, transnational mobility and globalisation disrupt these imaginaries, as migrants sustain cross-border networks, attachments, and identities that challenge the state’s capacity to singularly define membership. Building on theories of nationalism, the chapter conceptualizes political communities in ideal types—primordial, civic, and cultural—while emphasising that, in practice, most states combine these forms. Integration policies are shaped by these configurations of community and enacted through bureaucratic and biopolitical mechanisms. Ultimately, the chapter argues that integration policies do more than incorporate newcomers: they are technologies of boundary-making that reproduce hierarchies of membership and continuously redefine the contours of the political community in an era of intensified global mobility and contested nationhood.

Chapter 4 investigates what it means for European states to “integrate” newcomers and how the political logics of integration have evolved across time and contexts. Integration is not simply a matter of social adjustment or legal inclusion; it is a politically charged process through which states articulate ideas of nationhood, belonging, and citizenship. These policies operate as mechanisms of boundary-making, defining who can be fully recognised as part of the political community and under what conditions. The chapter begins by tracing the historical development of integration regimes, showing how national approaches emerged from distinct institutional legacies, colonial histories, and competing self-understandings of the nation. France’s civic-republican model, Germany’s ethno-cultural conception of membership, Britain’s multicultural accommodationism, and the corporatist approaches of Scandinavian countries illustrate how different imaginaries of nationhood underpin integration policies. Despite these variations, integration has consistently served as a tool for the reproduction of national identity and the demarcation of insiders and outsiders. From the late twentieth century onward, European states underwent a profound policy transformation characterised by a “civic turn” and a simultaneous retreat from multiculturalism. Integration measures became increasingly conditional, linking long-term residence and citizenship acquisition to language proficiency, civic education, and adherence to “core national values.” While presented as fostering inclusion, these requirements often conceal exclusionary logics, implicitly demanding conformity to majority cultural norms. The rise of right-wing populism and nativist discourses has further politicised these dynamics, framing migration as a threat to social cohesion,

security, and sovereignty. Drawing on typologies from migration and citizenship studies, the chapter examines how integration policies oscillate between civic ideals of equality and hidden ethnic boundaries of exclusion. It interrogates the power relations embedded in these policies, revealing how they function as instruments of governmentality that discipline newcomers and regulate access to membership. Ultimately, the chapter argues that integration policies cannot be understood merely as technical governance tools; they are sites where states continuously renegotiate nationhood, citizenship, and democracy in response to pluralisation, globalisation, and political polarisation.

Chapter 5 examines how the post-9/11 European landscape has been reshaped by a politics of fear targeting migrants, refugees, and especially Muslims. Conspiracy narratives such as “Eurabia” and the “Great Replacement” (Camus, 2011, 2018) amplified by leaders like Wilders, Le Pen, Orbán, and Zemmour, depict Muslim immigration as an existential threat to European civilisation. Framed in the language of liberal values, these discourses have mainstreamed Islamophobia and securitised migration, linking Muslims to crime, terrorism, and social instability. The chapter conceptualises these developments through *ultra-politics*—state and populist projects that construct existential narratives of cultural siege—and *sub-politics*, the bottom-up responses they provoke. Among majority populations, sub-politics manifests in nativist mobilisation, populist support, and retreats into homogeneous enclaves. Among migrant-origin people, it often takes the form of counter-radicalisation, religio-political solidarities, and alternative modes of belonging in response to systemic exclusion and epistemic injustice. Rather than a clash of civilisations, radicalisation in Europe emerges as a reaction to neoliberal governance, which has eroded welfare protections, fragmented solidarities, and intensified precariousness. Religious, ethnic, and community networks thus serve as alternative sources of recognition and security. In this context, nostalgic nationalism gains traction by promising to restore sovereignty and cultural homogeneity. The chapter highlights how some segments of both migrant and native groups contest dominant integration frameworks through everyday practices, while securitisation and right-wing populism entrench exclusionary boundaries and reshape pathways of belonging in Europe.

The concluding chapter brings together the book’s key insights on migration and integration as complex, relational processes shaped by interactions between migrants, native-born populations, states, and institutions. It revisits central concepts such as state, nation, citizenship, and governance, demonstrating how these categories structure lived experiences of belonging and exclusion. The chapter further highlights how neoliberal restructuring and the rise of populism intensify social insecurities and inequalities, giving rise to both exclusionary forms of ultra-politics and diverse sub-political responses through which individuals and communities seek recognition and solidarity. Drawing on Fredrik Barth’s (1969) approach to ethnic boundaries, integration is conceptualised as an ongoing process of boundary negotiation rather than as the management of fixed cultural differences.

More broadly, and as a central premise underpinning the book as a whole, the authors position themselves in critical dialogue with strands of scholarship that call

for “writing against integration.” While recognising the analytical and political force of such critiques, this volume argues for retaining integration as an object of analysis, provided it is approached in a reflexive, context-sensitive, and power-conscious manner. Rather than abandoning the concept, the book treats integration as a contested political field through which struggles over belonging, recognition, and exclusion are articulated in specific historical and institutional settings. From this perspective, the integration concept remains indispensable for understanding how boundaries of membership are constructed and challenged in contemporary societies, even as global transformations continue to reshape its meanings and effects.

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Chapter 2

Integration in Theory and Practice: From Classical Sociology to Relational Approaches



The concept of integration has long stood at the heart of scholarly and policy debates on migration, citizenship, and social cohesion. Yet, its meanings, uses, and implications remain deeply contested. This chapter explores how integration has been conceptualised across historical, sociological, and political traditions, tracing its evolution from classical sociological theory to contemporary critiques and reformulations. By examining integration through different lenses, including liberal egalitarianism, multiculturalism, civic integrationism, and transnationalism, the chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of how integration has been defined, studied, and measured. It also critically assesses the normative assumptions embedded in integration research and policy, particularly the tendency to individualise and decontextualise integration, often reinforcing majority norms. The chapter concludes by highlighting recent theoretical shifts toward relational and boundary-based approaches, which offer more dynamic and inclusive ways of understanding integration in an increasingly fluid and diverse world.

2.1 Integration—Definition and Early Scholarship

Etymologically, the term *integration* stems from the Latin *integratio*, meaning “renewal” or “restoration,” rooted in *integer*, denoting “whole” or “intact”. Originally used in theological and legal discourse, the term gradually acquired broader connotations, particularly in the social sciences, where it refers to the processes by which individuals or groups become integrated into larger societal structures. In modern contexts, *integration* often implies the inclusion of minorities or newcomers into political, economic, and cultural systems, suggesting not only structural participation but also normative ideals of unity or cohesion (Favell, 1998; Schinkel, 2018). The concept thus carries both descriptive and prescriptive weight, frequently

contrasted with segregation or exclusion, and assumes—sometimes implicitly—a prior or desired societal “whole” into which others are to be integrated.

When returning to the classical sociological texts on integration, it becomes clear that the focus was not, unlike today, on immigration and ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity. Instead, early scholars of integration such as Auguste Comte, Émile Durkheim, and Talcott Parsons focused primarily on the foundations of social order, cohesion, and stability within increasingly complex societies. Integration was understood as a condition of equilibrium in social relations, maintaining the social order of societies. At its heart, the problem of integration, as it was addressed by the classical thinkers, mirrors the dilemma Thomas Hobbes highlighted—how to secure a stable political order in the face of citizens’ conflicting desires and interests (Beckman, 2011; Ellis, 1971).

Émile Durkheim viewed social integration as the foundation of social order, evolving from traditional to modern forms. In traditional societies, integration was based on *mechanical solidarity*—shared beliefs, values, and a strong collective conscience that bound individuals together through similarity. As societies became more complex and differentiated, he argued that integration shifted toward *organic solidarity*, where cohesion arises from the interdependence of diverse individuals performing specialised roles. This modern form of integration relies on mutual dependence, individual rights, and moral regulation to maintain social cohesion amid increasing diversity and impersonality (Durkheim, 2014/1893). For Durkheim, the challenge of modernity was to cultivate new forms of solidarity that could sustain social unity without relying on cultural homogeneity.

Auguste Comte (1830) viewed integration as a foundational need in modern societies, particularly as traditional religious and hierarchical structures weakened under the forces of industrialisation and modernity. He believed that social cohesion could no longer rely on theological or military foundations but needed to be rebuilt through a new “scientific” understanding of society—what he called sociology. In his view, the integration in modern societies required a shared moral order based on positive science, which would harmonise the diverse parts of society into a stable whole.

Talcott Parsons (1951) distinguished between two senses of social system integration: it could refer either to the overall stability of the system itself, or the ‘compatibility’ among a system’s members. This distinction raises the question of what is meant by ‘compatibility’. One interpretation is to equate compatibility with *similarity*—members who hold similar views may naturally be seen as compatible. However, another possible interpretation, advanced by Ludvig Beckman, understands compatibility in terms of *alignment with the goals or principles* of the system (Beckman, 2011). Under this interpretation, if we consider, for instance, a workplace explicitly committed to pluralism but characterized by uniformity of opinion among its employees, such uniformity could be seen as undermining the very purpose and principles of the organisation. In this case, a more diverse staff would be regarded as more integrated than a uniform one, precisely because it aligns more closely with the organisation’s foundational commitment to pluralism. From this perspective, integration might be defined and evaluated by the extent to which core principles are

upheld—that is, by the degree of normative compatibility with the system’s guiding ideals (Beckman, 2011, p. 34).

2.2 Integration in Political Theory

Taking as its point of departure the conception of integration as normative compatibility outlined above, this section examines influential traditions in political theory that offer differing accounts of the core values of democratic society and, in doing so, propose alternative benchmarks for interpreting and assessing integration. The discussion is organised around two distinct responses drawn from the political theory literature concerning what it means for a society and its members to be considered well integrated. The first response, reflected in liberal egalitarianism, emphasises non-discrimination and individuals’ access to an equal set of rights, while the second places greater emphasis on political participation and civic responsibilities (Borevi, 2016).

2.2.1 *Integration—As All Individuals’ Access to Core Rights*

One classical perspective on integration is the sociology of welfare state integration emerging from T.H. Marshall’s seminal work on citizenship (1950). Marshall famously outlined the historical development of citizenship as a progression through three layers of rights—civil, political, and social. The different rights are interdependent; without one of them, the other two cannot be fully realised. However, in Marshall’s view, social rights, institutionalised through the welfare state, play a strategically central role in promoting integration. According to T.H. Marshall, social rights enable individuals to make use of the other rights: “The right of freedom of speech has little real substance if, from lack of education, you have nothing to say worth saying, and no means of making yourself heard if you say it” (Marshall, 1950, p. 35).

Moreover, and crucial to the concept of integration, social and material well-being, in Marshall’s view, fostered a sense of belonging among all members of society. The basis of belonging in a liberal democracy could no longer be kinship; rather, “citizenship requires a bond of a different kind, a direct sense of community membership based on loyalty to a civilisation which is a common possession” (Marshall, 1950, p. 34). T. H. Marshall (1950, p. 47) argued that preventing deep socio-economic divisions was crucial to maintaining a shared sense of collective belonging. In his view, integrated individuals both see themselves—and are seen by others—as full members of the political community, enjoying equal standing with fellow citizens. Accordingly, an integrated society is one in which everyone has equal access to the rights and resources deemed essential for full membership in the social community (cf. Borevi 2010).

If integration and equality are closely intertwined in T. H. Marshall's theory, a similar view resonates within the tradition of liberal egalitarianism, most influentially articulated by John Rawls in his *Theory of Justice*. According to John Rawls, equal rights and fair social redistribution are essential to fulfilling the core commitments of liberalism (Rawls, 1971; 1999). Central to his theory is the idea that all individuals should have access to primary goods—the basic resources and rights that people need to develop and act upon their own life plans. These include civil liberties, opportunities, income and wealth, and the social bases of self-respect. First, John Rawls argues that all citizens must enjoy equal civil rights that ensure political freedom, such as the right to vote and stand for public office, freedom of speech, belief, and association, personal liberty, the right to own property, and protection against arbitrary arrest. Additionally, the distribution of wealth and income must be governed by the “difference principle”, which allows social and economic inequalities only if they work to the advantage of the least advantaged members of society. A further cornerstone of Rawls's theory is the principle of state neutrality, which requires that the institutions of a liberal society neither promote specific conceptions of the good life nor obstruct individuals in pursuing their own. This principle serves to protect the freedom and equal moral worth of all citizens (Rawls 1993, pp. 190–95). As Ronald Dworkin (1977) famously asserted, the state must treat every citizen “with equal concern and respect”.

Scholars such as T. H. Marshall and John Rawls grounded their theories in the assumption that members of a nation-state share a common cultural framework—a “background culture”—which enables individuals to define and pursue their own vision of the good life (cf. Kymlicka, 2002, p. 231). However, with rising cultural diversity in the 1980s and 1990s, driven by globalisation and immigration, this assumption came under increasing criticism for overlooking individuals' need for a cultural context in which to anchor their identity (Kymlicka, 2002; Kymlicka & Norman, 1994). Will Kymlicka argued that access to *cultural membership* is essential for individual autonomy, as cultural contexts shape the range and meaning of available life choices and therefore proposed that this too should be recognised as a basic good, alongside those identified by Rawls. While members of the dominant culture enjoy this cultural context-resource by default, minorities are often, according to Kymlicka, “unfairly disadvantaged in the cultural marketplace” and therefore have a moral claim to special group rights to sustain their cultural frameworks. (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 109). Will Kymlicka's theory of liberal multiculturalism holds that true integration—where all residents feel like full citizens—requires active support for minorities' cultural belonging. If T. H. Marshall identified civil, political, and social rights as the foundations of integration, Kymlicka adds a fourth one: cultural rights.

An important note is that Will Kymlicka's theory primarily justifies such cultural rights for indigenous peoples and national minorities. While he supports efforts to help migrant ethnic minorities express their cultural identity and pride, he distinguishes between migrants' moral claims and those of national minorities. Since immigrants have, in his view, voluntarily left their original societal culture, they are not entitled to the same collective cultural rights (Kymlicka, 1995, pp. 14–15). The assumption that migration entails a voluntary surrender of cultural membership

has been criticized, for instance, by Joseph Carens (2000, p. 80), who argues that immigrants may still have strong moral claims to cultural recognition and support. However, in relation to religion, Kymlicka does claim that immigrants have a moral claim to receive special rights, for instance right to legal exemptions in cases where religious practices conflict with general laws, for them to uphold their religious obligations.

Brian Barry's *Culture and Equality* (2001) offers a strong critique of multiculturalism, insisting instead on individual citizenship rights and socio-economic redistribution to enable individuals to pursue their own life paths (Barry, 2001, chapter 4). For immigrants, Barry sees integration as requiring three key policies: (1) robust anti-discrimination laws ensuring equal opportunities regardless of ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation; (2) equal access to learning the official language, essential for participation in work and education; and (3) redistribution of resources to level socio-economic conditions, as equal opportunities depend on a fair starting point (Barry, 2001, pp. 54–62, pp. 103–9). Barry warns against state involvement in ethnic or cultural issues, arguing that liberalism, born out of Europe's religious conflicts, demands state neutrality. State policies, according to him, should therefore not be shaped by ethnicity (Barry, 2001, pp. 25–29, p. 68). Incidentally, Barry prefers the term “assimilation” over “integration,” emphasising the need for a shared national identity. This identity, he argues, should be civic rather than ethnic, allowing for cultural diversity (Barry, 2001, pp. 79–81); however, he offers little detail on how such a shared culture should be formed.

Barry may certainly be criticized for endorsing a one-sided model of integration, something we will return to soon. The point to make at this stage, however, is that he shares a Rawlsian egalitarian liberal tradition focused on individual rights. Within this framework, equal social membership is the guiding principle against which integration should be measured. Or put differently, a society may be understood as “integrated” to the extent that the state succeeds in realising individuals' capacity to make autonomous life choices. This conception of integration follows a Marshallian logic, where social rights are regarded as essential for enabling participation in society.

It can be noted that integration understood in relation to the value of equality—as emphasised in liberal egalitarianism—stands in sharp contrast to the general integration policy developments since the early 2000s, which are associated with civic integrationism. Chapter 4 provides a more detailed characterisation of these developments. Here, it suffices to note that civic integrationism involves a reversal of the core integration logic, put forward by T. H. Marshall and other theorists mentioned above: Rather than viewing access to rights as a prerequisite for fulfilling civic responsibilities and attaining status as integrated, the fulfilment of certain duties is seen as a precondition for acquiring rights (Borevi 2010). This also entails a notable shift toward the *individualisation* of integration, where the concept of integration seems to have completely lost its roots in classical sociology. Instead of denoting a property of a social system, integration has become synonymous with an individual achievement, and has turned into a quality of the individual. Yet, as noted by Willem Schinkel (2018, p. 3), individual-level integration is a strange idea, considering that

the opposite—a disintegrated individual—could at best have a (perversely) physical but not a social meaning (Schinkel, 2018, p. 3; Favell 2019; 2022).

2.2.2 Integration—As Political Participation and the Sharing of Core Civic Values and Identities

While liberal egalitarians, as discussed above, generally regard non-participation in the political and societal life as unproblematic—provided it stems from free choice rather than discrimination or unequal opportunities—proponents of constitutional patriotism and liberal nationalism instead stress the importance of active participation, civic virtues, and a sense of belonging as essential to sustaining democratic-liberal values. Consequently, these traditions place participation and belonging, rather than equality alone, at the very core of integration.

In political theory debates of the 1980s and early 1990s, the central question concerned whether ethnic or cultural groups possess a moral right to preserve their distinct identities. From the mid-1990s onward, however, attention increasingly turned to whether the state itself has a right—or even a duty—to promote a shared national identity. Critics argued that traditional liberalism, including John Rawls' view that a shared commitment to liberal-democratic principles suffices for democratic stability (Rawls 1980, p. 540), inadequately addresses the need for a deeper sense of community and belonging within the citizenry. Liberal principles such as human rights, democratic procedures, and the rule of law were seen as too abstract to explain why citizens of a particular state should feel a special obligation toward one another. These principles are, as Christian Joppke (2004) puts it, 'nationally anonymous'—applicable across democracies but insufficient for fostering the specific loyalties and attachments that bind citizens within a single polity. Democracy—and the welfare state—requires more than assent to universal values: it also depends on a shared sense of community, a social and emotional foundation that supports trust, cooperation, and mutual responsibility.

Indeed, such debates were certainly not a new phenomenon. In the mid-nineteenth century, John Stuart Mill (1946 [1861]) argued that democracy depends on a sense of national belonging—a shared identity and mutual sympathies among citizens that foster cooperation and collective self-governance. Without this basic unity, he warned, group isolation and social distance could hinder compromise and prevent the formation of common political will (Mill 1946 [1861], p. 294). However, theorists in the 1990s and onwards started to put a new emphasis on the need for a common national belonging. In the following sections, two prominent approaches are outlined that claim to bridge what has been presented as a gap between, on the one hand, liberal democracies' commitment to universal, reason-based values, and, on the other, the perceived need for emotional and social bonds that sustain solidarity, mutual understanding, and a shared sense of 'we'.

The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas is the leading figure associated with the development of the theory of *constitutional patriotism*. As a post-national alternative to ethnic or cultural nationalism, the theory takes a decidedly critical stance toward all forms of communal identity resembling nationalism, in light of its historically destructive consequences. The Holocaust, in particular, played a formative role in shaping Habermas' views (Habermas 1998). Yet he also acknowledges the historical link between the nation-state and democracy, tracing their parallel emergence to the French Revolution. According to Habermas, national consciousness—rooted in shared origins, language, and history—provided the cultural foundation for the rise of constitutional states (Habermas, 1998, p. 112). Habermas maintains that constitutional patriotism should replace national identity as the basis for political belonging.

Although Habermas's definitions of the term are somewhat ambiguous and vary across his work, constitutional patriotism is commonly interpreted as loyalty to the democratic constitution and political culture of one's country. Importantly, such constitutional patriotism, Habermas argues, must not only imply passive allegiance but also involve active participation in democratic processes, through which citizens cultivate a sense of solidarity and belonging. In Habermas's view, the common identity required among members of the same nation-state should be reproduced not through shared heritage, but through democratic engagement (Habermas, 1998, p. 76). Habermas's approach gives constitutional patriotism a distinctly republican character: Citizens become "co-authors" of the laws and principles that govern them, enabling them to perceive the political order as an expression of their collective will. For Habermas, democracy thus serves as both the source of political legitimacy and as the basis of social integration (Habermas, 1998, p. 50). He seeks to reconcile universal democratic norms with the concrete institutions of the nation-state through laws developed through public deliberation—thereby avoiding the exclusionary effects of fixed national or cultural identities (see Markell 2000; Helldahl, 2013).

Theorists in the tradition of *liberal nationalism* share Habermas's concern that pre-political identities—like ethnicity, religion, or culture—can be exclusionary and are therefore unsuitable as the basis for cohesion in a liberal democracy. However, they argue that the concept of constitutional patriotism is too abstract and focused on formal procedures to foster the deeper sense of belonging democratic societies require. Liberal nationalists believe that national identity can support democratic solidarity, provided it is reinterpreted in ways that align with liberal-democratic values (Moore 2001). This means rethinking traditional elements of nationhood to avoid exclusion. Proponents of liberal nationalism argue that shared ancestry or religion, for example, are inherently exclusionary, while a common language or civic institutions may serve as unifying features without violating liberal principles. Rather than promoting ethnic traditions, liberal nationalists support building an inclusive public culture through national media, museums, and civic symbols—offering a more legitimate basis for integration (Banting & Kymlicka 2017).

David Miller is one of the most prominent contemporary advocates of liberal nationalism. He argues that national identity holds normative importance for two

main reasons: first, because individuals have special obligations to their fellow citizens, and second, because a shared national identity provides a necessary foundation for democratic governance. Drawing on the republican tradition, Miller contends that citizenship is not just a set of rights but also involves certain attitudes and civic virtues. Being a “good citizen” means identifying with one’s political community and committing to the common good through active participation in political life (Miller 2000, p. 53). According to Miller, national identity has instrumental value in sustaining both democracy and the redistributive welfare state. Without a sense of belonging and solidarity with their compatriots, citizens are unlikely to support the redistribution necessary for social justice (Miller 1995, p. 185). While he admits it cannot be conclusively proven that abstract political identities alone fail to foster this solidarity, Miller points out that all functioning democracies with strong welfare systems seem to depend on a shared national culture. The lack of counterexamples makes it reasonable, in his view, to conclude that national identity plays a crucial role (Miller 2008, p. 381). He also refers to empirical research supporting the claim that national identity is essential for both democratic stability and the development of welfare states. Some liberal nationalists go further and argue that a legitimate form of liberal nationalism must also recognize multiculturalism. It is not enough to make national identity more inclusive; it is also necessary to publicly acknowledge ethno-cultural diversity within a shared national identity and narrative. Will Kymlicka is a leading proponent of this multicultural nationalism, where minority rights are regarded as crucial to ensuring that efforts to strengthen national identity do not compromise the rights or status of minority groups. (Kymlicka, 1995; 2007; cf. Tamir 1993).

It is noteworthy that the emphasis on collective belonging, identity, and civic virtues in the theories of constitutional patriotism and liberal nationalism discussed above is echoed in contemporary notions of integration and current policy developments. As will be explored further in Chapter 4, many policy proposals across European countries—particularly in the areas of immigration and integration—explicitly aim to strengthen national identity. However, as discussed above, efforts to promote national identity can potentially threaten core democratic values, including individual justice and equal opportunity. Even when designed to be inclusive, national identity can easily take on ethnic connotations—whether intentionally or unintentionally—resulting in the exclusion of certain groups. This underlying tension between *demos* and *ethnos*—or, in other words, between civic and ethnic conceptions of an integrated national community—will be examined further in Chapters 3 and 4.

2.3 The Study and Measurement of Immigrant Integration: Approaches and Critiques

As noted earlier in this chapter, early scholarship on integration—shaped by classical thinkers such as Auguste Comte, Émile Durkheim, and Talcott Parsons—understood integration as a characteristic of society as a whole. In contrast, contemporary research on integration predominantly focuses on immigrants and minority groups.

2.3.1 *Assimilation and Integration Research*

The Chicago School of Sociology was among the first to study integration in urban, migration-shaped environments. Robert E. Park and colleagues (1925) described the city through labour division, mobility, and communication, and introduced the “race relations cycle”: contact, competition, accommodation, and assimilation. Newcomers first meet locals, often sparking conflict, followed by competition over resources. With time—and sometimes state intervention—this can lead to assimilation, where newcomers are structurally and socially integrated into society. Assimilation in the Chicago School’s model centred on acculturation—initially requiring migrants to unlearn their culture of origin and then adopt that of the host society. Migrants were described as “marginal men” (Park, 1914, 1928), gradually transitioning into the dominant culture. The Chicago School rested on the assumption that immigrants—but not members of the host society—are expected to abandon their own culture, language, and beliefs to become indistinguishable from native-born individuals.

Early assimilation research also identified a second form: cultural blending, where immigrants and the host society merge their practices and norms to create a “melting pot” (Gordon 1964). From this perspective, integration is assessed by whether differences—such as language, income, and residential patterns—between long-established and newcomer groups diminish, without expecting all the change to come solely from immigrants and their descendants. Later variants of this approach include the framework developed by Herbert Gans (1997), which allowed for segmented or partial assimilation. Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou (1993) developed the theory of segmented assimilation further, distinguishing modes of incorporation based on race, class, and societal reception, and highlighting the possibility of downward assimilation among marginalised groups.

The Canadian social psychologist John Berry (2005) extended this line of inquiry by formulating a widely recognized typology of acculturation pathways. He identified four possible outcomes shaped by both immigrant choices and host-society attitudes: marginalisation, segregation, assimilation, and integration. ‘Marginalisation’ occurs when exclusionary pressures leave immigrants disconnected from both their heritage and the dominant culture, while ‘segregation’ results when immigrant communities are isolated from broader society. In contrast, ‘assimilation’ reflects a

melting-pot approach in which immigrants are expected to abandon their cultural background entirely. Finally, John Berry identifies ‘integration,’ where immigrants maintain aspects of their original culture while also engaging with the host society, aligning closely with multiculturalism as a policy ideal.

As shown above, assimilation became the dominant paradigm in North American integration research well into the late twentieth century, providing both a framework for studying incorporation and a normative benchmark for immigrant adaptation. The assumption of unidirectional cultural change—placing the burden on immigrants rather than the host society—would later be criticised for its ethnocentric bias and limited attention to transnational dynamics. In its canonical definition, integration differs from assimilation by being understood as a two-way process. Migrants and ethnic minorities are expected to achieve full membership in society by adopting key values, norms, and cultural codes (such as language) from the majority population, while mainstream society is simultaneously reshaped through their participation (Alba et al., 2013). Nonetheless, many of the questions raised in assimilation theory, such as how intergroup boundaries shift over generations and how social mobility intersects with ethnicity and race, continue to shape integration research today.

2.3.2 Examples of Studies Measuring and Comparing Integration

Integration research has employed a variety of approaches and indicators to assess the extent to which immigrants participate in and are included within their host societies, providing insight into social outcomes and, in some cases, informing policy and practice. A widely cited framework for measuring immigrant integration, suggested by Alastair Ager and Alison Strang (2008), defines integration as both parity in public outcomes (employment, housing, education, health) and active engagement with ethnic, host, and institutional communities in ways aligned with national notions of citizenship. Drawing on Robert Putnam’s (1993) concept of social capital—especially bonding, bridging, and linking ties—this framework organizes integration into four domains: (1) Markers and Means (employment, housing, education, health), representing key tangible indicators of socioeconomic inclusion; (2) Social Connections, referring to relationships within ethnic communities, with the broader host society, and with institutions; (3) Facilitators, such as language skills, cultural knowledge, and a sense of safety and stability; and (4) Foundation, encompassing legal rights, residency status, and access to citizenship. The framework by Ager and Strang was designed with practical use in mind, aimed at assisting policymakers and practitioners.

Several international institutions have made use of similar indicators to compare the native population with the migrant population, assessing the extent of the differences, and concluding that as these differences diminish, integration increases. The Indicators of Immigrant Integration, for instance, assess integration outcomes across

the 27 EU member states using metrics such as labour market access, education, housing and living conditions, risk of poverty, social exclusion, and active citizenship. These indicators, often referred to as the *Zaragoza indicators*, were introduced under the 2009 Stockholm Program, formalised in the 2010 Zaragoza Declaration, and adopted in 2013 (OECD/European Commission 2023). Another example is the EUROSTAT Migrant Integration Statistics, which evaluates the performance of the 27 EU member states through indicators, including labour market access, employment, education, housing and living conditions, poverty risk, social exclusion, and active citizenship (EUROSTAT, 2024). The IOM Migration Data Portal, launched in 2017, further provides global indicators on both immigration and integration. Its integration metrics include migrants' access to employment, education, and the extent of skills–job mismatch (IOM, 2020). Similarly, the Immigration Policy Lab (IPL), founded by Stanford University and ETH Zurich, developed a survey-based tool assessing integration across six dimensions—psychological, economic, political, social, linguistic, and navigational—capturing migrants' self-perceptions of integration in their host societies (IPL, 2025).

Beyond outcome-focused approaches, such as those mentioned above, there is a large body of research studying and comparing integration policies and regulations across countries. These studies give information on how policies and laws shape migrants' access to the labour market, education, healthcare, family reunification, citizenship, etc. Progress in this field accelerated in the 2000s, aided by the growing availability of comparable data (Vink & Bauböck, 2013), leading to the development of several analytical frameworks that establish indices for measuring, comparing, and evaluating different integration regimes in terms of their inclusiveness or restrictiveness. The *Migrant Integration Policy Index* (MIPEX 2025) is a comparative index, first introduced in 2004 for assessing the quality of integration policies, currently covering 56 countries across five continents, using indicators across areas like employment, education, health, political participation, and anti-discrimination. The *Citizenship Policy Index* (CPI 2025), developed by Marc Morjé Howard, evaluates the inclusiveness and restrictiveness of countries' citizenship laws, focusing on eligibility, rights, and obligations associated with naturalisation (Howard, 2009). The *Civic Integration Policy Index* (CIVIX, 2025), developed by Sara Goodman, measures the extent and strictness of civic integration requirements for immigrants, including language, knowledge, and participation tests (Goodman 2010). The *Barriers to Naturalisation Index* (BNI, 2025), developed by Thomas Janoski, assesses obstacles to acquiring citizenship, capturing legal and procedural constraints that affect immigrants' access to nationality (Janoski 2010). The *Multiculturalism Policy Index* (MPI 2025), developed by Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka, compares countries' multiculturalism policies, considering support for cultural diversity, minority rights, and group-specific accommodations (Banting & Kymlicka, 2006). The *Indicators of Citizenship Rights for Immigrants* (ICRI 2025) quantify the legal and practical rights granted to immigrants in areas such as political participation and social benefits (Koopmans et al., 2005). Finally, Maarten Vink and Rainer Bauböck have developed a typology of citizenship configurations to allow systematic classification of national citizenship regimes based on combinations of rights,

eligibility, and dual citizenship rules (Vink and Bauböck, 2013), which is part of the online Global Citizenship Observatory (GLOBALCIT), committed to fact-based and non-partisan analysis of citizenship laws and electoral rights around the world (GLOBALCIT, 2025).

Together, these examples demonstrate how integration research over the last two decades has been institutionalised through indicators and indices, producing a wide array of comparative frameworks. These studies and frameworks provide valuable means for comparing the circumstances of immigrants across different national contexts, as well as for assessing how inclusive or restrictive integration and citizenship policies are. At the same time, this research has faced critical scrutiny for the assumptions underlying its approaches.

2.3.3 Critique Against Integration Research: The Gap Approach

Existing integration research has been criticized for implicitly assuming a one-sided, linear process of immigrant adaptation. Even when framed as integration rather than assimilation, research often reproduces divisions between “migrants” and “natives,” focusing on how newcomers must adjust to predefined societal norms while largely ignoring the potential for reciprocal change within the host society.

Richard Alba and Nancy Foner (2015) define integration as the process through which immigrants and their descendants gain access to resources—such as employment, housing, education, and social acceptance—by participating in key institutions, including the labour market, education system, political system, and housing sector. In their words: “Integration, as we understand it, refers to the processes that increase the opportunities of immigrants and their descendants to obtain the valued ‘stuff’ of society, as well as social acceptance, through participation in major institutions... Full integration implies parity of life chances with members of the native majority group and being recognized as a legitimate part of the national community” (Alba & Foner, 2015, p. 5). In principle, this allows for reciprocal processes between newcomers and natives. In practice, however, the focus often remains on one-sided adaptation (Safi 2024, p. 175). This tendency is often referred to as the “gap model”, which measures differences between immigrants (and their descendants) and a majority benchmark, treating disparities in income, political views, marital choices, language proficiency, and other social indicators as inherently problematic (Bloemraad et al., 2023, p. 7; Schinkel, 2018).

By anchoring integration to outcomes like employment or language proficiency, the framework risks reinforcing deficit-based thinking, where migrants are primarily evaluated in terms of what they lack. Such an orientation can obscure structural barriers and power asymmetries that shape migrants’ opportunities, as well as the role of the majority population in boundary-making and inclusion (Rytter, 2019;

Schinkel, 2018). While index-based studies highlight whether systematic differences exist between natives and immigrants—differences that may reflect unequal opportunities—they can also unintentionally reinforce perceptions of migrants as deficient or “failing.” Willem Schinkel (2018) and Adrian Favell (2022) argue that studies focused solely on immigrant groups risk reproducing stereotypes rather than investigating whether actual disparities exist. The normative expectation that immigrants conform to the norms and values of the receiving society frames deviations from the majority standard—whether in economic performance, cultural values, or behaviour—as indicators of incomplete integration (Li, 2003).

Understanding integration primarily as immigrants’ conformity to the average characteristics of the majority population is also problematic, not only since it frames migrants as deficient or failing, but also for producing misleading results. For instance, if migrant groups outperform the national average in employment or educational achievements, how should that be characterised? It would certainly be odd to consider that as a sign of non-integration on the side of the migrants. The issue becomes even more complex in social or cultural domains (Bloemraad et al., 2023). For instance, if mixed marriages are used as a measure of immigrant integration—which they sometimes are (Ivory & Adam Huang, 2025)—it becomes strange not to also consider them an indicator of participation among members of the native (non-migrant) population, reflecting the reciprocal nature of social relationships and the co-construction of belonging. Finally, it has been noted that integration in relation to different domains may potentially either reinforce or hinder each other. Researchers often identify three interconnected domains of integration—economic, sociocultural, and civic-political (Ravanera et al. 2013). For instance, if asylum-seekers are barred from employment by legal restrictions, they become dependent on social welfare, which can in turn reinforce public perceptions of dependency. Discrimination in housing may follow, leading to residential segregation and limiting children’s educational opportunities. Such patterns of exclusion are sometimes mistakenly attributed to cultural differences, when they may in fact result from legal and structural barriers. (Bloemraad et al., 2023).

2.3.4 The Critique Against the National Container Logic

A second major critique of integration research concerns the “national container” logic, which assumes that immigrants integrate into a fixed, bounded societal framework (Favell, 2022; Dahinden 2016). Much of the research on integration implicitly treats the receiving society as static, homogeneous, and fully formed, ready to incorporate newcomers. In reality, societies are more accurately characterized as fluid, diverse, segmented, and heterogeneous (Spencer & Charsley, 2021). Immigrants actively shape these social structures through interactions that extend beyond national borders (Kutor et al. 2023). Several scholars highlight the increasing sociological complexity of contemporary societies, challenging the continued relevance of the national container paradigm. Zygmunt Bauman (2000) uses the metaphor of

“liquid modernity” to describe the erosion of stable social reference points, while Latour (2005, p. 248) emphasises that societies are constantly changing, requiring continual reassembly of social associations. These transformations are accelerated by global economic, cultural, and technological shifts.

Recent applied research has sought to study integration without relying exclusively on the nation-state as a framework. Following the “Local Turn” in migration and refugee studies, scholars such as Alastair Ager and Alison Strang (2008) and post-2015 European refugee studies often focus on interactions and interculturalism within local communities, particularly cities. Quantitative studies measure integration through specific societal sectors, such as labour market participation (Demireva & Heath, 2017) or educational attainment (Kalter et al., 2018). While these local and sectoral approaches provide valuable insights, they have been criticized for overlooking power dynamics and systemic inequalities between nationals and newcomers (Favell, 2022). Local studies often idealize mutual recognition but fail to address domination and racism, while quantitative analyses reduce integration to descriptive disparities without considering structural drivers.

Building on foundational sociological insights, contemporary scholars emphasise that the meaning and application of integration must adapt to today’s fluid, globalised world. Willem Schinkel (2018, p. 7) criticizes the static notion of society as “bloodless, unmovable, undifferentiated,” lacking sociological complexity. Mikkel Rytter (2019) and Christian Joppke and Ewa Morawska (2003) argue that Durkheimian ideals of organic solidarity no longer reflect modern realities, while Adrian Favell (2022) underscores the tension between Westphalian nation-state models and global mobility. Matthew Flinders (2016) highlights the growing complexity of work, relationships, and communities, and Michel Wieviorka (2014) notes that integration has become nostalgic, echoing a desire for coherent, systemic societies that no longer exist.

Integration research also increasingly needs to account for transnational dimensions. From the 1990s onwards, the transnational turn challenged nation-centred models. Nina Glick Schiller and colleagues (1992) introduced the concept of “transmigrants”—individuals whose lives span multiple national contexts. Standard integration indicators often neglect these transnational connections, despite their centrality in contemporary migrant lives. Integration cannot be fully understood without considering socio-economic changes across historical, spatial, temporal, and transnational contexts. Today, migrant-origin individuals participate in dynamic interactions that extend from local neighbourhoods to transnational spaces, connecting family, social networks, and broader communities across multiple levels (Kaya 2012; Mügge, 2016; Spencer & Charsley, 2021).

Erdem Dikici (2022) proposes a three-way model of integration, where immigrants, the host country, and transnational actors jointly shape integration processes. He identifies four perspectives in the literature on transnationalism and integration: (1) Alarmist view: cross-border ties are seen as fostering dual loyalties or radical ideologies, undermining integration. (2) Pessimistic but less alarmist: transnational activities are survival strategies for migrants with limited skills or resources (e.g.,

language). (3) Positive view: transnationalism and integration are not mutually exclusive but can be mutually supportive (Levitt et al., 2003; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). (4) Pragmatic view: transnational ties can coexist with integration processes, so the two are not necessarily a zero-sum game (Dekker & Siegel, 2013; Erdal & Oeppen, 2013; Tsuda, 2012). This body of work highlights the limitations of measuring integration solely within national frameworks and underscores the importance of incorporating transnational and multi-level perspectives into contemporary integration research.

2.4 Relational Integration—A Boundaries Approach to Studying Integration

Various scholars critical of conventional integration research suggest that academics should abandon the concept altogether (Favell, 2022; Rytter, 2019; Schinkel, 2017, 2018). Others, however, argue for retaining the concept while rethinking its analytical use. Lea Klarenbeek, for instance, proposes that integration should be understood as a relational process of mutual, reciprocal change occurring among people. Drawing on classical sociological theory, she emphasises that integration originally denoted reciprocal relationships between actors rather than one-sided adjustment. Klarenbeek (2024, p. 235) similarly argues that the notion of “European integration” reflects this relational understanding, highlighting the mutual processes connecting member states (Klarenbeek, 2024, p. 235).

Along similar lines, Irene Bloemraad et al. (2023) advocate a “boundaries approach” to integration, emphasising its relational nature by including the perspectives of the non-migrant population. Instead of measuring cultural “gaps,” this approach focuses on intergroup dynamics and mutual recognition of belonging (Esses 2021). For example, it considers both whether migrants themselves identify as “French” and whether native-born citizens perceive them as such, irrespective of racial, ethnic, or religious difference. This perspective addresses a recurrent critique: conventional integration studies often treat migrants as the sole object of study, overlooking how majority populations respond to migration and how these responses evolve. Boundary blurring can signal convergence, where former outsiders are redefined as insiders, while also opening the possibility for broader, transformative visions of membership, aligning with bidimensional integration models (Berry, 2005) or multicultural national identities.

Boundary-drawing serves as a key analytical lens for understanding how group membership is socially constructed. Ethnic and other group boundaries are not fixed but emerge through social processes distinguishing “us” from “them” (Barth 1969). Tajfel’s minimal group experiments demonstrated how even arbitrary distinctions generate in-group bias and out-group prejudice (Tajfel et al. 1971), highlighting the behavioural and cognitive impact of group identities. When symbolic boundaries—such as language, religion, race, or citizenship—intersect with power and hierarchy, they acquire material significance, shaping access to social inclusion (Lamont et al.,

2015; Wimmer, 2009). Research shows that these markers can define immigrants as insiders or outsiders depending on context: speaking the majority language may foster inclusion, while lacking citizenship may maintain exclusion (Alba 2005; Zolberg & Woon, 1999). In some cases, even shared ethnicity or religion does not prevent exclusion, as political actors may strategically highlight other differences (Ponce, 2018).

From this perspective, integration entails softening, shifting, or removing boundaries to include immigrants within the social in-group (Zolberg & Woon, 1999). Perceived boundary permeability shapes immigrant strategies: when inclusion seems possible, individuals pursue personal advancement; when boundaries feel fixed, collective action may emerge (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Mähönen & Jasinskaja-Lahti 2015). Yet, this lens can inadvertently naturalize a binary view of membership, implying individuals are either “in” or “out.” It may also obscure internal hierarchies, suggesting that crossing a boundary—such as acquiring language proficiency—ensures full inclusion, while persistent inequalities within the in-group remain unexamined.

An alternative emphasises that belonging is multiple, graduated, and relational (Bloemraad 2018; Bloemraad et al., 2023). Instead of categorising individuals as “in” or “out,” this approach examines how people align to varying degrees with ideal-typical markers of membership, including ascriptive traits (e.g., race or ancestry), attitudinal alignment (e.g., views on democracy), and behaviours (e.g., language use, employment). The salience of these markers varies depending on legal formalisation (e.g., citizenship), measurement complexity (e.g., fluency), and social consensus (e.g., defining cultural belonging). Experimental studies indicate that legal status strongly affects public perceptions of deservingness, showing that policies such as citizenship pathways can reduce symbolic boundaries (Bloemraad et al., 2023).

This boundary-based, relational perspective also highlights the gradient and conditional nature of membership. Individuals may occupy ambiguous positions: racialised citizens may be formally included but socially marginalised (Beaman 2017; Fox 2012), while others, such as undocumented migrants, may be included in some spheres (e.g., employment, language proficiency) but excluded in others (Patler 2018). By focusing on dynamic intergroup relations rather than static cultural gaps, this approach emphasises the co-construction of inclusion by both migrants and majority populations (Esses 2021). Ultimately, by reconceptualising group membership, this framework potentially opens space for more pluralistic, transformative understandings of integration and national identity.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has traced the historical and theoretical evolution of integration, highlighting the shifts from classical sociological conceptions of social cohesion to contemporary debates over the measurement, meaning, and politics of integration.

Early theorists such as Auguste Comte, Émile Durkheim, and Talcott Parsons understood integration primarily as a systemic property: a condition of social equilibrium, solidarity, and stability. Their concern was not with migration per se, but with the structural and normative foundations that hold complex societies together. Émile Durkheim's distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity, for instance, underscored the adaptive capacity of social order in increasingly diverse contexts, while Talcott Parsons emphasised compatibility between system members and the normative ideals underpinning social organisation. These early insights remind us that integration is, at its core, about the alignment of social relations with shared principles and structures, rather than a simple cultural or ethnic adaptation of newcomers.

In political theory, integration has been conceptualised as both a set of rights and as a form of civic belonging. T. H. Marshall, John Rawls, and other liberal egalitarians emphasised the role of civil, political, social, and, in Will Kymlicka's extension, cultural rights as preconditions for full social participation. In this view, integration is closely intertwined with equality: individuals are integrated to the extent that they have equal access to the resources, rights, and institutions that enable them to pursue autonomous life paths. By contrast, approaches associated with civic integrationism invert this logic, treating the fulfilment of duties as a precondition for accessing rights, thereby individualising integration and largely detaching it from its sociological roots. Complementing these liberal frameworks, theories of constitutional patriotism and liberal nationalism underscore the importance of active participation, civic virtues, and shared identity in sustaining democratic societies. Jürgen Habermas's constitutional patriotism and David Miller's liberal nationalism highlight the relational dimension of integration: belonging is not merely legal or procedural but also social, emotional, and symbolic. These perspectives reveal the tension inherent in contemporary integration debates: the need to balance universal, egalitarian principles with social cohesion, identity, and solidarity.

Empirical research on integration has mirrored these conceptual developments, moving from assimilationist models to multidimensional typologies and comparative policy indices. While tools such as EUROSTAT indicators, MIPEX, and other indices provide valuable insights into labour market outcomes, education, political participation, and social inclusion, they have also been criticized for adopting a one-sided "gap model," measuring immigrants against a static majority standard. Such approaches risk reinforcing deficit-oriented thinking and underestimating structural inequalities, systemic barriers, and the active role of host societies in shaping integration outcomes. Moreover, conventional models often assume that societies are stable, bounded entities ready to incorporate newcomers, overlooking the fluidity, heterogeneity, and transnational linkages that characterize contemporary social life.

A boundary-based, relational perspective addresses these limitations by conceptualising integration as a dynamic process of mutual, reciprocal change. Rather than treating migrants as passive subjects and the majority as a neutral container, this approach emphasises the negotiation of social boundaries, the conditional and graduated nature of belonging, and the co-construction of inclusion across multiple dimensions—cultural, social, political, and legal. It highlights that integration is not a

binary state but a relational and context-dependent process in which individuals may simultaneously occupy positions of inclusion and exclusion. By attending to majority responses, intergroup perceptions, and symbolic as well as material boundaries, relational approaches arguably provide a more nuanced and inclusive framework for understanding integration.

The historical, theoretical, and empirical insights highlighted in this chapter point toward several key conclusions. First, integration should not be understood solely as the adaptation of immigrants, but as a co-constructed, relational process that involves both newcomers and host populations. Second, integration occurs within dynamic, multi-level, and transnational contexts, which shape both opportunities and constraints for inclusion. Third, measuring integration requires attention not only to outcomes but also to processes, interactions, and perceptions, capturing the fluidity and contingency of social belonging. Finally, conceptualising integration relationally has profound policy implications: rather than focusing narrowly on immigrant adjustment, policymakers can cultivate conditions for mutual recognition, boundary permeability, and pluralistic participation, fostering social cohesion without resorting to coercive assimilation or ethnically exclusive notions of belonging.

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Chapter 3

The Evolution of the Politics of Integration



The political preoccupation with immigrants and integration is deeply entangled with issues regarding the very construction and reproduction of the nation. Since the nineteenth century, nation-states have positioned themselves as the principal units of political belonging, tightly linking citizenship, identity, and territory. In modern nation-building processes, the boundaries of inclusion have been historically shaped by competing visions of the nation. On the one hand, the literature states that civic models of the nation have emphasised shared legal and political commitments. In contrast, ethnic models have drawn boundaries based on descent, culture, or religion. However, these dichotomies, often presented as mutually exclusive, fail to capture the complex and evolving logics through which nations define “the people.” Contemporary politics of integration continue to mobilize both civic and ethnic criteria in defining who can fully belong, often in contradictory ways. This interplay becomes especially salient in times of heightened migration, when the visibility of difference is politicized, and narratives of national identity are actively reshaped.

This chapter explores how recent decades have witnessed a reprisal of exclusionary forms of belonging, marked by the rise of right-wing populism and nativism. These developments signal a shift in the symbolic construction of “the people,” not simply as the body politic of the nation-state but as a culturally homogenous entity imagined in opposition to racialised and religious others. In this context, the politics of integration often serves as a proxy battleground for broader struggles over national identity and sovereignty. Yet, these national imaginaries are increasingly unsettled by the realities of globalisation and transnational mobility.

Migrants today maintain networks, attachments, and identities that transcend the territorial boundaries of the state. The transnational turn in citizenship theory has highlighted how human rights norms and transnational institutions have begun to challenge the state’s monopoly over defining belonging. More recently, the transnational turn in migration studies has emphasised how migrants actively participate in multiple societies simultaneously, forming new kinds of social fields and solidarities.

This chapter situates the politics of integration within these broader historical and theoretical developments. It begins by revisiting the foundational role of nation-building in shaping integration paradigms, moving beyond simplistic civic–ethnic binaries. It then examines how contemporary nativist movements are reshaping the boundaries of inclusion. Finally, it turns to the question of how migrants themselves negotiate belonging in transnational spaces. The main premise of this chapter is that integration is a concept that is not only related to migrants but also concerns the construction of the nation itself, as discussed in the previous chapter. That is, how migrants are expected to integrate reveals how the nation is imagined, who is considered part of “the people,” and what forms of difference are rendered acceptable or threatening. Therefore, the politics of migrant integration are deeply intertwined with the ongoing redefinition of national identity, sovereignty, and the social contract in an age of intensified global mobility, fractured solidarities, and contested nationhood. At the same time, the lived experiences of migrants and transmigrants complicate these national projects, since their sense of belonging is rarely confined to a single polity. Instead, they often cultivate layered, overlapping, and situational attachments that unsettle fixed notions of membership and expose the limits of both civic and ethnic paradigms of nationhood.

3.1 Construction of the Nation and the People: Going Beyond the Dichotomy of Ethnic and Civic Variations

The structure of the political community itself often shapes and limits how integration unfolds. Based on their unique foundations, political communities vary in how they determine and assess who qualifies as a member (Orgad, 2017). To that effect, the politics of integration is shaped by how the community, forming the foundation of citizenship, is perceived. The theories of nationalism discuss three main types of community: *primordial*, *civic*, and *cultural*. A *primordial* community emphasises fixed traits such as kinship, ethnicity, and race. Membership in this community is based on birth, connection to an existing member, or transformation of these inherent traits, such as through religious conversion (Geertz, 1963; Shils, 1957). A *civic* community, on the other hand, is built around knowledge of and adherence to the community’s rules, constitutional principles, and social norms. Membership can be achieved by learning about the community’s history and civics, participating in its political life, respecting laws, and embracing local customs (Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1990). These requirements are all learnable. A *cultural* community, finally, is an ideal type that exists between the primordial and the civic type of communities. Here, membership is open to those willing to adopt the community’s cultural values, including conversion to its faith and adherence to specific ethnocultural or religious practices (Armstrong, 2008; Smith, 1995, 1999, 2009).

These are the analytical constructs, or ideal types, discussed in theories of nationalism by prominent scholars such as Edward Shils (1957), Clifford Geertz (1963),

Anthony D. Smith (1995), Ernest Gellner (1983), Benedict Anderson (1983), and Eric Hobsbawm (1990). However, in practice, most communities present a combination of the primordial, civic, and cultural aspects. In a highly individualised and diverse society, the fully emancipated and morally autonomous citizen is deeply tied to the privileges of national membership. This form of membership is inherently exclusive: it grants full recognition and rights to those deemed insiders, while systematically denying or limiting full membership for others, such as ethnic and racial minorities, immigrants, and other marginalised groups who nonetheless seek inclusion on equal terms. While the promise of inclusion and full membership may exist for non-members in each ideal type of community, it is contingent upon overcoming the barriers that exclude them. This exclusion reinforces the privileges and freedoms of those already within the “club,” underscoring a hierarchy where the subordination of some affirms the autonomy of others. In each type, nation-states draw lines and borders separating members from non-members through passports, identity cards, and eventually the full range of membership rights and obligations, from birth to death, defined by the states. According to Adrian Favell (2022, p. 50), these aspects of line-drawing, bureaucratic and institutional rationality become a form of biopolitical governmentality, as expressed in the writings of Michel Foucault (1979).

Nationalism is best understood as a thin-centred ideology, which values the sense of belonging in a nation greater than other groups based on gender, political parties, ethno-cultural communities, or socio-economic groups. Nationalist ideology defines itself through distinction from other nations and prioritises the preservation of the nation by promoting political representation *of* the nation and *for* the nation (Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1983; Smith, 1995). Conventionally, nationalism has been distinguished into two variants: ethnic and civic. Civic nationalism is based on citizenship and the ability of individuals to join the nation, whereas ethnic nationalism is based on the myth of common descent and is thus less inclusive (Kohn, 1944). Rogers Brubaker (1999) criticized the distinction made between civic nationalism and cultural nationalism, arguing that it is more normative than analytical, since the two cannot be clearly separated. French nationalism is widely regarded as the paradigmatic example of civic nationalism, while German nationalism is typically considered the standard example of ethnic nationalism in the literature (Kohn, 1944). Civic nationalism is often described as liberal, universalist, voluntarist, and inclusive, whereas ethnic nationalism is characterized as illiberal, ascriptive, particularist, and exclusive (Brubaker, 1999, p. 64). Rogers Brubaker argues that the assimilationist language policies of the French Revolution were justified by the claim that citizens needed a common language to communicate freely and participate fully in the Republic. In this sense, linguistic nationalism in France represents a particularistic expression of ethnic nationalism. Consequently, a sharp analytical distinction between civic and ethnic forms of nationalism is misleading, as the boundaries between the two are porous and often indistinguishable (Brubaker, 2001).

Modernist theories of nationalism argue that French nationalism has historically leaned more toward civic principles, offering more inclusive citizenship rules than

the ethnically focused German model. Yet France also has the Front National, now renamed *Rassemblement National*, which marginalises Muslims from the core of national identity. In contemporary nationalism, the crucial factor is the degree of inclusion or exclusion it entails. Such exclusion can be rooted in the concept of descent, but it can also be based on narratives around being native or adhering to specific values, and is often referred to as nativism (Bieber, 2018).

There are other alternative ways of understanding nationalism to liberate it from what Rogers Brubaker (1999) calls “the Manichean myth” of the distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism. Brubaker proposes an alternative distinction, namely between *state-framed nationalism* and *counter-state nationalism*. The former allows the state to frame, mediate, and shape linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and civic aspects of nationhood simultaneously, while the latter enables certain ethno-cultural, regional, or national groups to assert their nationalist aspirations against a state, often based on historical, territorial, or regional claims. To illustrate the counter-state variant, Brubaker refers to early anti-Habsburg Hungarian nationalism and Northern Italian regional nationalism. The anthropology of nationalism may offer alternative explanations about how nationalism can be inclusive or exclusive. For instance, Thomas Hylland Ericksen (1993) talks about the distinction between *formal* and *informal* nationalism in everyday life. Formal nationalism is a political ideology that is developed and implemented by the state in the form of keeping the nation intact through the promotion of national symbols, flags, national anthem, national days, and authorized heritage. Informal nationalism is mostly a social movement that emerges spontaneously among citizens as a reaction to any kind of centrifugal force, such as minority nationalism or a secessionist movement.

Jonathan Friedman (1994) makes another distinction between two variants of nationalism: *retrospective* and *prospective* nationalism. The former relies on the state’s use of the past to maintain national unity by reviving shared myths and memories, while the latter is employed when such common myths and memories are absent to preserve the nation’s cohesion. Greek nationalism is a paradigmatic case of the former variant of nationalism, while Hawaiian nationalism is of the latter. Retrospective nationalism aims to strengthen national cohesion by reviving the past among citizens who share common myths and memories. In contrast, prospective nationalism is more relevant in multi-ethnic and post-colonial contexts, where such shared myths and memories are absent. In these cases, the state can use a future-oriented approach to unite citizens from diverse backgrounds by guiding them toward a common goal in the future.

Shantha K. Hennayake (1992) suggests the term “interactive nationalism,” which allows us to make a distinction between majority and minority nationalism. Her concept of “interactive nationalism” is particularly useful for understanding the driving force behind minority nationalism worldwide. Interactive nationalism describes a form of minority ethnic nationalism that emerges in response to the dominant majority’s hegemonic and exclusionary nationalist politics. Her perspective is critical in the sense that she proposes to problematize majority nationalism by studying the root causes of minority nationalism rather than starting the analytical process by problematising minorities.

A more recent categorisation of nationalism was made by Christian Joppke (2020, 2021a, 2021b), who differentiates between two forms of nationalism in the neoliberal era: *populist nationalism* and *statist nationalism*. The former is reactionary and opposes neoliberalism. In contrast, the latter form aligns with different aspects of neoliberalism, particularly its emphasis on ‘responsibilising’ individuals within a nonethnic community of the frugal and hardworking (Inda, 2006; Pyysiäinen et al., 2017; Rose, 1999). This notion of ‘responsibilisation’ supports the rise of harsh, punitive welfare-to-workfare policies, which carry significant, often overlooked, consequences for how social risks are individualised, structural inequalities are obscured, and migrants in particular are cast as primarily responsible for their own integration and socio-economic success. Another example of neoliberal nationalism is a restrictive view of citizenship, where citizenship is no longer seen as a ‘right’—as in the liberal tradition—but rather as a ‘privilege’ that must be ‘earned’ (Joppke, 2021a, 2021b).

As stated earlier, much of the scholarship on nationalism has relied on the binary distinction between ethnic and civic forms, a framework that has shaped not only theoretical debates but also policy discourses surrounding the integration of migrants. This dichotomy, however, tends to flatten the complex realities of nation-building and belonging, where legal, cultural, historical, and socio-economic dimensions intersect. As suggested above, drawing on political theory, sociology, anthropology, and postcolonial studies enables us to move beyond the ethnic–civic binary and instead examine how boundaries between *people* (*demos*) and *presumed cultural community* (*ethnos*) are actively produced, negotiated, and contested. This perspective is particularly instructive for understanding how contemporary nativist projects reassert exclusionary notions of belonging by redefining who legitimately constitutes “the people,” especially in societies shaped by migration and diversity.

3.2 Ethnos and Demos: The Reprisal of Nativism

The ongoing debates on nativism, mentioned above, immediately evoke a central question when considered through the lens of nationalism theories. In terms of the formation of the modern state, human history has undergone a transformation from *ethnos* to *demos* (Balibar, 2021). It is possible to trace the roots of democracy from ancient Greek civilisation to the present day. However, today, democracy seems to be in a state of crisis. With the rise of right-wing populism in many countries, the narrative of nativism appears to threaten institutions like democratic citizenship. Under these changing conditions, as will be discussed further in Chapter 5, individuals of migrant origin increasingly feel insecure and struggle to find their place within the national whole in opposition to the populist and nativist segments of society. At this point, the possibility that the *demos* might revert to *ethnos* constitutes a pressing challenge in contemporary debates.

The Greek terms *ethnos*, *demos*, and *laos* denote distinct concepts that underpin contemporary understandings of ‘the people. In modern political discourse, however,

the people are often closely linked to the concept of nation, a connection usually framed through the opposition between *ethnos*, as a tribal structure, and *demos*, as the collective body of citizens. Yet the meanings of both “the nation” and “the people” remain fluid. The rise of populist rhetoric has further reshaped and blurred the boundaries between these two concepts.

The politics of integration is closely tied to how the concept of “the people” is defined in the contemporary world. Historically, the nation was understood as a state-driven project, built from the top-down through homogenisation and assimilation, and defined by ethno-cultural, religious, or civic criteria (Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1983; Smith, 1995). In contrast, today’s political discourse—especially under the influence of right-wing nativist populism—frames “the people” in a more exclusionary and oppositional way, very different from earlier, more inclusive understandings promoted by social democratic governments, such as in the period after the Second World War (Borevi, 2017). Whereas nationalism sought to unify diverse populations under a common identity shaped by the state, “the people” in populist narratives are often framed in opposition to both elites and perceived “outsiders.” It is imagined not as an inclusive civic body but as a culturally or ethnically “authentic” core under threat from pluralism, immigration, and globalisation (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). In this sense, while the nation historically functioned as an integrative project, albeit with coercive tendencies, the notion of the people today is increasingly mobilised as a gatekeeping mechanism to justify the exclusion of racialised, religious, and cultural others from full membership in the political community.

The notion of “the people” has become increasingly prominent with the global spread of populist discourses (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014). Populist rhetoric is inherently Manichean, framing society through sharp oppositions. As noted by Wendy Brown (2018), this often takes the form of contrasting “aversive insiders”—those already within the nation but deemed suspect or insufficiently belonging—with “invading outsiders,” imagined as perpetual threats from beyond the border. Together, these figures legitimise exclusionary border regimes and securitisation. In this way, populist rhetoric essentializes “the people” in a way that is simultaneously inclusive and exclusive. It is inclusive insofar as it embraces those deemed ‘pure,’ ‘good,’ ‘homogeneous,’ and ‘right.’ However, it is equally exclusive, targeting those labelled by populist leaders as the ‘establishment,’ ‘corrupt,’ ‘evil,’ and ‘wrong’ (Katsambekis, 2016; Mudde, 2007). In populist rhetoric, the nation becomes a familiarized polity that puts the democratic principles of universality, equality, and openness at stake.

Paul Taggart’s notion of ‘the people’ as ‘the heartland’ illuminates the populist interpretation of the term. Taggart describes the heartland as a place where, in the populist imagination, a virtuous and unified population resides (Taggart, 2000, p. 95). In populist discourse, however, ‘the people’ is not a real or all-inclusive entity but a mythical and constructed subset of the population (Mudde, 2004). In this sense, ‘the people’ functions as an imagined community, much like the nation does for nationalists. For example, in France, Marine Le Pen may define “the people” as only Christians, while in Turkey, President Erdoğan might define it as exclusively Sunni Muslims. As Jan-Werner Müller (2016) observes, populists constitute a distinct

category of elites who seek power through the construction of a collective fantasy of political purity. Decades earlier, Isaiah Berlin (1967, p. 16) explored a similar Manichean dichotomy between ‘the people’ and ‘the enemy’ at the famous LSE Conference on Populism.

The enemies of the people have to be specified, whether it be capitalists, foreigners, ethnic minorities, majorities, or whoever it might be. They have to be specified. The people is not everybody. The people is everybody of a certain kind, and there are certain people who have put themselves beyond the pale in some sort of way, whether by conspiring against the people or by preventing the people from realising itself, or however it may be. The people must be specified. So, must the enemy. The people is not the whole of society, however constituted. (Berlin, 1967, p. 16)

Populism thrives on the antagonism it creates between the so-called ‘pure people’ and perceived enemies like “the Jews,” “the Muslims,” “ethnic minorities,” or “the corrupt elite.” In Europe, populist parties often frame this notion of purity in ethno-religious terms, leading them to reject equality and promote exclusionary policies primarily targeting migrant and minority groups. Despite differences across nations, these parties and movements share common traits: they oppose immigration, prioritize the protection of national or European culture, strongly criticize globalisation, European integration, the EU, representative democracy, and mainstream political parties, and exploit those who are ‘culturally different’ from the ethnic, religious, or national Self (Mudde, 2004).

This antagonistic logic is not unique to contemporary populism but has deeper historical roots in specific national contexts. A telling example can be found in Greece, where populist discourse has long relied on similar constructions of internal and external enemies. Greek scholar Artemis Leontis (1991) traces the history of populist discourse in Greece since the late nineteenth century, arguing that it has repeatedly succeeded in persuading citizens that a range of ‘unwanted conspirators’—such as the educated pedant, the elitist Westerniser, rationalism, the immoral capitalist, the foreign invader, or, more abstractly, ‘the System’—seek to manipulate public opinion, disrupt the integrity of the people’s way of life, and sever their ties to the native land. Accordingly, the logic of populism instructs the people that there is only one way to counter the harmful effects of such conspiratorial interventions: to rely on the existential necessity of an authentic identity (Leontis, 1991, p. 192). To this end, populist discourse advances what Artemis Leontis terms a ‘theology of roots’ as a counter-narrative to perceived external and internal threats. Artemis Leontis (1991, p. 193) concludes that the implicit aim of populist discourse is to escape the burden of history by defending the beauty, simplicity, integrity, and purity of the national community.

Étienne Balibar (2021) argues that the concept of “the people” in the modern state refers mainly to the Homeric *laos*, which is more suited to the canons of the Judeo-Christian tradition. In the political science literature, *demos* simply refers to “the people” as the basis of democracy, while *ethnos* refers to “the people” as a cultural or ethnic group, and *laos* means “the people” in a more religious or populist sense. The tension between *demos* and *ethnos* is central to the challenges faced by our contemporary democracies. The conflation or opposition of these concepts

leads to exclusionary practices, where the political community (*demos*) is defined in ethnically homogeneous terms (*ethnos*), thereby marginalising those who do not fit the dominant identity (Balibar, 2021). The concept of *laos* adds another layer, often used in populist or religious contexts to unify people under a common cause, which can further complicate democratic practices.

This conceptual tension is further intensified in contemporary Europe by the re-emergence of civilisational narratives that recast “the people” in quasi-religious and cultural terms. Étienne Balibar’s (2021) emphasis on the growing popularity of a notion of “the people” grounded in religious and moral content (*laos*) closely parallels Rogers Brubaker’s observations regarding the rise of a Huntingtonian civilisational paradigm in Europe and beyond (Huntington, 1996). Rogers Brubaker (2017) notes a growing civilisational preoccupation with Islam in European societies, a shift that has significantly reshaped the political semantics of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’. In this framework, the collective self in Europe is increasingly defined in civilisational rather than strictly national terms. Civilisational rhetoric internalises liberalism, secularism, philosemitism, gender equality, LGBTQ rights, and freedom of speech as core identity markers of a culturally Christian West, constructed in opposition to an allegedly illiberal Islam (Brubaker, 2017, p. 1208).

In parallel with the Huntingtonian paradigm of ‘clash of civilisations’, the term civilisation here is reduced to religious differences, and Christianity as a cultural form—but not religious form—to be celebrated by liberals, atheists, agnostics, and others, versus the rise of radical Islam challenging secular forms of life. The feelings of socio-economic and political deprivation are not only expressed through resentment against multiculturalism, diversity, migration, and Islam, but also through resentment towards the European Union institutions, which are believed to be imposing a unified transnational identity challenging national sovereignty and nativism. Rogers Brubaker draws attention to a process that has actually started much earlier, in the aftermath of 9/11. The idea of defending Western civilisation against Islamisation became materialised in the late 2000s through transnational right-wing populist projects such as ‘Cities against Islamisation’, a European initiative launched in 2008 by Filip Dewinter, the leader of *Vlaams Belang* in Belgium, Heinz-Christian Strache, head of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), and other right-wing populist representatives, such as the UK-based Counter-Jihad Movement (Betz, 2013, pp. 74–81). Another popular formation along similar lines is the global rise of the PEGIDA movement (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident), which was originally founded in Dresden, Germany, in 2014 (Ingulfsen, 2016; Kaya, 2019).

3.3 Citizenship and the Politics of Integration

Citizenship is a core component of the politics of integration. The term ‘citizenship’ is as old as settled human communities, with groups and tribes in specific territories developing rudimentary social contracts for mutual benefit. There is evidence to suggest that its origins are more closely linked to Western civilisation, particularly

the ancient Greek and Roman worlds. It has been asserted that the further east we go, the fewer the traces. The term citizen has an urban origin, derived from the Anglo-Norman word *citezein*, and the French *citoyen*. This is based on the Latin *civitas*, meaning people united in a city or community. The expansion and development of citizenship has been closely linked to the growth of cities and the emergence of the nation-state. Citizenship is an institution that defines the *rights* and *duties* of individuals *vis-à-vis* the state (Marshall 1950; Benhabib 2004).

As discussed earlier in Chapter 2, the first modern scholarly analysis of citizenship in the previous century was the path-breaking work of English sociologist Thomas Humphrey Marshall. His work, *Citizenship and Social Class*, was published in 1950. His theory has formed the basis of all citizenship theories, and it was developed after the end of World War II. It was a time when many states were either reshaped, such as Germany and India, or newly emerged, such as Israel and Pakistan. In his seminal work, T. H. Marshall presents a *triadic model of citizenship*, which was based on the idea that the evolution of citizenship has been in progress for about two and a half centuries. T. H. Marshall divides the development of citizenship into three stages and distinguishes between *civil*, *political*, and *social* citizenship, constituting the modern drive towards social equality as the latest phase (Marshall 1950, p. 78). T. H. Marshall ascribes the three different sets of rights to three different centuries: civil (with the freedom of speech, thought and faith) to the eighteenth, political (with active and passive suffrage) to the nineteenth, and social rights (like welfare and economic security) to the twentieth century. It is a sequential model, though, to Marshall, the attainment of social rights has completed the sequence. His modern citizen is thus the sum of three historical parts. In other words, the process of becoming a citizen covers three stages; the product, the citizen, is therefore three-dimensional.

Twentieth-century citizenship theory came in three ‘waves’, where T. H. Marshall’s work marks the first, setting in when Europe’s fascist regimes fell, and the old nation-states reached a turning point. The second ‘wave’ of citizenship theory only came after a long pause in the early 1990s, when the Cold War had ended and people again had to think about issues of belonging and citizenship rights in a new world order emerging after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Alongside trends like rising voter apathy and long-term welfare dependency in the United States, the pressures of multiculturalism in Western Europe, the backlash against the welfare state in Thatcher’s England, the limitations of voluntary-based environmental policies, and the resurgence of nationalist movements in Eastern Europe sparked a renewed interest in citizenship studies (Isin & Turner, 2002). The third wave of citizenship theory, which came with increasing globalisation and deterritorialisation, has brought about new claims for inclusion and belonging. Citizens were increasingly beginning to look beyond the nation-state and became part of transnational corporations, non-governmental organisations, and worldwide social movements. In addition, people who migrated to other countries did not want to deny their cultural origins (Bauböck et al., 2008; Delanty, 2001; Holston, 2008; Ong, 1999, 2006; Sassen, 2005; Soysal, 1994).

The increasing flows of international migration from non-Western countries to some Western countries after World War II resulted in the formation of a new type

of membership in Western nation-states. These flows introduced local populations to new ethno-cultural and religious identities, creating a need for immigrants' differences to be recognized and respected by members of the receiving majority societies. Hence, the growing number of international migrants has challenged the conventional understanding of national citizenship, as they have generated a multitude of belongings to at least two nation-states: one is the sending state, and the other is the receiving state. Thus, a new type of membership in those countries has emerged as a replacement for the traditional citizenship rhetoric. Yasemin Soysal (1994) introduced the concept of *postnational membership* to capture the emerging forms of rights and belonging that transcend the classical model of national citizenship. She outlined five key distinctions between postnational and traditional national citizenship. First, postnational membership is a relatively recent development, reflecting contemporary transformations in statehood, rights, and mobility. Second, it is no longer territorially confined to the boundaries of the nation-state; the rights of transnational migrants, often upheld by international conventions and supranational bodies, exemplify this shift. Third, instead of a uniform legal status, postnational membership involves multiple and differentiated rights regimes. Fourth, Soysal argues that universal personhood begins to supplant national identity as the basis for claiming rights, with human rights norms replacing nationally bounded entitlements. Finally, these rights are increasingly guaranteed not by national governments alone, but by transnational and supranational institutions—suggesting a relative weakening of national citizenship as the central organising principle of political membership.

However, since Soysal's intervention, the concept of postnational membership has been subject to critique and re-evaluation. While international norms and institutions continue to play a role in shaping migrants' rights, the resilience of the nation-state and the rise of exclusionary politics have revealed the limitations of postnationalism. The intensification of border controls, the rise of welfare chauvinism, and the growing emphasis on conditional or earned citizenship (Joppke, 2021a, 2021b) in many countries suggest that national frameworks of belonging remain powerful, if not dominant (Bloemraad et al., 2008; Shachar, 2009). At the same time, the partial retreat of postnationalism should not obscure the fact that, particularly during the 1990s and 2000s, migrants' transnational practices gained broad recognition in both scholarship and policy through debates on dual citizenship, diaspora engagement, and multicultural accommodation, highlighting how belonging increasingly unfolded across borders and setting the stage for the transnational turn in migration studies.

3.4 Transnational Turn

Building on national and postnational approaches to integration, it has become increasingly clear that analysis must move beyond the boundaries of a single state and focus instead on the overlapping social fields in which migrants organise their lives. Immigrant-origin populations often develop multiple and layered attachments to both their countries of origin and their countries of settlement. This has become

even more pronounced in the age of globalisation, as advances in transportation, communication, and digital technologies make it easier to sustain social, economic, and political ties across borders. The social spaces that migrants create and inhabit across and beyond the territorial boundaries of origin and destination countries are commonly referred to as transnational spaces or transnational fields. As Alejandro Portes and colleagues (2001, p. 3) define it, transnational fields consist of “the web of contacts created by immigrants and their home-country counterparts who engage in repeated back-and-forth movements across national borders in pursuit of economic opportunities and political voice.”

Transnational spaces are not an entirely new phenomenon since similar patterns can be traced back, e.g., to the trading *diasporas* of the Middle Ages (Cohen, 1997) and to the European immigration to the United States at the turn of the twentieth century (Foner, 1997). However, some features differentiate the present forms of transnational spaces from the historical ones: Firstly, the overwhelming speed of transportation technology and electronic communications facilitate easy, cheap, and fast contact across national borders. Secondly, a growing number of immigrants and their counterparts in their homeland generate intensive contact made through these technologies. And thirdly, an increasing number of sending country governments tend to guide the transnational initiatives of their diasporas (Adamson, 2016; Kaya & Drhimeur, 2023; Portes et al., 2001).

Present-day transnational communities are illustrative of the features mentioned above, in that they constitute border-crossing populations. Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Christina Blanc-Szanton (2004) provide a compelling definition of both the new global condition of migration and the emerging type of migrant:

Our earlier conceptions of immigrant and migrant no longer suffice. The word immigrant evokes images of permanent rupture, of the uprooted, the abandonment of old patterns and the painful learning of a new language and culture. Now a new kind of migrating population is emerging, composed of those whose networks, activities, and patterns of life encompass both their host and home societies...We call this new conceptualization ‘*transnationalism*’ and describe the new type of migrants as ‘*transmigrants*’.... (Glick-Schiller et al., 2004, p. 213)

In the age of transnationalism, many migrants are no longer physically detached from their countries of origin due to poverty or lack of access to means of transportation and communication. Broad networks of communication and transportation linking European countries with nations like Turkey, China, India, Pakistan, Algeria, and Morocco are central to the formation and maintenance of transnational identities. Modern networks of communication connect transnational subjects both to the homeland and to the rest of the world. Thus, it has become much easier for migrant-origin individuals, “to live on ‘both banks of the river’ at the same time, or have their feet in two societies”, as Elsa Chaney (1979, p. 209) noted in the context of Caribbean living in the United States. This simultaneity of attachment creates a condition of belonging that is both plural and precarious. Migrants may feel at home in multiple societies, yet their acceptance by the host country’s state institutions and broader society often remains conditional. As such, the transnational state of belonging should be understood less as a stable identity than as an ongoing process of

negotiation, where migrants actively balance opportunity and vulnerability, inclusion and exclusion, across different political and social fields.

While the national model imagined integration as alignment with a territorially bounded and culturally unified polity, and the transnational paradigm sought to detach rights and belonging from the nation-state altogether, both frameworks are now confronted by the transformative pressures of globalisation (Glick-Schiller et al., 2004). Globalisation has not only intensified the cross-border movement of people, goods, and ideas, but it has also produced new forms of simultaneity in migrants' lives—where identities, practices, and attachments span multiple nation-states (Ong, 2006). In this context, many states have come to acknowledge the reality of human mobility by adapting their policies to migrants' transnational ties—sometimes by facilitating dual citizenship, diaspora engagement strategies, or remittance-friendly institutions. Indeed, the paradigm of transnationalism became especially influential throughout the 1990s and 2000s, when both scholars and policymakers embraced it as a corrective to the limits of methodological nationalism and as a framework better suited to capturing migrants' multi-sited lives.

The growing recognition of transnationalism by state actors in the 1990s and 2000s reflected both an accommodation to the erosion of rigid national boundaries and a strategic attempt to reassert influence over increasingly mobile populations. Thus, the rise of transnational spaces called for a reconceptualisation of integration, no longer as a linear process into a single society, but as a dynamic and multidirectional negotiation across multiple contexts. For migrants and transmigrants, these contexts are not abstract; they are lived as everyday negotiations of belonging in families, workplaces, diasporic associations, and digital networks. Belonging is not merely granted or denied by states but constantly rearticulated through practices of care, remittances, cultural reproduction, and political participation across borders. This means that integration cannot be understood without accounting for the transnational condition in which migrants inhabit more than one community at once, often holding together competing claims of loyalty, recognition, and identity (Bauböck, 2007).

3.5 Curtailing Transnationalism in the Contemporary Politics of Integration: The Return to National Citizenship

In recent decades, however, the transnational turn that gained prominence in the 1990s and 2000s is increasingly exposed to contestation. In the wake of multiple crises—including the global financial crisis, the rise of religious extremism, and the so-called “refugee crisis”—European states have tended to shift toward more restrictive discourses, policies, and practices (Borevi & Carlsson, 2025; Joppke, 2021a, 2021b; Kaya et al., 2023). What was once seen as a recognition of plural attachments is now frequently reframed through the lens of security, loyalty, and conditional belonging, signaling a narrowing space for transnational forms of integration.

Integration policies that once accommodated dual or multiple allegiances are now reframed through the lens of national loyalty, security, and conditional belonging. As will be shown in Chapter 4, the emphasis has shifted toward singular, nationally anchored forms of citizenship, narrowing the space for migrants and their descendants to maintain and express transnational practices. This reassertion of national citizenship signals a broader trend in contemporary politics of integration: the consolidation of state-centric expectations of belonging at the expense of previously acknowledged plural and overlapping memberships. This shift in policy and political discourse calls for a closer examination of transnational citizenship as both a concept and a legal-institutional response.

Rainer Bauböck (2007, p. 2395) defines *transnational citizenship* as “a triangular relationship between individuals and two or more independent states in which these individuals are simultaneously assigned membership status and membership-based rights or obligations”. Bauböck and colleagues (2008) also argue that political rights, although not constituting the core substance of transnational citizenship, represent its most problematic dimension. Economic opportunity and personal advancement are the most essential constituents of transnational citizenship. For this reason, both sending and receiving states have largely accepted the limits of national citizenship. The need for transnational citizenship may derive either from the democratic evolution of state-centric naturalisation regimes or from normative approaches advanced in scholarly debates (Bauböck, 2010). In the aftermath of World War II, many democracies in Europe and beyond liberalised their naturalisation policies to meet the civil, political, and social requirements of immigrants and their descendants. This liberalisation was primarily materialised through the introduction of the right to dual citizenship (*inter alia*, Soysal, 1994; Faist, 2007; Bauböck, 2021). Scholars like Thomas Hammar (1990) and Rainer Bauböck (2010) have pointed out that transnational citizenship represents an institutional transformation of membership and legal rights. Hence, the transformation of citizenship is not the result of international migration itself, but of changing normative conceptions of the political community that respond to perceived challenges and opportunities created by globalisation, mobility, and diversity. These perspectives are best understood as complementary: transnational citizenship emerges both from the internal democratic transformation of state-centred citizenship regimes and from broader normative redefinitions of political community driven by globalisation, mobility, and diversity.

Rainer Bauböck (2007) classifies transnational citizens into three distinct categories: *multiple nationals*, *denizens*, and *ethnizens*. The formal recognition of individuals as citizens by two or more independent states, through the tolerance or even active promotion of multiple citizenship, reflects a significant normative and institutional shift in how transnationalism is understood and accepted. The term “*denizenship*” refers to a special legal status of long-term resident foreign nationals who enjoy most of the civil liberties and social welfare rights of resident citizens, often including rights to family reunification, some protection from deportation, and voting rights in local elections (Hammar, 1990). Denizenship is often considered to be a step in the process of migrant integration in the receiving country. Finally, “*ethnizenship*” is the converse of denizenship in a way that creates an external quasi-citizenship for

individuals who are neither citizens nor residents of the country granting that status. It is generally granted to minorities on the basis of ethnic descent and perceived common ethnicity with an external kin state. States like Hungary, Slovakia, and Slovenia have adopted laws that introduce a quasi-citizenship for minorities of co-ethnic descent living abroad to provide them with certain benefits, including financial support for maintaining a minority culture and language, privileged admission to the territory or labour market of the kin state, and, in some cases, facilitated naturalisation (Bauböck, 2007, p. 2396). One should not forget the fact that this last category of transnational citizenship, *ethnizenship*, is not only limited to the three Eastern European countries; there are also several other Western countries granting citizens of other countries automatic naturalisation based on ethnic descent while these persons still reside abroad. Germany is one of them. Article 116 of the German Basic Law provided a broad constitutional definition of ‘German’ that included ethnic Germans (*Aussiedler*) from Eastern Europe and the former USSR, thereby reducing legal barriers to their admission and naturalisation in the Federal Republic (Brubaker, 1992, pp. 114–119; Klusmeyer, 1993, p. 84; Joppke, 2004).

However, while the emphasis on multiple and differentiated rights as well as dual citizenship for transmigrants has long been regarded as a progressive tool for accommodating transnational identities and facilitating migrant integration, recent political developments in various liberal democracies reveal a more restrictive and strategic use of this legal status. In the contemporary politics of integration across Europe, states have increasingly associated dual citizenship not with inclusion, but with conditional belonging, using it as a legal loophole to withdraw nationality without breaching international norms against statelessness. In particular, governments have introduced reforms enabling the revocation of citizenship in cases of perceived national security threats, often targeting naturalised citizens with another nationality. This trend has been observed in countries such as the United Kingdom, France, and Denmark, where legal changes allow for denaturalisation based on vague notions of “loyalty” or “threat” (Gibney, 2013; van Waas, 2016). As van Waas (2016) notes, the existence of a second nationality renders these individuals vulnerable to loss of legal membership, reflecting a shift in state practice from the universal protection of rights to a more discretionary and securitised governance of citizenship.

In this respect, the transnational turn in migration and citizenship studies, once celebrated as a paradigmatic shift beyond methodological nationalism, is increasingly being contested. Multiple crises—ranging from the global financial crisis to the rise of religious extremism and the so-called “refugee crisis”—have amplified political demands for reasserting national sovereignty and tightening the boundaries of membership. In this sense, the very condition of transnational belonging, once promoted as a marker of plural identities and cosmopolitan integration, is reinterpreted by states as a potential liability. Dual citizens embody the tension between overlapping memberships and exclusive sovereignty, making their status a key site where questions of loyalty, risk, and national cohesion are negotiated. The ambivalent meanings attached to dual citizenship—as either a facilitator of integration or as a mechanism of exclusion—point to the increasingly contingent nature of membership in an era of mobility, insecurity, and rising nativism. Migrants/transmigrants thus find

themselves navigating a paradox: their transnational attachments expand their social and cultural belonging, but simultaneously expose them to political suspicion and legal precariousness.

In sum, the transnational turn reveals that integration can no longer be conceived as a unidirectional process of adaptation into a bounded national community. Rather, it unfolds through overlapping social fields in which migrants and transmigrants continuously negotiate their place across multiple contexts of belonging. This negotiation is not merely cultural but deeply political, shaped by the tension between migrants' agency to sustain cross-border attachments and states' efforts to regulate, instrumentalise, or restrict such attachments. The resulting condition of belonging is marked by both expansion and fragility: migrants gain access to wider networks of solidarity and opportunity, yet their recognition as legitimate members of the national community remains conditional and, at times, revocable. Analysing the politics of integration, therefore, requires moving beyond methodological nationalism to account for these transnational dynamics, where belonging is simultaneously lived, contested, and governed across borders. In this sense, integration cannot be reduced to policy frameworks or institutional discourses alone; it is experienced and enacted in the everyday lives of migrants who navigate multiple, and at times conflicting, spaces of attachment. To grasp the full implications of the politics of integration, it is crucial to examine how belonging itself is reimagined in transnational contexts, where national anchors remain significant but no longer exclusive.

3.6 Belonging and the Politics of Integration: The Shift from Transnational Belongings to Nationalist Anchors

Belonging is an emotional attachment to feeling 'at home', feeling 'safe', and feeling "content" with the familiarity of the surroundings (Bauman, 2001; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Both social psychology and sociology disciplines have produced several works on the fear of separation from the familiar, and its devastating ramifications for individuals (Bauman, 2000, 2001; Billig, 1995; Lyons-Padilla et al., 2015; Maffesoli, 1996; Salmela & von Scheve, 2017; Tajfel, 1982; Yuval-Davis, 2006). The extant literature in social psychology demonstrates how individuals' interpersonal relationships are deeply affected by their membership or lack of membership in particular groups and organisations (Tajfel, 1982). Sociological works have also focused on how people belong to collectivities and states, as well as on the social, economic, political, and spatial effects of moments when such belongings are at stake due to the processes of modernisation, (de)industrialisation, urbanisation, and migration (Bauman, 2001; Maffesoli, 1996; Yuval-Davis, 2006). From Ferdinand Tönnies' concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, to Émile Durkheim's ideas of mechanical and organic solidarity, Anthony Giddens' (1994) notion of self-reflexivity, Charles Tilly's (1977) theory of cultural repertoires, and Manuel Castells'

(2011) concept of the network society—all these foundational works have helped explain how belonging in modern societies has shifted.

In the European context, these shifts intersect with the politics of integration, where state policies and discourses often attempt to re-anchor belonging within national frameworks, even as migrants live and negotiate it across transnational spaces. Thus, the question is not only how belonging is felt, but also how it is governed and regulated through the politics of integration. Building on this tradition, but placing it in dialogue with migration studies, this section examines how migrants' sense of belonging is reconstituted in transnational spaces, thereby exposing the tensions and possibilities that underpin the contemporary politics of integration. Rather than being rooted in the civic structures of nation-states, the sense of belonging has increasingly relocated to more defensive and reactionary identity-based communities (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

As said, belonging is an emotional attachment. Emotions may change at different times and in different situations. In moments of crisis, insecurity, ambiguity, frustration, alienation, anomie, inequity, deprivation, and grievance, the emotional constituents become more central for individuals while they construct their narratives about themselves and their identities. For instance, when some of the citizens feel economically insecure, their hostility often springs from their belief that immigrants and refugees are threatening their national culture, social security, community, and way of life (Reynié, 2016). It is precisely this emotional register that integration policies in Europe often respond to or instrumentalise, either by emphasising cultural adaptation and loyalty to the nation, or by framing migrants as potential risks to cohesion and security. Since the events of 9/11, 'strangers' have increasingly been perceived as not only a danger to the unity of political and cultural communities but also as potential terrorists, particularly young men. The definition of who qualifies as an 'insider' and a 'stranger' is constantly shifting and debated, as ethnic, cultural, and religious tensions rise both within and between nations. As a result, the politics of belonging has become central to political discourse worldwide, even in cases where rigid ideas about a 'clash of civilisations' are not directly invoked (Yuval-Davis, 2011).

Socio-economically disadvantaged groups may perceive immigrants and refugees as a threat to the social, political, cultural, and economic unity and homogeneity of their nation. Under such conditions, the politics of integration becomes more essential for the political actors who are concerned with the formation of the boundaries of the political community. These are the boundaries that separate the world population into 'us' and 'them'. The construction of boundaries may take place in different forms, such as national, religious, ethno-cultural, territorial, communal, tribal, and sentimental communities. All these in-group and out-group communities, or "us" and "them", are imagined communities in modern times, as Benedict Anderson (1983) put it very well. In European states, integration policies frequently operate within this logic of boundary-drawing, by distinguishing between "desirable" and "undesirable" migrants, "integrated" and "unintegrated" communities, thereby institutionalising the politics of belonging into bureaucratic and legal categories.

The politics of integration, as a key expression of the broader politics of belonging, encompasses not only the preservation and reinforcement of community boundaries by hegemonic political forces but also how these boundaries are contested and challenged by other political actors. It is essential to recognise that these actors are not merely advancing competing visions of how the community should be constituted; they also deploy these visions strategically to strengthen their positions both within the community and beyond. The politics of integration thus involves ongoing debates over what it means to belong, who qualifies as a legitimate member, and how social positions and identity narratives shape these judgments. This is evident in European integration policies, which often rest on normative assumptions about belonging and authority, expressed through citizenship tests, language requirements, and cultural adaptation discourses (Bauböck & Joppke, 2010). In this way, integration functions not only as a policy framework but also as a political terrain in which struggles over belonging, recognition, participation, and exclusion are enacted, including conflicts over the rights, privileges, and responsibilities attached to membership in a political community (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has explored how integration is deeply embedded in the historical and ideological processes that constitute nationhood and political community. Moving beyond simplistic civic–ethnic dichotomies, the chapter has shown that national imaginaries often draw from multiple logics, such as primordial, civic, and cultural, when defining who belongs and who remains excluded. These logics continue to inform the politics of integration, even as they are adapted and rearticulated in response to contemporary pressures. In this light, integration is not merely a question of migrant adaptation, but a mirror reflecting broader anxieties about the cohesion and identity of national communities themselves. The processes of line-drawing and boundary-making that define membership rights reveal the exclusionary underpinnings of seemingly inclusive models, and demonstrate how the promise of full belonging remains conditional and contested.

At the same time, the chapter has drawn attention to the growing salience of transnational forms of belonging. Migrants today are not simply assimilated into bounded national containers but participate in multiple social fields, challenging the territorial and symbolic authority of the nation-state. The “transnational turn” in migration studies invites a rethinking of integration not as a one-way path into a fixed political community, but as a dynamic and multi-sited negotiation of identity, recognition, and rights. This decentred view complicates nationalist narratives and opens space for more plural, flexible, and relational understandings of belonging. Yet, the resurgence of exclusionary nativist discourses, rooted in ethnos rather than demos, signals that these transnational realities are often met with political resistance. In this context, the politics of integration emerges as a crucial battleground where competing visions of the nation, citizenship, and solidarity are constantly redefined.

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Chapter 4

Integration Policies Between Inclusion and Exclusion



What does it mean for a state to “integrate” newcomers, and how have these meanings changed over time and across contexts? This chapter delves into the political logics that have shaped immigrant integration policies in Europe, with a particular focus on how such policies articulate ideas of nationhood, belonging, and citizenship. Integration is not simply a technical matter of social adjustment or legal inclusion; it is a deeply contested site where liberal-democratic ideals confront nationalist, socio-economic, and cultural anxieties.

When referring to the politics of integration, the intention is not merely to describe concrete policy instruments but rather to capture the broader field of political contestation, discourse, and power relations surrounding the issue of integration. While integration policies denote specific measures such as language requirements, citizenship tests, or access to welfare and employment, the politics of integration points to the ideological and normative debates that shape these measures and give them meaning. It encompasses how different actors frame integration as a problem or a solution, how competing visions of national identity and belonging are mobilised, and how political struggles over inclusion and exclusion are played out. In this sense, the politics of integration provides the discursive and institutional context within which integration policies are formulated and implemented.

The chapter begins by tracing the historical development of integration regimes, highlighting how different European states have pursued distinct paths rooted in their colonial legacies, institutional traditions, and national self-understandings. It then explores the dual emergence—especially in the early twenty-first century—of a “civic turn” in integration policy and a backlash against multiculturalism, both of which have reshaped the normative foundations and practical instruments of integration. Drawing on the typologies and analytical frameworks, the chapter unpacks how integration policies oscillate between civic ideals and ethnic boundaries, often masking exclusionary logics beneath the language of rights and responsibilities.

4.1 Comparing Integration Policies

As shown in Chapter 3, integration is deeply intertwined with nation-building processes and national ideologies, leading to considerable variation in how it is understood and translated into policies and legislation across countries. Differences in migration experiences across continents, regions, and national contexts also play a key role in shaping migrant integration policies. Western European countries, often referred to as the “Old World,” generally have shorter or less continuous histories of immigration compared to traditional settler societies such as the United States, Canada, and Australia. Colonial legacies further influence these trajectories, particularly in countries like the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium. The experience of post-war migration also differs across Europe. While Northern and Western European countries have long served as destination countries, Southern and Eastern European nations have undergone a transition from being primarily emigration countries to becoming both emigration and destination countries. In Southern Europe, countries such as Spain, Portugal, and Greece remained largely emigration countries until the end of the labour migration era in the 1970s (Castles & Miller, 2003). Similarly, many Eastern European countries, including Poland, Hungary, the Baltic states, Bulgaria, and Romania, underwent this transformation during the EU enlargement processes of 2004 and 2007 (Pszczółkowska, 2024).

In Western Europe, post-war approaches to immigrant integration have varied considerably. Germany, a country that until recently maintained a national self-image as a non-immigration country (“*Wir sind kein Einwanderungsland*”), did not implement substantial integration policies until the late 1990s. France, by contrast, has traditionally pursued an assimilationist model (Kaya and Kentel 2005; Schnapper 2007; Kaya, 2012). In the United Kingdom, integration policies evolved from a colonial legacy into a form of multiculturalism (Parekh, 2000). Belgium, shaped by its federal structure, developed a hybrid of assimilationist and multiculturalist approaches across its three administrative regions (Kaya and Kentel 2008). The Netherlands adapted its paternalistic colonial heritage into a multicultural framework (Kaya, 2012; Vink, 2007), while Sweden is often cited as a forerunner in multicultural integration, contrasted by its Scandinavian neighbour, Denmark, which has followed a more assimilationist trajectory (Borevi, 2014, 2017). A significant strand of scholarship has been devoted to comparing, understanding and explaining these types of cross-country variations in policy approaches to integration.

Some of the most influential accounts of national differences in immigrant integration policies are offered by Rogers Brubaker and Adrian Favell. In *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (1992), Brubaker contrasts French republicanism with German ethno-nationalism, showing how these national models shape distinct approaches to immigrant integration. Brubaker (1992) argues that conceptions of nationhood are institutionalised in citizenship laws and administrative practices, shaping the boundaries of membership and belonging. He highlights how these national self-understandings, civic and assimilationist in the French case, ethno-cultural and descent-based in the German case, structure not only who is

granted legal citizenship, but also how immigrants are expected to become part of the national community. Adrian Favell (1998), in *Philosophies of Integration*, offers a critical analysis of how European states conceptualise and implement integration, with a particular focus on France and Britain. With the notion ‘Philosophies of Integration’, Favell implies an “‘amateur’ public theory [...] that combines a kind of functionalist social theory of what it is that holds nations together, with a normative political philosophy that expresses nationhood in terms of abstract civic values (usually citizenship)” (Favell, 2006, p. 51).

Several scholars have also developed typologies and analytical frameworks to identify and compare different integration policy regimes. A seminal and influential contribution in this regard is Stephen Castles’ (1995) typology of three distinct citizenship models: the differentialist, assimilationist, and multicultural models. The differentialist model, exemplified by Germany’s former guest worker policies, either denies migrants and their descendants’ access to the political community or makes naturalisation exceedingly difficult. In contrast, both the assimilationist and multicultural models allow relatively easy access to formal citizenship but take fundamentally different stances on cultural diversity. The assimilationist model demands migrants’ adherence to a uniform set of rules, whereas the multicultural model supports not only individual rights but also group rights for cultural minorities. In reference to the discussion in Chapter 2, Castles’ assimilationist model aligns with scholars such as Brian Barry, who argue that civic rights and duties alone suffice for integration, with ethnicity belonging to the private sphere (Barry, 2001). In contrast, the multicultural model reflects the position of thinkers, such as Will Kymlicka, who contend that public recognition of ethnic and cultural identities is a necessary complement to equal rights in achieving genuine integration (Kymlicka, 1995). Yet another analytical model may be mentioned, formulated by Friedrich Heckmann and Dominique Schnapper (2003), to compare how states and societies manage cultural diversity and the inclusion of minorities. Their model distinguishes three “integration paths” in Europe: *segregationist*, where minority groups remain largely separate; *assimilationist*, where minorities are expected to fully adopt the majority’s culture; and *ethnic minority*, where groups retain their distinct identity while participating in broader society.

4.2 Integration Policies and the Tension Between *Ethnos* and *Demos*

One analytical framework, developed by Ruud Koopmans and Paul Statham (Koopmans & Statham, 2000) and colleagues (Koopmans et al., 2005), differed from the more static categories of typological “models” or “regimes” discussed above in the sense that it combined two different dimensions. Their two-dimensional framework intends to work as “a conceptual (and political) space in which different actors and policies can be situated, and developments can be traced over time” (Koopmans

et al., 2005, p. 9). The vertical axis relates to conceptions of citizenship, ranging from “ethno-cultural” to “civic-territorial”, and the horizontal axis concerns cultural obligations associated with citizenship, ranging from “cultural monism” to “cultural pluralism”. The framework identified four ideal–typical configurations of citizenship and immigrant incorporation—assimilationism, segregationism, universalism, and multiculturalism—which were positioned within the conceptual space.

While the framework by Koopmans and colleagues represents a very useful contribution, it has also been subject to critique. Karin Borevi argues that a key concern is that the authors, when specifying the different dimensions, conflate two distinct issues in a problematic way: namely, whether the state actively recognises and promotes cultural diversity, as in multicultural policies, and whether the state tolerates cultural diversity, as in universalism or any approach grounded in liberal-democratic principles (Borevi, 2002, 2010). This issue becomes particularly pressing when the aim is to analyse recent developments in civic integration policies, a topic that will be examined in greater detail later in this chapter (Borevi, 2010; 2016). In response to these limitations, Borevi proposed a revised version of the framework (see Fig. 4.1), in which the horizontal axis concerns the state’s approach to ethno-cultural diversity, ranging from “active” to “passive”, while the vertical axis captures how the national identity is conceived, with endpoints reflecting an ethnic (*ethnos*) versus a civic (*demos*) understanding of the nation. Since it is unrealistic to draw a sharp line between ethnic and civic ideas of nationhood, because no nation can ever be entirely ‘de-ethnicised’ or purely ‘civic’ (Yack, 1996; see also Chapter 3, this book), the framework is based on the idea that, in any liberal democracy, there will always be a built-in *tension* between cultural identity (*ethnos*) and democratic inclusion (*demos*) (Borevi, 2002).

The upper part of the model in Fig. 4.1 reflects approaches grounded in an ethnic conception of the national community and, as such, stands in tension with liberal democratic principles. A clear empirical illustration can be found in the historical treatment of the Sámi in Sweden, an Indigenous people primarily residing in the

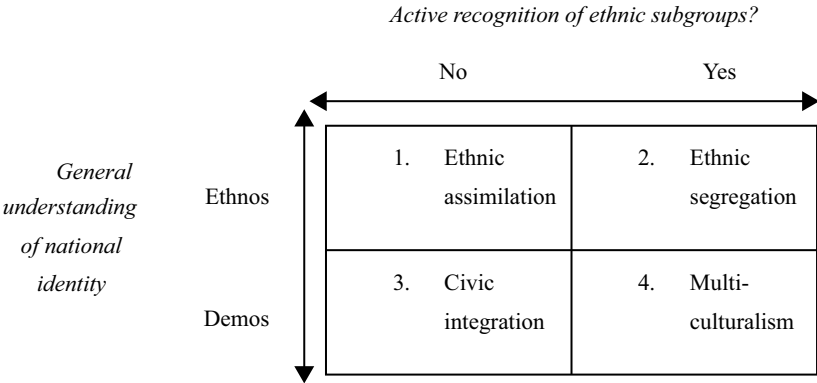


Fig. 4.1 Ideal–typical integration policy options

northern regions of the country, whose governance was long shaped by nationalist and racist assumptions. At various points, Swedish state policies sought to “Swedify” the Sámi population, for instance by prohibiting the use of Sámi languages in schools in an effort to assimilate Sámi children into an ethnic ideal of Swedishness (Ideal Type 1, “Ethnic Assimilation”). At other times, the state adopted a segregationist approach, encapsulated in the slogan “a Lapp should remain a Lapp” (*Lapp skall vara lapp*). The term “Lapp,” now widely recognised as outdated and pejorative, reflects the racialised and hierarchical understandings of Sámi identity that underpinned such policies. Under this logic, Sámi children were denied access to mainstream elementary education, including instruction in Swedish, and were instead channelled into separate schooling systems (Ideal Type 2, “Ethnic Segregation”).

Civic integration and (liberal) multiculturalism (Ideal Types 3 and 4 in Fig. 4.1) share a common foundation in the idea that belonging in modern liberal democracies cannot be based on ethnicity, but rather on the notion of a community of citizens—a *demos*. What distinguishes them is the way they seek to promote this form of civic integration. The position labelled civic integration (Ideal Type 3) emphasises individual rights and passive tolerance of cultural diversity, while the position called multiculturalism (Ideal Type 4) involves the state actively recognising and supporting such affiliations. However—and this is a crucial point—the inherent tension between *ethnos* and *demos* implies that each of these policy models will always carry the risk of drifting toward the upper part of the framework, ultimately reflecting an illiberal conception of the nation as an ethnic community (*ethnos*) (Borevi, 2002). This chapter’s remaining sections, which focus on European policy developments since the late 1990s, serve to illustrate how each approach is vulnerable to this risk, beginning with multiculturalism and followed by civic integrationism.

4.3 Multiculturalism and Its Backlash

Multiculturalism is a contested concept with multiple interpretations, but one key distinction lies between its descriptive and normative uses. Descriptively, it refers to demographic pluralism—ethno-cultural diversity within a population—often termed “multiculturality” or *Multikulturalität* in German. Normatively, it denotes a political or ideological stance on how such diversity should be addressed. In this normative sense, which is the primary focus here, multiculturalism asserts that ethno-cultural diversity requires more than the protection of basic liberal-democratic rights; it calls for public recognition and support for minorities to preserve and express their distinct identities (Banting & Kymlicka, 2006, p. 1). Policies described as ‘multicultural’ may include exemption rights, support for separate institutions, accommodations within mainstream institutions (such as schools and media), and representation rights for ethnic or religious organisations (Koopmans 2013, p. 151).

Several states in Europe and beyond adopted what may be characterized as “multicultural policies,” which included measures aimed at supporting migrants in maintaining and developing their ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious identities within

sub-groups, while also promoting their economic and political integration into the host society. In the European context, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Sweden have often been cited as leading examples of states that pursued multicultural approaches to immigrant integration (Joppke, 2004). However, significant variations existed among these countries in terms of how multiculturalism was operationalised. In the United Kingdom, the focus was largely on granting exemptions from general rules for minority groups; in the Netherlands, on the establishment of institutionalised parallel structures; and in Sweden, on providing mother-tongue instruction within public schools and state support for ethnic associations (Borevi, 2013, 2024). To capture and compare such policies across countries, several indices have been developed—most notably the Multiculturalism Policy Index (MPI, 2025) by Banting and Kymlicka, and the Indicators for Citizenship Rights for Immigrants (ICRI, 2025) by Koopmans and colleagues (see Chapter 2).

The decline—or backlash—of multiculturalism may be linked to a series of crises in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Following the 9/11, 2001, terrorist attacks in New York and subsequent events in Europe, such as the 2004 Madrid bombings (11 March), the 2004 murder of Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam (2 November), and the 2005 London bombings (7 July), multiculturalism was increasingly blamed for fostering extremist Islamist violence. One can debate the exact timing of when the wave of multiculturalism critique emerged. As early as the 1990s, Arthur M. Schlesinger (1991) and Robert Hughes (1993) strongly criticized multiculturalism in the U.S., warning that allowing minorities such as Hispanics and African Americans to celebrate their ethno-cultural distinctiveness could threaten national unity. Across the Atlantic, similar concerns emerged in the Netherlands, where Social Democrat Paul Scheffer (2000) famously described the situation as a ‘Multicultural Drama,’ claiming it was undermining Dutch social cohesion. Drawing on Huntington’s ‘clash of civilizations’ paradigm (Huntington, 1996), Wilhelm Heitmeyer et al. contended already in 1997 that it was the Turkish-origin population that resisted integration into German society (Heitmeyer et al., 1997). The latter claim was based on the perception that Turkish-origin youths pursued an intentional self-isolation due to their alleged satisfaction with living according to Islamic and Turkish identities. This contentious discussion parallels debates surrounding Thilo Sarrazin’s (2010) book, *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (Germany Abolishes Itself), in the early 2010s, which sparked responses from high-level politicians.

In October 2010, the German Chancellor (2005–2021) Angela Merkel, publicly dismissed the policy of multiculturalism as having “failed, failed utterly” (The Guardian, 2010), a statement swiftly followed by the British Prime Minister (2010–2016) David Cameron who called for a ‘more active, more muscular liberalism’ (The Independent, 2011) and the French President (2007–2012) Nicolas Sarkozy’s statement that multiculturalism is a “failed concept” (France24, 2011). Geert Wilders, leader of the Freedom Party in the Netherlands, made no apologies for arguing that Christians “should be proud that our culture is better than Islamic culture” (Der Spiegel, 2010). A similar discourse had emerged in England, following the 7/7 London bombings in 2005. On the first anniversary of the bombings, Britain’s *Daily Mail* ran the headline ‘Multiculturalism is dead’ (Daily Mail, 2006).

The political debate, with statements such as those exemplified above, evolved alongside and was informed by an academic discourse unfolding at the same time. One central critical argument targeted multiculturalism's alleged reliance on an *essentialist view of culture*, treating cultures as static, homogenous, and deterministic of identity. In contrast, empirical research has emphasised the dynamic, fluid, and evolving nature of culture (Kaya, 2001). Critics contended that multicultural policies often exaggerated differences between cultures while neglecting internal diversity (Benhabib, 2004). Another related critique was that multiculturalism reflected a biased, Western-centric perspective in which only immigrants are viewed as carriers of cultural diversity. Consequently, multicultural policies often become policies directed at 'the Other', reinforcing cultural differences and confining immigrants to rigid, stereotypical identities (Phillips, 1999). Multiculturalism was accused of essentialising minority cultures for the state to govern them through fixed cultural categories, echoing colonial practices of managing difference and maintaining control. Rather than addressing structural inequalities, multiculturalism was said to confine minority identities to the private sphere, reproducing symbolic inclusion while sustaining majority dominance (Goldberg, 1994). In a similar vein, Slavoj Žižek, for instance, describes multiculturalism as a covert form of "distant" racism, an apparent respect for the identity of the Other that, in fact, reinforces the multiculturalist's own sense of superiority. Accordingly, by viewing the Other as an "authentic," self-contained community, the multiculturalist maintains a safe distance, enabled by a privileged universal position. This supposed respect for cultural specificity thus becomes a tool for reaffirming dominance. According to Slavoj Žižek, the cultural "roots" that appear to ground this universalism are not its hidden truth but a symbolic mask, obscuring the fact that the multicultural subject is already rootless and occupies a hollow universal space (Žižek, 1997).

Furthermore, multiculturalism—via its essentialisation and 'Othering' of migrant cultures—was accused of resulting in *ethnic marginalisation or segregation*, where minority cultures are imprisoned into their private spaces (or 'ghettos'), empowering the majority society at political, legal, and socio-economic levels at the expense of minorities (Rosaldo 1989; Rath 1993; Radtke 1994; 2003; Russon 1995; Radtke 2003; Kaya, 2001, 2012; Vertovec & Wessendorf 2010). In some of these critiques, multiculturalism was also criticized as representing and promoting a neoliberal and neo-colonial form of governmentality. By shifting responsibility for integration onto individuals and communities, depoliticising inequality, and commodifying cultural diversity for economic gain, multiculturalism was said to operate as a technique of rule that obscures injustice under the language of inclusion and recognition (Brown, 2006). Moreover, it has been criticised for legitimising and entrenching conservative, often patriarchal, power structures within minority communities, thereby undermining women's rights and gender equality (Okin, 1999). Finally, multiculturalism has been accused of weakening societal solidarity and interpersonal trust, for example, by fostering institutional fragmentation and cultural segmentation, which can erode people's support for the welfare state (Gitlin, 1995; Phillips, 1999; c.f. Banting & Kymlicka, 2006).

Viewed in light of the tension between *ethnos* and *demos*, and the analytical framework for immigrant integration policy approaches discussed earlier, the critiques of multiculturalism converge on a common concern: that as a policy model, it is inadequate. Critics argue either that multiculturalism is essentially indistinguishable from ethnic segregation (Ideal Type 2 in Fig. 4.1), or that it carries a significant risk of sliding in that direction over time, fostering forms of separation often described as “ghettoisation” or even “imprisonment.”

4.4 Interculturalism

In this context, another approach—called *interculturalism*—was in some cases proposed as a possible middle ground alternative. In 2008, the Council of Europe, in the White Paper, *Living Together as Equals in Dignity* (Council of Europe, 2008), suggested interculturalism as a new approach. Echoing arguments from the academic and political critical debates, reviewed above, the report states: “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. 10). Interculturalism, the Council went on explaining, was considered a more viable alternative, since it combined the focus on the individual (as in assimilation) with the recognition of cultural diversity (as in multiculturalism), adding to that an emphasis on dialogue, equal dignity, and shared values.

Interculturalism had emerged in the academic discourse as a response to critiques of multiculturalism, offering an alternative framework that prioritizes individuals over collectivities and emphasises dialogue and engagement between people of different cultural and religious backgrounds (Kaya, 2018; Meer & Modood, 2012). It should be noted that the notion of interculturalism that won influence in Europe differs from how it is used in Canada, namely referring to Québec’s approach to immigrant integration, which emphasises the protection of Francophone identity and promotes French as the common public language (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008; Bouchard, 2011).

The difference between multiculturalism and interculturalism essentially lies in the emphasis that the former puts on group identities and the incorporation of collective differences into society, while the latter focuses on *individual* differences only (Joppke, 2018; Meer & Modood, 2012; Modood, 2007, 2018; Zapata-Barrero, 2019). The interculturalist approach was considered to better align with the syncretic concept of culture found in global anthropology, which challenges the traditional, holistic notion that confines cultures to separate social compartments with fixed sets of “shared meanings and values” (Gilroy, 1993; Kaya, 2001).

Further, to a larger extent than multiculturalism, interculturalism insists on intercultural communication and dialogue between individuals belonging to different ethno-cultural or religious groups. This dialogue is not a private dialogue that takes

place, for instance, within a family, but a public one that can take place in institutional contexts such as the school or the workplace (Joppke, 2018; Meer & Modood, 2012; Modood, 2007, 2018; Zapata-Barrero, 2019).

Critics of the interculturalist approach argue that its proponents often misrepresent multiculturalism by reducing it to a simplistic strawman, while also pointing out that interculturalism itself remains conceptually vague and insufficiently defined (Joppke, 2018). Furthermore, because the intercultural account frequently relies on a vague and ambiguous critique of multiculturalism, it has been noted to carry the risk of legitimising—and potentially strengthening—political agendas that are fundamentally hostile to diversity (de Waal, 2018; Kymlicka, 2016).

4.5 Civic Integrationism

Both multiculturalism and interculturalism are integration policy approaches that rest on a collectivist premise that conceives of migrants as groups to be incorporated into the social fabric as distinct collective entities. By contrast, civic integrationism resonates more closely with neoliberal rationalities, reframing integration as a matter of individual responsibility and self-management on the part of migrants, but with a culturalist and assimilationist twist. As discussed above, the ideal type of “civic integration” often appears in typologies and analytical frameworks as an approach that aims at facilitating immigrants’ integration through participation in the labour market and access to legal and political rights and responsibilities, while maintaining state neutrality toward citizens’ cultural, ethnic, and religious identities, thereby rejecting the ‘multicultural’ model of actively promoting ethnic group affiliations. However, around the turn of the millennium, *civic integration*, also referred to as *civic integrationism* or *the civic turn in immigrant integration*, emerged as the label for a new policy trend, particularly evident across Western European states. This trend was marked by increased state involvement in conditioning access to legal membership statuses and rights, such as citizenship, permanent residency, and family reunification. The policy trend has been associated with the introduction of a range of new or stricter integration requirements that immigrants must overcome to get access to membership rights, such as language tests, citizenship tests, loyalty oaths and declarations, and citizenship ceremonies (Bassel et al., 2021a, 2021b; Borevi et al., 2017; Goodman, 2010; Joppke, 2007; Kostakopoulou, 2014).

Per Mouritsen, Kristian Jensen, and Stephen Larin (2019, p. 601) argue that civic integrationism, as it has developed across Europe since the turn of the millennium, represents a distinct ideological shift from the integration approaches discussed in the literature of the 1980s and 1990s. Based on their analysis, three main features can be identified, each of which will be discussed in the following section. First, civic integration represents an *expansion of what counts as ‘good citizenship’*, moving beyond traditional markers such as labour market participation, voting, and involvement in civil society, to include personal conduct, values, religious practices, family life, and one’s relationship with the welfare state. Second, integration is increasingly framed

as an *individual responsibility*, with a growing shift away from structural support and equal access to rights and resources, toward an emphasis on personal duty and the individual's willingness to adapt. Alongside its emphasis on individual responsibility, civic integrationism also entails more active state involvement, whether through incentives or through moralising and disciplinary measures aimed at shaping desired attitudes and behaviours. Finally, the logic of civic integration increasingly *intertwines integration policy with immigration control*, linking access to legal entry, residence, and citizenship to assessments of civic 'desirability', measured by conformity with national values and norms. (Mouritsen et al., 2019).

4.5.1 *Expansion on What Counts as "Good Citizenship"*

As noted above, states have implemented a range of requirements obliging migrants, at various stages of the integration process—including entry, residence, and naturalisation—to demonstrate compliance with what is officially framed as 'good citizenship'. These requirements often include passing integration or language tests, obtaining certificates of civic knowledge, and taking loyalty oaths. While presented as neutral or universal standards, such measures are frequently shaped by national self-understandings and political discourses about belonging, values, and social cohesion. They reflect not only an effort to encourage integration but also to draw symbolic boundaries between insiders and outsiders. In what follows, three distinct but overlapping forms of conditionality will be examined: (i) cultural conditioning, which involves conformity to dominant norms, values, and language; (ii) economic conditioning, which links residence or citizenship rights to employment, income, or self-sufficiency; and (iii) penal conditioning, which ties migrant status to criminal records or compliance with law enforcement, thereby reinforcing a securitised approach to integration (Mouritsen et al., 2019).

Cultural Conditionality

A central feature of civic integrationism was the new (or, rather, renewed) emphasis on ensuring that migrants conform to a culturally defined conception of citizenship in the host country. As reviewed above, political debates that criticised multicultural policies for allegedly fostering the marginalisation of ethnic communities (and the emergence of 'parallel societies') catalysed this shift in focus. The appeal from European political leaders to move away from multiculturalism was combined with a call for taking a new and more active role in promoting core national values, which is referred to in German as *Leitkultur*. One example of this was the above-mentioned 2011 speech by then UK Prime Minister David Cameron, who called for a "more active, more muscular liberalism" while combating Islamist extremism in the UK.

As the term *civic integration* suggests, the stated aim is to promote integration into a civic, rather than an ethnic, conception of national belonging. Some scholars

within the traditions of constitutional patriotism and liberal nationalism view the civic integration policy trend as normatively justified. Jan-Werner Müller (2007), for example, interprets modern citizenship tests as expressions of constitutional patriotism, framing national identity around liberal-democratic values rather than ethno-cultural heritage. Similarly, proponents of liberal nationalism have argued that civic integrationism can be compatible with a liberal framework (Banting & Kymlicka, 2013). However, other commentators remain critical, contending that the invocation of liberal values does not, in itself, render integration tests defensible from a liberal-democratic standpoint (Triadafilopoulos, 2011).

The debate has revolved around the testing of values in relation to naturalisation (Bauböck & Joppke, 2010), with critics arguing that such tests can be illiberal. Some commentators maintain that citizenship tests are legitimate only insofar as they concern cognitively learnable knowledge—focusing on ‘what is right’ rather than ‘what is good.’ The 2005 introduction of a ‘conversation guide’ [*Gesprächsleitfaden*] in the German state of Baden-Württemberg is one example of when this norm was transgressed. Interviewers were instructed to ask citizenship applicants, primarily from Muslim-majority countries, about sensitive personal attitudes (e.g., views on gender equality, homosexuality, and forced marriage) as a test of their ‘constitutional loyalty.’ This so-called ‘Muslim test’ provoked widespread criticism for targeting specific religious groups and probing inner convictions, raising concerns about potential violations of both Germany’s Basic Law and international equality norms. Critics argued that it contravened Kant’s principle that law should regulate outward behaviour rather than inner belief. Legal scholars also deemed the guide likely incompatible with international law, particularly the UN Convention on Racial Discrimination, and in 2011, it was abolished in favor of standardized nationwide tests (Mercur, 2011).

Others maintain that the citizenship tests and other requirements involved in the civic integration trend more broadly reflect a move toward *identity liberalism* or *liberal fundamentalism*. This version of ‘liberalism’ is no longer centred on individual rights, compromise, and shared solutions—as emphasised in egalitarian liberalism or liberal multiculturalism—but instead prescribes a particular way of life (Tebble, 2006). In this context, values that appear inherently liberal, such as freedom or gender equality, may be instrumentalised to exclude those perceived as ‘the Other’ (Mouritsen, 2006; Rostbøll, 2010). Right-wing populist parties, in particular, often invoke liberal ideals to argue that migrants, especially Muslims, hold incompatible values (Farris, 2017). As noted by Triadafilos Triadafilopoulos (2011), civic integrationism can reflect a broader tendency among self-identified liberals to treat liberal values as a creed to be defended at all costs, especially against perceived threats like Islamic fundamentalism. While this approach may align with a form of liberal perfectionism, it raises important questions regarding its effectiveness in promoting integration and social cohesion (Triadafilopoulos, 2011). As noted by Per Mouritsen and colleagues (2019, p. 604), even if framed in liberal rhetoric, the sincerity of civic integrationists’ commitment to universally shared values is questionable. Rather than embodying liberal neutrality, civic integrationism may exemplify what Daphne Halikiopoulou et al. (2013) describe as *the civic zeitgeist*—a

context in which Europe's radical right-wing parties promote ethnically exclusive agendas under the banner of liberal-democratic values, claiming these as the unique patrimony of the nation.

Civic integrationism has also been interpreted as part of a broader “cultural turn,” in which culture, encompassing norms, values, emotions, traditions, and religion, has become central to the conception of citizenship. This “culturalisation of citizenship” often supplements or even displaces traditional legal, political, and social rights. Immigrants, in particular, are expected to display emotional attachment and loyalty to the host nation, aligning themselves with new “feeling rules” (Duyvendak, 2011). Critics argue that this shift risks obscuring structural inequalities by privileging cultural conformity over socio-economic inclusion and may be mobilised in support of exclusionary or even racist agendas (Lentin & Titley, 2012; Pakulski & Markowski, 2014). Others contend that cultural adaptation is essential for meaningful participation, as unfamiliarity with social norms can impede integration (Duyvendak et al., 2016). To navigate these tensions, Duyvendak et al. (2016) propose a conceptual framework that distinguishes between “restorative” and “constructivist” understandings of culture, as well as between “functional” (e.g., language, civic knowledge) and “affective” (e.g., emotional belonging) dimensions. They aim to show that cultural norms, depending on context, can both facilitate and restrict access to full citizenship.

To sum up, civic integrationism involves a new emphasis on cultural conditioning that makes it relevant to ask whether policies truly uphold civic ideals or risk veering toward ethnic assimilation. The discussion above illustrates how policies associated with civic integrationism—where the explicit goal is to maintain an approach which is compatible with a civic understanding of the national community as a *demos* runs the risk of producing exclusionary outcomes. In relation to the analytical framework that was presented previously in this chapter (see Fig. 4.1), the controversy discussed above revolves around whether policies are in fact drifting toward the upper-left quadrant in the model, representing the (illiberal) ideal type of ethnic assimilation.

Economic Conditionality

Economic conditionality relates to requirements revolving around requirements targeted at migrants' economic resources and financial self-sufficiency. As mentioned before the three conditionalities highlighted here (cultural, economic, penal) are distinct, yet overlapping. Economic requirements, therefore, could well be understood as part of the above-discussed cultural conditionality, for instance, in relation to the notion of the citizen-as-worker ideal, as is often emphasised, not least in the context of Scandinavian welfare states (Borevi et al., 2017). The literature shows that there has been an increase in economic integration requirements. For instance, Jeremias Stadlmair (2018) researched fees for naturalisation in nine European countries and showed that they had increased over time, the largest increase taking place after 2000. Economic requirements are applied to condition access to permanent residency as well as naturalisation to citizenship.

A particularly illustrative case is the United Kingdom, where naturalisation fees were deliberately set above the actual administrative cost. This symbolic pricing served to signal that British citizenship carried both economic and moral value, reflecting a fusion of neoliberal and moral-nationalist rationalities. As Christian Joppke (2021, p. 190) observes, the underlying idea was that the “value” of citizenship should be expressed through the monetary contribution required of migrants seeking naturalisation. This example highlights how economic conditionality can function not merely as a practical threshold but as a symbolic instrument in the politics of integration, reinforcing the perceived significance and worth of full membership in the national community.

In Norway, for example, since 2017 applicants for permanent residence must document an income above a fixed threshold and demonstrate that they have not received means-tested social assistance in the preceding year (Eggebo et al. 2023). This model reflects a broader Nordic trend of tightening integration policies through economic conditionalities. A requirement of self-sufficiency for obtaining permanent residence was first introduced in Sweden through the temporary law of July 2016 and subsequently made permanent with the 2021 amendments to the Aliens Act, and Denmark has gone even further in combining income requirements with strict employment and benefit restrictions (Eggebo et al. 2023). Economic integration requirements are also prevalent to condition the right to family reunification (Bech et al., 2017; Sirriyeh, 2015; Staver, 2014).

Penal Conditionality

Finally, the third form of conditionality that may be identified revolves around requirements that oblige immigrants to meet specific standards of good conduct, particularly concerning criminal behaviour, to be eligible for different forms of legal membership, such as permanent residency or national citizenship. Scholars have identified a general decline of the ‘rehabilitative ideal,’ most clearly observed in the USA, with the invention and subsequent hardening of the legal concept ‘aggravated felony’ in immigration law, involving a logic of ‘once guilty, always guilty, never a citizen’ (Joppke, 2021, p. 193). A similar development occurred in Denmark: the 2002 amendment to the Danish Citizenship Act introduced a conduct rule whereby a prison sentence of one to two years necessitated an eighteen-year waiting period, while a sentence of two years or more permanently excluded the possibility of acquiring Danish citizenship—a restriction that has been further tightened since (Ersbøll, 2015).

A reform proposal presented in Sweden in the Spring of 2025 could also be mentioned, to illustrate the increasing prominence of penal conditionalities in contemporary integration policy. According to the proposal, a ‘good conduct’ requirement will be introduced for obtaining permanent residence, as well as for expanding the grounds for the state to revoke residence permits. Whereas existing law only requires that applicants must not have committed criminal acts, the proposal

considerably broadens the scope of disqualifying behaviour. The government-appointed committee which presented the proposed reform did not have a detailed definition of what ‘good conduct’ would entail, more specifically, but said that it could include unpaid debts, benefits fraud, association with criminal networks or violent extremist organisations, or failure to adhere to ‘fundamental Swedish values and ways of conduct’, and could potentially also include expression of views that was not against the law but considered to ‘threaten public order and Sweden’s security’. The proposal was (at the time of writing) under review, and a government bill was expected in 2026 (Borevi & Carlsson, 2025).

Penal conditionality can be understood within the framework of *crimmigration*, which describes the convergence of criminal law and immigration control. By conditioning access to citizenship on compliance with standards of good conduct—particularly the absence of criminal convictions—states embed punitive logics into migration governance, turning legal violations into barriers to civic membership. Rosenberg Rubins (2022) frames this as a ‘paradox of exclusion’: while such measures are intended to exclude undesirable migrants, they often produce long-term, sometimes permanent, restrictions on rights that can conflict with principles of rehabilitation and fairness. This approach exemplifies the broader trend of using criminal law to regulate social and political inclusion, disproportionately affecting marginalised populations and shaping citizenship as a conditional privilege rather than a universal entitlement (Stumpf, 2006).

4.5.2 *Individualisation of Integration*

The above section discussed the expansion of what counts as “good citizenship” as one major feature of civic integrationism. A second feature is the focus on *individual responsibility*, and a corresponding shift away from structural support and equal access to rights and resources, toward an emphasis on personal duty and the individual’s willingness to adapt. As has been pointed out by several scholars, in this regard, civic integration reflects a neoliberal ideology and rationality (Bassel et al., 2021a, 2021b; Joppke, 2021; van Houdt et al., 2011). The neoliberal logics, however, exist in a peculiar combination with nationalism. Friso van Houdt, Semin Suvarierol and Willem Schinkel (2011), for instance, talk about “a neoliberal communitarian regime” where it becomes the responsibility of the individual to convert to the nation, which is “sacralised as a bounded community of value” (van Houdt et al., 2011: 423–24).

The idea, most clearly reflecting the neoliberal logics of civic integrationism, is summarized in the slogan “earn your rights”. As asserted by Christian Joppke, the idea that individuals must earn their citizenship is the central theme in new-millennium restrictive citizenship discourse (Joppke, 2021). Joppke identifies three defining features of citizenship policies in the neoliberal era. The first two concern the fact that citizenship has simultaneously become more difficult to acquire and easier to lose—developments that, in his words, represent “complementary sides of

the same neoliberal-cum-nationalist coin of rendering citizenship more exclusive and conditional on the individual's behaviour and merit." The third feature highlights a paradoxical decline in the value of citizenship itself, which Joppke also attributes to neoliberal transformations: "the same citizenship that is meant to be upgraded and strengthened by these measures, 'renationalised' one could say, has also become objectively 'less in value', in our neoliberal age of welfare-to-workfare devolution and of turning everyone into a denizen" (Joppke, 2021, p. 168).

The "earn your rights" logic stands in stark contrast to the social citizenship model, following T.H. Marshall's seminal theory discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. As argued by Joseph Carens, "citizenship is not something that normally is earned or that ought to be earned. People acquire a moral right to citizenship from their social membership and the fact of their ongoing subjection to the laws" (Carens, 2013, p. 59). Following this line of reasoning, Joseph Carens maintains that the only justifiable conditions for granting citizenship via naturalisation are *residence* and *the passage of time*, which he regards as "proxies for richer, deeper forms of connection." Echoing T. H. Marshall, Joseph Carens' argument is that long-term residents, under their de facto social membership and continuous subjection to the law, acquire a moral entitlement to full legal membership rights. Civic integration, on the other hand, turns this logic on its head, as put succinctly by one commentator: "Rights have become rewards for fulfilling integration conditions, rather than tools to foster integration itself" (Jesse 2016: 16).

The neoliberal logics of civic integrationism, thus, entail an understanding of integration as an *individual* achievement or capacity. This individualised concept of integration, as Tamar de Waal (2018, p. 49) notes, implies that responsibility for the success or failure of integration is one-sidedly attributed to the individual behaviour, efforts, or qualities of these immigrants and their descendants. Furthermore, any negative social outcomes or statistical disparities involving immigrants and their descendants tend to be portrayed as "problems of integration", attributed to individual (or subgroup) failings rather than to broader structural or societal factors. Finally, and perhaps the most crucial implication of seeing integration as an individual capacity, de Waal also notes that this allows portraying certain individuals as physically present in the society but still—*symbolically*—positioned as "outsiders", marked as "non-integrated" (De Waal, 2018, p. 49).

In this context, migrants are often presumed to be "unwilling to integrate" and are thus subjected to disciplinary processes aimed at instilling the appropriate qualities associated with good citizenship—thereby reinforcing the idea that they must earn access to rights. However, public debates on integration often centre on certain categories of migrants—particularly non-Western, non-EU migrants and their descendants—and on what these groups must do to conform to a constructed image of societal belonging, while those whose membership is never questioned remain exempt from such scrutiny (De Waal, 2018). Some people, therefore, belong to what Bridget Anderson (2013) terms the 'moral community,' whose members are persons who are naturally perceived as "the protectors of good citizenship", and therefore not relevant for integration, and positioned beyond the reach of integration discourse. As

discussed in Chapter 2, a similar critique has also been put forward by scholars like Willem Schinkel (2017, 2018) and Adrian Favell (2022).

In Chapter 2, we discussed how integration research grounded in the so-called gap approach can be criticized for assessing migrant outcomes through comparisons with the average citizen as the norm. Civic integration requirements, however, often follow a different rationale, where conditions are framed not in relation to the average citizen, but rather to a ‘super-model’ of citizenship. On a similar note, Liav Orgad (2017) distinguishes between two naturalisation policy approaches: the ‘integration’ approach, which takes the average citizen as its benchmark, and the ‘selection’ approach, which instead uses the ‘ideal citizen’ as its standard. Under the latter, more is demanded of an immigrant than of a natural-born citizen. Orgad suggests that the selection approach has increasingly come to replace the integration approach, which dominated during a more liberal era of citizenship policy, when naturalisation was conceived as a tool within a broader integration process—one that was intransitive, unintended, and ongoing (Orgad, 2017).

As noted by Joppke (2021), a clear example of this selection logic was expressed by British Immigration Minister Phil Woolas (under whose tenure the “earned citizenship” approach was introduced in the UK): “As a point of principle... if you don’t break the law and you are a citizen, that’s fine. But if someone is applying to be a citizen of our country, we don’t think that you should only obey the law but show that you are committed to our country” (Joppke, 2021: 188, citing Anderson 2015, p. 187). A similar conclusion, that naturalised migrants are held to the standard of ‘super-citizens’, was reached in a comparative study of citizenship ceremonies in the UK and Germany (Badenhoop 2017).

4.5.3 The Merging of Integration with Immigration Control

The third core feature of civic integrationism that will be highlighted, finally, is that it tends to intertwine integration policy with immigration control, linking access to legal entry, residence, and citizenship to assessments of civic ‘desirability’, measured by conformity with national values and norms. States apply integration requirements not only, or even primarily, as a means to promote integration but also to control and select immigration (Goodman, 2010; Kunnan 2021; Van Oers, Ersbøll & Kostakopoulou 2010). Again, we may refer to the analysis of Christian Joppke (2021), who claims that immigration policy, in the neoliberal era, is structured around a dual strategy: to “court the top” by attracting high-skilled migrants, while simultaneously seeking to “fend off the bottom” by restricting low-skilled immigration. The latter often overlaps with tightened controls on family reunification and asylum migration (Joppke, 2021, pp. 67–75). In the context of migration that is predominantly viewed by states as “unselected” and “unwanted,” governments face a fundamental dilemma: while they are expected to promote migrant integration by facilitating inclusion in society, they are simultaneously driven by the opposing objective of limiting integration provisions, based on the belief that overly generous measures may encourage further migration.

Any policy that is “too generous” on the integration side would create incentives for more ‘unwanted’ migrants to come (Joppke, 2021, p. 173). A distinct feature of civic integration, therefore, is the fusion of immigrant integration and immigration policy functions (Joppke, 2021, p. 169). In this context, the concept of “integration” in policy measures often functions as a euphemism for “immigration control.” Such measures are not primarily intended to facilitate the incorporation of newcomers or to promote broader social cohesion. Rather, restrictive integration policies are—implicitly or explicitly—designed to deter unwanted migrants from arriving, acting as indirect tools of immigration control and keeping certain segments of the population in a state of precarity or deportability.

As noted, the link between integration policy and immigration control is particularly evident in relation to family reunification. Family migrants are not just ‘outsiders’ knocking on a country’s doors and requesting entry; they are also crucially connected with the moral claims of many ‘insiders’, i.e., people who reside within the country in question and wish to be united with their families (Block, 2016). In relation to family migration, therefore, civic integration involves a kind of ‘double conditionality’, in the sense that both parties—i.e., both the incoming migrant and the person residing in the destination country, referred to as a ‘sponsor’ - are potentially subject to requirements for integration (Bech et al., 2017). The sponsor, for example, may have to show that he or she has fulfilled such requirements, while the incoming family member may need to present evidence indicating a good potential to do so. The latter aspect was institutionalised via a policy reform, introduced by the Dutch government in 2005, that has become renowned as “integration from abroad”, or pre-entry integration requirements. Foreign nationals seeking to join a partner, parent, or child in the Netherlands were required to go through pre-entry integration requirements, administered abroad, to demonstrate their proficiency in the Dutch language and basic knowledge of Dutch society (Bonjour, 2014). This reform forged a direct link between integration policy and immigrant selection, institutionalising the aforementioned double conditionality by assessing both the sponsor’s perceived deservingness and the incoming family member’s potential for civic integration (Bech et al., 2017). In the years that followed, similar models were adopted in Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Although the justifications varied across national contexts, a common rationale emphasised the need to differentiate applicants based on their willingness and capacity to acquire knowledge deemed essential for integration in the host society (Bonjour, 2014).

The tightening of integration requirements for access to legal membership status—permanent residency, national citizenship, or the right to family reunification—also places migrant populations at risk of being denied the right to stay, potentially leading to deportation. Deportability refers to the risk or possibility of deportation rather than deportation itself, implying that ‘some are deported in order that most may remain (un-deported)’ (De Genova, 2002). All undocumented persons are subject to deportability, but deportability is also generated through migration-related conditions, such as the issuance of temporary permits and the possibility of revoking more secure statuses, including permanent residency or even citizenship. These conditions are often justified on the grounds of security (Choudhury, 2017; De Genova, 2007). Since

9/11, individuals racialised as Muslims have been securitised in Europe and the West, framed as threats to peace and national values and governed beyond conventional policy channels (Banai & Kreide, 2017; Buzan & Hansen, 2009; Kaya, 2012). More recently, people with ties to Russia have similarly been constructed as security risks, particularly in border states such as the Baltics following the annexation of Crimea and the war in Ukraine (Kuczynska-Zonik, 2017; Oivo & Davydova-Minguet, 2019).

In sum, to return to the analytical framework (Fig. 4.1), we can conclude that although framed in terms of liberal-democratic principles and an idea of the political community as *demos*, the two approaches—liberal multiculturalism and civic integrationism—risk leading to exclusionary outcomes that are not compatible with integration into a *demos*. As has been shown above, policy developments associated with civic integrationism have been characterized as aiming to discipline people to protect the majority group and culture, where integration, according to some accounts have even turned into an euphemism for xenophobic and racist ideals (Blankvoort, 2023). Through the politicisation of the concept, integration has obtained culturally imperialist, or sometimes even xenophobic, implications (Bowskill et al., 2007).

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the politics of integration in Europe by tracing the historical development, typologies, and shifting frameworks of policy approaches. We have seen that integration is never simply a matter of technical regulation or social adjustment; it is a deeply political field where ideas of nationhood, belonging, and citizenship are contested and reconfigured. Integration policies, whether framed as multicultural, intercultural, or civic, must therefore be understood as political instruments that articulate and reproduce particular visions of national identity and the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.

By comparing different policy traditions and examining their trajectories over time, the chapter has highlighted how integration debates are inseparable from broader historical, institutional, and ideological contexts. Colonial legacies, national self-understandings, and political traditions all shape the frameworks within which states respond to migration and diversity. As the analysis of Rogers Brubaker, Adrian Steven Castles, and others demonstrates, integration models are closely tied to the ways in which nations imagine themselves: civic or ethnic, assimilationist or pluralist, universalist or differentialist. The persistence of these national models underscores the importance of situating integration policies within the deeper histories of nation-building and identity politics.

The chapter has also illustrated how integration policies oscillate between civic ideals and ethnic boundaries. Both multiculturalism and interculturalism sought to offer frameworks for managing diversity that recognised cultural pluralism, yet both came under sustained critique for essentialising cultural differences, reifying group boundaries, and allegedly undermining social cohesion. The backlash against multiculturalism in particular revealed how quickly integration debates can be reframed

in terms of national security, loyalty, and cohesion. Interculturalism emerged in part as an attempt to respond to these critiques, emphasising dialogue, individual engagement, and shared values. Yet, as critics have noted, it often risks misrepresenting multiculturalism while failing to provide a robust alternative.

Against this backdrop, civic integrationism has become the dominant paradigm of the early twenty-first century. While presented as a neutral, liberal model, the chapter has shown how civic integrationism embodies a distinct ideological shift. Three features in particular stand out. First, the expansion of what counts as “good citizenship” has moved far beyond traditional markers of democratic participation and economic contribution, extending into migrants’ personal values, beliefs, and everyday conduct. Second, the logic of civic integration has individualised responsibility for integration, placing the burden squarely on migrants while downplaying structural inequalities and the role of institutions. Third, integration has become closely intertwined with immigration control, functioning as a filter for selecting “desirable” migrants and excluding or disciplining those deemed “undesirable.”

These features reveal how civic integrationism, despite its civic rhetoric, is deeply implicated in exclusionary practices. It reinforces symbolic boundaries between insiders and outsiders, contributes to the production of deportability, and sustains hierarchies of belonging. In this sense, integration often operates less as an instrument of inclusion than as a mechanism of control. By regulating the terms of judicial membership, the politics of integration also contribute to actively shaping who is imagined as part of the national community, under what conditions, and at whose expense.

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Chapter 5

Individual Responses to the Politics of Integration



The preceding chapters have traced how integration has been conceptualised, politicized, and institutionalised within European nation-states. Chapter 2 mapped the conceptual evolution of integration, revealing its contested meanings and its shift toward more relational, boundary-focused understandings. Chapter 3 situated integration within broader nation-building processes, showing how civic and ethnic logics have intertwined in defining national membership, often reactivated during periods of intensified migration and populist mobilisation. Chapter 4 examined the policy dimensions of these dynamics, demonstrating how European states have navigated tensions between liberal ideals and exclusionary impulses through evolving integration regimes, civic integration measures, and multiculturalism's retreat. Together, these chapters illuminate the complex interplay between theory, national imaginaries, and state practices of migrant integration—an interplay that directly frames the empirical findings presented in this chapter, where these dynamics are observed in lived experiences and policy outcomes on the ground.

This chapter examines how individuals, both of migrant and native origin, respond to the contemporary politics of integration in a European context marked by the rise of right-wing populism and a pervasive politics of fear. Since 9/11, migrants—particularly Muslims—have been increasingly securitised and framed as existential threats through conspiracy theories such as “Eurabia” and the “Great Replacement.” These narratives constitute *ultra-politics*, propagated by populist leaders and amplified by media discourse, which not only fuel exclusionary state practices but also reshape everyday forms of belonging. At the same time, individuals on the ground develop *sub-political* responses: among native populations, these often take the form of nativist mobilisations and retreat into homogeneous enclaves; among migrant-origin youth, they emerge as religio-political solidarities and alternative networks of recognition. In both cases, these dynamics are rooted in broader neoliberal transformations that have eroded welfare protections, heightened precarity, and left local actors and individuals to navigate integration in fragmented and unequal contexts. By analysing these responses, the chapter highlights how ultra-politics and sub-politics

interact in shaping radicalised pathways of belonging and contesting the dominant frameworks of integration.

5.1 Setting the Scene

Since the attacks of 11 September 2001, the belief that “there are too many Muslims” has become widespread across Europe, fueling the popularity of conspiracy theories such as “Eurabia” (Ye’or, 2005) and the *Great Replacement* (Camus, 2011, 2018). Politicians including Geert Wilders, Marine Le Pen, Thierry Baudet, Alexander Gauland, and Viktor Orbán have mobilised these narratives, portraying Muslim immigration as part of a deliberate strategy of “Islamification” supported by global elites. In doing so, they selectively draw on figures such as Bat Ye’or (2005), Bernard Lewis (2002), Oriana Fallaci (2002), and Ayaan Hirsi Ali (2008), while simultaneously invoking liberal values such as women’s emancipation and LGBT + rights—instrumentalised against Islam (Brubaker, 2017).

Although the Muslim population in Europe has grown in recent decades, it remains relatively modest. In 2016, Muslims in the EU, Norway, and Switzerland numbered around 25.8 million, representing only 4.9% of the total population (Pew Research Center, 2017). Their heightened visibility is less the product of demographic expansion than of younger generations entering public life with stronger linguistic, civic, and educational capital (Kaya, 2019). Right-wing populist movements nevertheless exaggerate demographic fears and strategically reframe migration as a security threat. What was once defined in geopolitical and military terms now extends to societal anxieties about identity, cultural revival, and supranational governance (Wæver et al., 1993; Buzan et al., 1998; Kaya, 2012).

This securitisation process has stigmatised migrants—particularly Muslims—as sources of crime, unemployment, and social instability (Faist, 2000; Huysmans, 2006, 2014; Kaya, 2012). Amplified by xenophobic and racist rhetoric, such discourses dehumanise migrants and cast them as existential dangers to the imagined national community. They also contribute to identity-based radicalisation on multiple fronts: among marginalised native Europeans, a sense of cultural siege reinforces support for populist movements; among migrant-origin youth, everyday stigmatisation and epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007) foster counter-radical responses in the form of religio-political solidarities and alternative networks of belonging (Kaya, 2021).

This dual dynamic can be understood through the lenses of ultra-politics and sub-politics. Ultra-politics is enacted through state policies and dominant narratives that frame diversity as a threat, sustaining surveillance and exclusionary governance (Mouffe, 2005). Sub-politics emerges in the responses of individuals and communities—whether through nativist mobilisation or through religious and cultural solidarities (Beck 1996). Together, these dynamics reshape social boundaries and generate divergent, sometimes radicalised, pathways of identity and belonging (Della Porta, 2018).

These locally situated responses have increasingly taken radicalised forms, shaped by the socio-economic and political conditions in which people live. Radicalisation—whether Islamist or nativist—can be understood as a political response to neoliberal governance, which weakens social bonds and shifts key state responsibilities, such as education, healthcare, security, and pensions, onto individuals and communities, while primarily serving the interests of global capitalism (Inda, 2006, p. 12; Brown, 2019). At the same time, global urban networks have contributed to the marginalisation of rural, deindustrialised, and peripheral regions, disproportionately affecting lower-educated and working-class populations who are excluded from the skills and credentials demanded by the global economy (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018).

5.2 In Search of Nativist or Faith Communities: Sub-Politics

Responses to the politics of integration, whether framed through multiculturalism, assimilation, or civic integration, do not unfold only at the level of policy. They are lived, contested, and reinterpreted in everyday contexts where individuals experience marginalisation, inequality, and epistemic injustice. These conditions often generate sub-political strategies (Beck, 1992), in which both migrant-origin and native populations seek recognition, solidarity, and protection against the destabilising effects of neoliberalism and securitisation.

For migrant-origin populations, sub-politics often takes the form of religio-political solidarities, ethnic networks, or traditional community structures. These structures provide migrant-origin individuals with protection against racism, surveillance, poverty, and exclusion, while also enabling individuals to engage in “life politics” (Giddens, 1994, pp. 14–15). Such networks create spaces of belonging where migrant-origin people can reinterpret practices of integration on their own terms, challenging assimilationist expectations or multicultural frameworks that treat their identities as fixed. Yet, as Zygmunt Bauman (2001) cautions, the autonomy generated within these communities is double-edged: it simultaneously fosters dependency and heteronomy, as safety is found within bounded solidarities.

For native populations, particularly in deindustrialised or economically marginalised regions, sub-politics often takes the form of a retreat into nativist and nationalist spaces. Confronted with economic insecurity, political disillusionment, and a sense of cultural displacement, many individuals build new forms of solidarity around ethno-national or civilisational identities. In this process, *ressentiment* plays a central role (Nietzsche, 1968/1901; Scheler, 1961/1915): members of majority populations who feel marginalised reframe their wounded status as moral virtue, portray integration as a threat, and mobilise around nostalgic ideals of national homogeneity (Kaya, 2019). While these practices resemble the protective community-building strategies of migrant-origin groups, they differ in that they channel belonging into exclusionary and boundary-drawing forms.

In both cases, sub-politics emerges less from essential cultural or religious differences than from lived experiences of deprivation, discrimination, and alienation in late modern societies (Lazëri, 2023). Individuals marginalised by the failed promises of liberal democracies—freedom, equality, justice—find themselves compelled to create new minorities vis-à-vis perceived dominant majorities. This process fosters *ressentiment* and deepens divisions, but also reflects the search for dignity in contexts where the politics of integration have failed to deliver inclusion.

Ultra-politics functions as the top-down reinforcement of these divisions. As Jacques Rancière (2001), Slavoj Žižek (1999), and William Walters (2010) note, *ultra-politics* frames migration and diversity in terms of existential antagonism between “us” and “them.” Since 9/11, securitisation practices such as border militarisation, surveillance technologies, detention, and deportation have expanded across Europe (Brown, 2010; Sassen, 2003). More recently, the populist era has intensified these dynamics: stigmatisation of migrants, especially Muslims, has legitimised the suspension of free movement within Europe in times of crisis (BBC News, 2016; The Guardian, 2024).

Thus, the politics of integration—whether in its multicultural, assimilationist, or civic forms—intersects with ultra-politics to produce new forms of polarisation. Sub-politics, meanwhile, represents the everyday, ground-level strategies of individuals and communities—both migrant and native—that seek to reclaim dignity and belonging. These competing logics of ultra- and sub-politics lie at the heart of contemporary struggles over integration, migration, and identity in Europe.

5.3 New Minorities at the Local Level: Natives and Migrants

As explained earlier in Chapter 2 with reference to the works of Will Kymlicka (1995), integration debates often focus on including indigenous peoples and national minorities into the greater social whole, on the grounds that they are “unfairly disadvantaged in the cultural marketplace” and therefore have a moral claim to group rights sustaining their cultural frameworks (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 109). Yet, as Marina Lazëri (2023) reminds us, the very notion of “minorities” needs to be reconsidered in the changing global and European context. Today, both natives drawn to nativist ideologies—often in response to socio-economic marginalisation, spatial deprivation, and *ressentiment*—and migrant-origin individuals who turn to religio-political solidarities when confronted with discrimination and epistemic injustice, actively construct new boundaries of belonging. In doing so, both groups increasingly position themselves as *new minorities* vis-à-vis the wider majority society.

Understanding these dynamics requires moving beyond narrow ethno-cultural or religious definitions of minorityhood. “Minorities” in contemporary Europe are also

constituted by shared socio-economic, political, spatial, and psychological conditions. A broader lens allows scholars to see parallels between, for example, deindustrialised working-class natives retreating into nativism and migrant-origin youth building religious or ethnic solidarity networks. While differences certainly matter, an exclusive focus on cultural or religious markers risks essentialising identities and obscuring the deeper structural inequalities that underpin these processes (Latour, 2005). As Emmanuel Levinas (1998) observed, each individual is irreducibly unique, yet it is precisely structural injustice and inequality that drive both nativist and migrant-origin groups into newly constituted minority positions.

These emergent minorities are not simply the outcome of identity politics from below; they are also a reaction to the current politics of integration across Europe. As Chapter 4 demonstrated, migration and integration policies increasingly restrict pathways to permanent residence and citizenship. While such restrictions are often justified in the name of cohesion, they also serve economic interests by supplying states with flexible, low-cost labour while limiting migrants' long-term rights (Baas & Glick Schiller, 2024). At the same time, national debates over multiculturalism, interculturalism, and assimilation have struggled to address diversity in ways that account for structural inequalities. This leaves both migrants and natives feeling unprotected: migrant-origin groups are pushed into precarious positions, while marginalised natives perceive themselves as losing ground in societies where diversity is officially celebrated but unevenly distributed.

This context is shaped by larger economic and political transformations. As Leila Hadj Abdou (2019), Steven Vertovec (2019), and Maurice Crul (2016) note, European policymakers and officials—especially in the post-Fordist era—have become more willing to endorse migration and diversity, particularly in knowledge economies where “diversity” is framed as an asset for urban growth (Kaltmeier, 2011). Cities, increasingly detached from nation-state logics (Barber, 2013; Sassen, 1990), often brand themselves as cosmopolitan and open to immigration. This has led to a well-documented “local turn” in migration and integration studies (Bendel et al., 2019; Caponio & Borkert, 2010; Caponio et al., 2019; Scholten & Penninx, 2016; Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017), highlighting how local authorities play a central role in managing housing, welfare, and education for diverse populations.

Yet, this discourse of diversity and openness often conceals deep contradictions. Drawing on Achille Mbembé's (2003) notion of necropolitics, it becomes clear that urban governance selectively allocates life chances: affluent, mobile, and highly skilled populations are privileged, while marginalised migrants and racialised groups are left with precarious housing, insecure jobs, and limited access to rights. Similarly, Giorgio Agamben's (1998) concept of the state of exception illuminates how even “open” cities can suspend rights, producing zones of exclusion where some residents are reduced to “bare life.” The result is a reproduction of inequalities within and between cities: racialised migrants and precarious natives in deindustrialised regions alike are left with fewer opportunities, feeding both migrant-origin solidarities and nativist resentments.

Thus, the emergence of new minorities at the local level—whether migrant-origin or native—is best understood as a response to the failures of integration politics.

National governments' restrictive policies, the symbolic yet superficial embrace of diversity in cities, and the persistent inequalities of global capitalism combine to create conditions where groups feel marginalised and compelled to reconstitute themselves as minorities. These new minorities, though different in content—religio-political solidarities among migrants, nativist enclaves among natives—share a common root in the contradictions of contemporary integration regimes.

5.4 The Limits of the Politics of Integration in Addressing Structural Inequalities

This section and the following sections benefit from two empirical studies conducted by Ayhan Kaya and his research teams. The first empirical study (henceforth the study on populism) that is occasionally addressed in the following pages was also conducted by Kaya and his research team in 2017 and 2018 within the framework of a Horizon 2020 research project about the critical heritages, focusing on the use of the past, nostalgia, and myths by right-wing populist parties and their supporters in France, Germany, Greece, Italy, The Netherlands, and Turkey. This research also included in-depth interviews with the supporters of FN, AfD, Golden Dawn, Five Star Movement, PVV and AKP ($N = 120$). The second study (henceforth the study on youth radicalism) was conducted between 2020 and 2022 within the framework of an European Research Council Advanced Grant research project that included in-depth interviews ($N = 307$) with self-identified Muslim youth with migration background residing in capital cities of Europe (aged 18–30; male and female; in Amsterdam, Berlin, Brussels, and Paris), and native youngsters labelled as far-right, living in politically and spatially remote places (aged 18–30; male and female; living in Aalst, Dresden, Lyon, and Rotterdam). It is this second study that is mostly addressed in this book.

A key finding is that both young European Muslims of migrant background and young native Europeans aligned with right-wing populist movements commonly choose to live in neighbourhoods that provide the familiarity and reassurance of ideologically or culturally like-minded communities. In doing so, members of these two different groups often create self-contained local enclaves, positioning themselves as distinct minorities within the broader urban fabric (Lazëri, 2023). Both groups tend to make similar residential choices, seeking proximity to others who share their lifestyle or values, allowing them to live in alignment with their communal identity.

Other similarities were also observed: whether native-born or of migrant origin, individuals face comparable challenges in their daily lives (De Certeau, 1984). Their aspirations often converge around common goals: leading a dignified life, working under equitable conditions, providing quality education for their children, accessing healthcare, and securing a stable pension. These are universal desires. Moreover, they

all contend with similar hardships, such as socio-economic deprivation, unemployment, poverty, exclusion, alienation, humiliation, perceived discrimination, and epistemic injustice. As mentioned before, inequalities that the members of these groups experience potentially result in them feeling like a minority, though this sense of minority status is not necessarily tied to ethno-cultural or religious identities (Lazëri, 2023).

The study on youth radicalism found that many native residents of remote, post-industrial towns experiencing economic decline—despite belonging to the national majority and benefiting from its broader social and political dominance—often perceive themselves as locally marginalised minorities (Lazëri, 2023). While these individuals are not subjected to structural discrimination comparable to that faced by migrant-origin minorities, empirical findings reveal that they nonetheless experience profound feelings of economic abandonment, cultural displacement, and political neglect. Many articulate a sense of being “strangers in their own country,” particularly as demographic shifts and economic transformations alter the character of their towns. This perceived marginalisation fuels support for right-wing populist movements, which offer narratives of protection and restoration. At the same time, migrant-origin communities—often concentrated in separate urban neighbourhoods—develop their own counter-narratives rooted in experiences of intersectional discrimination and socio-spatial exclusion. With limited interaction between these groups, their grievances increasingly take shape in parallel, isolated social and spatial arenas, deepening divisions and reinforcing localised forms of estrangement and boundary-making (Kaya et al., 2023).

Our research also finds that younger generations with migrant backgrounds, especially those of non-European descent, report heightened sensitivity to experiences of discrimination compared to their parents’ generation. Whereas older cohorts often interpret prejudice primarily through the lens of nationality or ethnic background, younger people more frequently identify religion—particularly Islam—as the salient marker of exclusion. This is partly because they have grown up in Europe and therefore measure their experiences against expectations of equal citizenship and recognition, rather than against the harsher conditions of migration and settlement encountered by their parents. In what follows, we turn to themes that concern both native and migrant-origin youth—such as epistemic injustice, life in remote or marginalised places, claims to spatial ownership, and intergenerational differences. These issues are often overlooked or downplayed in the prevailing politics of integration across European states. Modern states, governed increasingly through neoliberal rationalities, are ill-equipped to address the structural, spatial, psychological, and generational challenges facing disenfranchised young people. Instead of tackling the root causes of exclusion, inequality, and injustice, integration policies tend to reduce complex social realities to cultural or religious differences, thereby obscuring the deeper forces that shape youth experiences of marginalisation.

5.4.1 *Epistemic Injustice*

Epistemic justice, which pertains to an individual's political capabilities, encompasses the freedom to express political ideas, engage in politics, protest, and be free from state repression (Cin, 2017). Conversely, the concept of epistemic injustice, as defined by Miranda Fricker (2007), undermines these capabilities and is a key barrier to political participation. When individuals are denied the conditions necessary to exercise their political capabilities, the result is often described as "political poverty" or "political deprivation". Epistemic injustice, in the context of the studies discussed here, signifies the political poverty experienced by citizens who feel that they are denied to actively participate in social and political life through legitimate channels such as local, national, and European parliaments, political parties, labour unions, and mainstream media. Essentially, political poverty or deprivation entails an inability to engage in public deliberation, voice concerns, and receive recognition from others (Bohman, 1996). Politically alienated groups, such as self-identified Muslim youth and individuals labelled as far-right extremists, lack the necessary political and economic capabilities to fully participate in public life through conventional channels. The lack of inclusive public reasoning and spaces for deliberation can limit people's full participation in the public sphere and constrain their ability to realise their identities (Sen, 1999, 2009).

Ayhan Kaya and colleagues (2023) show how the concept of epistemic injustice applies to the experiences of both "young self-identified Muslims" and "youths labelled as far-right". Both categories have faced socio-economic, spatial, and political deprivation, and can therefore be understood as having been subjected to epistemic injustices in recent decades. A Turkish-origin female from Amsterdam underlined the essential meaning of being recognised in everyday life by the members of the majority society with the following words:

My high school consisted of two buildings, one of which was for the lower level and the other for the higher levels. In the higher levels, there were mainly white children, but because I had to change to a lower level, I was in the former building in my third and fourth years. In these last two years, I have felt much more at home at school. There were many more children like me, Muslim, with a migration background. I just felt a lot more understood. The white children were very nice, but they did not understand why I did not have a boyfriend, for example. You don't have boyfriends, but you just get married at some point. They didn't understand Ramadan either. It wasn't very annoying or anything, but it's just nice if you don't have to explain why you do certain things. Essentially, you are seeking acknowledgement and validation. (23-year-old Turkish-origin-female, Amsterdam, 11 March 2021)

The testimony illustrates how everyday experiences of belonging at school are shaped less by overt hostility and more by subtle dynamics of recognition and understanding. The interlocutor describes feeling more "at home" when surrounded by peers with similar religious and migration backgrounds, not because the white students were unkind, but because they could not fully relate to her practices and values, such as not having a boyfriend or observing Ramadan. While these kinds of differences "weren't very annoying," the constant need to explain herself may be taken to reflect a sense of lack of effortless recognition in majority-dominated settings. The recurrent

burden of having to explain oneself can be seen as a form of epistemic injustice, where minority perspectives are not immediately intelligible within dominant cultural frames, limiting the ease of participation and sense of belonging.

Native young Europeans with an appeal to right-wing populism are exposed to similar forms of epistemic injustice, stemming from their ideological and spatial stance. For example, a 28-year-old female native Dutch with an appeal to the right-wing populist movements, residing in Zwolle (in the Netherlands), voiced her dissatisfaction with the lack of acceptance for her viewpoints, both within her political party, FvD (Forum for Democracy) and in other communities:

The multicultural society has somewhat failed. When I think of a multicultural society, I think of people who live together. But we do not live together, we live separately. Everyone lives in their own groups. This is a parallel society. The Turks with the Turks and the Moroccans with the Moroccans. The disadvantage of this is that people create an enemy image of each other. Many people from the FvD say that migrants are stealing our homes and jobs, and on the other side, the white man is always to blame. But neither is of course entirely true. The white man doesn't always get it wrong. But they hardly ever listen to each other. In politics, mutual criticisms are also becoming increasingly extreme. It is very idealistic that people want to help refugees and migrants, but it is not realistic. I am more into small solutions myself. What can I do for the people around me? For example, I think it's important to keep the neighbourhood clean. That's a real problem in our neighbourhood, I think if people felt more connected to each other and with their neighbourhood, people would also leave less mess behind. (28-year-old native female, Zwolle, 21 June 2021)

This account illustrates a form of epistemic injustice she encounters in everyday life, originating both from members of the majority society and from within her own political party. Despite aligning herself with a right-wing populist movement (FvD), her more nuanced understanding of coexistence, local solidarity, and small-scale solutions is often dismissed or overshadowed by polarised political narratives. Within her party, dominant discourses frame migrants as threats to jobs and housing, leaving little room for her alternative, less antagonistic perspectives to be acknowledged or taken seriously. Simultaneously, from the viewpoint of pro-diversity or left-leaning actors, this interlocutor is often perceived simply as “nativist” or “anti-immigrant,” which undermines her credibility as a knower and silences her contributions to discussions on neighbourhood-level coexistence. This epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007) prevents her lived experiences and localised solutions—such as promoting shared responsibility for communal spaces—from being recognised as legitimate forms of social knowledge.

Beyond epistemic injustices, global events such as the economic crisis, the so-called “refugee crisis,” the COVID-19 pandemic, and the conflict in Ukraine have added further challenges to everyday life. These crises exacerbate existing difficulties, particularly for individuals in geographically and politically isolated areas, who face unfair treatment, a lack of understanding, and spatial or nostalgic deprivation. Such deprivation erodes social status and personal dignity for both middle- and working-class individuals, whose positions have been weakened by globalisation. These multiple forms of perceived injustice hinder not only migrant-origin individuals but also disenfranchised members of the majority society from fully integrating into the wider social fabric (Kaya & Benevento, 2021; Kaya et al., 2023).

5.4.2 Remote Places

One finding from the study on youth radicalism was that natives in remote areas, experiencing the destabilising effects of deindustrialisation, mobility, diversity, depopulation, and unemployment, are often nostalgic about “better times”—including greater job opportunities, cultural homogeneity, prosperity, and more attentive treatment from the political centre (Kaya, 2023; Kenny, 2017). The following narrative by a young right-wing native man conveys a nostalgic attachment to his hometown, rich with descriptive and interpretive details. The excerpt is also noteworthy as it describes the remoteness of the narrator’s place of residence both physically and mentally, and it addresses safety and serenity as pulling factors:

I like living in this village. I call it “this small holy collective”. You can compare it to the villages where I used to live. The villages of my youth. There are many single-family houses here. There are two new buildings. But it is an area with many fields. I like the remoteness, the recreation. The people are typical *Uckermärker* [people from the Uckermark region]. For an outsider, it takes 30 years to find a friend here. But that person will be a friend for the rest of your life. When you are a native, everyone helps you. What I like least is the seclusion of the people towards the new. On the other hand, that is also a thing I like because it’s conservative. People’s restraint and reticence towards new people. That could be something one could work on.

Researcher: What do you think is the reason for this?

Those are the fruits of the reunification [Wende] and of being left behind. But the regions here are simply left behind in fact. People were always busy with how to get by. Also, the organic structures here were consolidated because promises were not met. You had to rely on the neighbours. Then, after a couple of years, it became more difficult to join in as an outsider. Trust has to be built in the first place. It is a mutual interplay between unmet promises and the consolidation of communities. Sometimes, I also think it’s in people’s blood. This Prussian stubbornness, this thing of staying among one another and not letting anything in from the outside. This is also not always a bad thing. (29-year-old native male in a small town in Brandenburg, Germany)

Interestingly, for both subpopulations of youth—nativist youth and young Muslims of migrant background—the reification of community, culture, and religion seems to be a practical *tactic*, to use the words of Michel de Certeau (1984), which is utilised to create a safe haven for themselves against the destabilising effects of globalisation. As Zygmunt Bauman (2001) explained earlier, community structures provide their members with the necessary equipment to struggle against the detrimental effects of globalisation, such as insecurity, ambiguity, poverty, loneliness, and unemployment. In other words, the community serves as a platform for its members where they can perform a politics of identity in a way that corresponds to Ulrich Beck’s concept of sub-politics. In line with this understanding of how the community functions, migrant-origin Muslims also express a sense of comfort living around people of colour, primarily as they either had experienced or anticipate experiencing discrimination elsewhere:

Where I live, there are many high-rise buildings. People who live there and people who don’t live there call it a ghetto because it looks like that. Eighty per cent of the youngsters living there don’t have a degree. They hang out in the streets (using the Bavarian word) doing

illegal business [*krumme Dinger*]. Get into fights, drugs, criminal stuff in general... What do I like the most? I would say cohesion. In our neighbourhood, everyone knows everyone. We actually don't have that much racism. Since many people have a migration background, they know how we are, and we know how they are. That is why we can understand one another. When you show respect to people, they are so nice, and they also respect you. When you are cool to somebody, they are cool to you. (20-year-old Turkish-origin male in Ehrenfeld, Germany)

As the quotation illustrates, our interlocutor finds that segregated neighbourhoods often provide a more conducive environment for fostering community ties and engaging in friendly interactions with others who share similar backgrounds. Although he is aware of the comparative lack of safety in these neighbourhoods, he values the cohesion in their communities despite these conditions. Safety appears to be an important aspect of the neighbourhood, mostly emphasising the participants' persistence in living and belonging there. Members of both groups with native and migrant backgrounds often react to integration policies—whether assimilationist, multiculturalist, or transnationalist—that either promote or reject mobility and diversity. Over time, instead of embracing a shared civic identity, they may shift toward forming defensive and reactionary identity-based communities (Yuval-Davis, 2006, 2011). Nostalgia, ethnicity, culture, and religion become lighthouses, guiding individuals back to a sense of belonging and direction amid an era marked by prudence, the decline of the social state, insecurity, loneliness, distrust, aimlessness, and anomie (Brown, 2019; Stewart, 2000).

5.4.3 *The Intricacies of Claiming Spatial Ownership*

While the research participants of the two categories in the study on youth radicalism were similar in that they expressed that they appreciated living around like-minded individuals, there were also crucial differences between the groups in how they emphasised the significance of spatial ownership. Firstly, the analysis yields a set of statements indicating the importance of spatial ownership from the standpoint of the right-wing native youth who emphasised what may be labelled a “this place belongs to us” discourse. This discourse arguably represents the response of disenfranchised citizens living in remote areas to come to terms with their spatial, economic, political, societal and nostalgic forms of deprivation. Such ownership claims are closely related to the feelings of being trapped in the homeland (and an isolated part of it), which the interlocutors expressed. The destruction of the local economy by multinational companies plays a part in this. In relation to both migrants and foreign-run businesses, the interviewees draw on a nativist myth that positions them as the autochthonous population—those with a legitimate claim to authority over their hometowns and, by extension, the nation as a whole, which is perceived as rightfully “theirs”. Many of the right-wing nativists who participated in the study described themselves as “local” people in accordance with the first-arriver principle (Verkuyten et al., 2015), and that living in a small village was a way of “escaping from globalisation”, as expressed by

one native female interviewee in Leiden, the Netherlands. Further, this interviewee emphasised the importance of national language, which can be interpreted as an ongoing resistance against *one big global town*:

In large cities, you see strong globalisation, international retail chains, and in many cafes and restaurants, you can only order in English. Some time ago, I was in the bazaar in Beverwijk [a small town in the north of the Netherlands], I thought that it was a bizarre experience; nobody spoke Dutch. It really was a separate society. And that is not the Netherlands where I want to live. It feels like you are abroad. (26-year-old native female in Leiden, the Netherlands).

The feeling of isolation does not always stem solely from economic hardship, although this remains a significant factor. A profound sense of entrapment can also emerge when individuals from the national majority, especially native youth with right-wing populist inclinations from deindustrialised or rural regions, find themselves in the minority (Lazëri, 2023) within cosmopolitan urban centers like Amsterdam or Berlin. In such settings, the visible presence and perceived communitarianism of migrant-origin groups can amplify feelings of displacement. These young natives, aligned with right-wing populist movements, articulate their alienation through narratives that frame migrant communities as forming insular and “impenetrable” parallel societies in the very heart of the nation. This discourse reflects a deeper anxiety over lost cultural dominance and perceived erosion of traditional social norms in the urban landscape:

I have lived in Aalst for 10 years, and I have recently moved back to the village I grew up in, Denderhoutem (10 km from Aalst). We decided to move to Denderhoutem for different reasons. There were many problems in Aalst, plus the added fact that we now had a daughter. Aalst suffers from an increase in foreigners [using the Dutch word *vervreemding*]. It is very visible on the streets. There is a lot of noise in the evenings and nights, people throw garbage anywhere in the public areas, and people are getting into fights with each other. There are a lot of problems with evening life, and it becomes hard for young people to go out and have fun. The ways of going out these days are no longer what they used to be. (30-year-old native male living close to Aalst, Belgium)

The above statements about the neighbourhood merge with an all-encompassing argument over cultural incompatibilities. The conclusion that such incompatibilities exist is based on, not only the imagery and lived experiences of the participants but also on observations made of their interactions.

When it comes to the self-identified Muslim youth with Turkish and Moroccan origins, they emphasised several challenges and locations that confound our understanding of what roles they play and what are their obligations as residents of a neighbourhood. Although migrant-origin youth had limited mobility experiences, like their nativist counterparts, they also displayed a complex mix of values regarding where they belonged. Rather than asserting ownership of a single place, they emphasised a range of issues and locations that complicate their sense of belonging. Their families’ migration histories, periodic visits to ancestral homelands, and a persistent nostalgia for a lost past complicate fixed notions of where they “belong.” As a result, the meaning they attribute to place remains fluid, continuously renegotiated as they navigate an in-between positionality:

When you are a teenager, you can easily feel that you are being targeted and that you are not accepted. You easily feel this way. If I don't feel well here, and then I visit Turkey and notice that I don't seem to belong there either because they consider me to be a European, I can easily end up feeling bad about both places. (21-year-old Turkish origin female in Schaarbeek, Belgium)

For migrants and their descendants, the fear of the present may lead to mystification of the past, as John Berger (1972, p. 11) already pointed out in his pivotal work, *Ways of Seeing*. The reification of the past and tradition by migrant-origin individuals is also a prominent motif in the earlier works of Salman Rushdie. In his work *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie (1991, p. 9) effectively illustrates how migrant-origin individuals may construct imaginary homelands:

It is my present that is foreign, and... the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time... [Thus], we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands.

This is also an aspect found in the study on youth radicalism. Alongside their political grievances and experiences of discrimination, the migrant-origin youth constantly negotiate their position in-between, appropriating their roles and responsibilities as inhabitants of a cultural and geographic zone. The narrative below, along with countless others, portrays migrant-origin Muslims' negotiation of place, identities, and their efforts to find a foothold within the majority society:

Why is the Döner accepted, and I am not? I have been here for 30 years. My grandfather says, 'This country has given me a lot.' He loves the country more than any right-wing terrorist dude. I love my country as much as Merkel does. I am German with Turkish roots. I am proud of that... My father also grew up very German. When he was between 30 and 35 years old, he was pro-German, and when he got older, he became more pro-Turkish. This has to do with his age, his political environment, and the social circles around him. It really depends on the person and their environment. (29-year-old Turkish-origin male in Charlottenburg, Germany)

As James Clifford (1988, p. 5) rightly states, minority groups who are alienated by the system and swept up in a destiny dominated by global capitalism, remain tied to traditional pasts. Remaking the past, or recovering the past, serves at least a dual purpose for such communities. Firstly, it is a way of coming to terms with the present without being seen to criticize the existing status quo. The 'glorious' past is, here, handled by the disenfranchised subject as a strategic tool absorbing the destructiveness of the present, which is defined by exclusion, structural outsiderism, poverty, humiliation, and institutional discrimination. Secondly, it also helps them recuperate a sense of the self not dependent on criteria handed down by others—the past is what the disenfranchised subjects can claim as their own.

The study on youth radicalism revealed that members of both native and migrant-origin youths are grappling with social, economic, political, nostalgic, and psychological deprivation. Both groups accused the very democratic systems as responsible for their persistent feelings of fear, anger, bitterness, humiliation, anxiety, and frustration, and expressed a desire to democratize these systems. Under structural grievances, personal or social identities evolve from feelings of inferiority into ones

characterized by a sense of nobility and superiority, as seen on the one hand in white supremacist and, on the other, in Islamist essentialist ideologies. Experiencing neglect and exclusion from the majority society, members of both groups claim spatial ownership of their neighbourhoods, fostering communities of like-minded individuals. The interview data show that individuals, whether of native or immigrant backgrounds, initially wish to become part of the larger society; however, various factors—such as epistemic injustices, socio-economic deprivation, humiliation, and perceived discrimination in everyday life—prevent them from doing so. The research showed that these individuals develop a sense of *ressentiment*, manifested in a tendency to reinterpret and devalue the social collectivity to which they seek belonging. Aspirations that were previously imbued with positive value are subsequently reconfigured as undesirable or illegitimate, a dynamic aptly captured by Aesop's "sour grapes" allegory, in which the fox disparages what it cannot attain (Scheler, 1961/1915; Aeschbach, 2017; Demertzis, 2020; Salmela & Capelos, 2021; Capelos & Demertzis, 2022). The study further indicated that while these individuals may acknowledge the merits of integration into the greater society, embracing geographical mobility, diversity, globalisation, and multiculturalism, their daily behaviours and discourses often contradict these views, as they encounter barriers to accessing these opportunities due to socio-economic, political, and spatial limitations (Kaya et al., 2023).

Individuals experiencing *ressentiment* seek out like-minded communities that reinforce their altered perception of the world. However, this attachment remains fragile, lacking the deep empathy and solidarity that typically bind social groups (Salmela & Capelos, 2021). This distinction becomes particularly evident in the spatial dynamics of both native and migrant-origin groups who prefer to live among their peers in secluded spaces—whether in urban enclaves, isolated rural communities, or self-segregated neighbourhoods. These spaces offer a sense of security and shared identity but do not necessarily cultivate trust, civic engagement, or identification with broader, abstract collectives such as one's nation, city, or global citizenship (Huddy, 2013).

The research discussed above shows that young Europeans, whether of migrant or native origin, share many common experiences. These similarities are less the result of so-called "civilisational" differences than of shared conditions of socio-economic, political, emotional, nostalgic, and spatial deprivation. Such forms of deprivation often generate growing resentment among young people toward liberal and democratic systems, which they increasingly perceive as responsible for their difficulties. For many of the individuals interviewed, everyday life was experienced as a form of entrapment, leading them to seek allies in order to confront what they saw as persistent threats. This condition was described as both frustrating and demoralising, as it had to be endured continuously, with little expectation of meaningful long-term change. The findings suggest that repeated experiences of failure and diminished self-worth—expressed through emotions such as envy, shame, humiliation, and powerless anger—can harden into resentment, indignation, contempt, and even hatred. These emotions are frequently directed toward outgroups, as right-wing political actors use populist strategies to frame social conflict along identitarian, ethno-cultural, and religious lines.

In the last three decades, there has been a prevalence in the scholarship of civilisational approaches, implying that the debates on integration to ethno-cultural, lifestyle, and/or religious differences have partly been reduced. Some scholars have argued that the main reason for the failure of migrants and their descendants to integrate into the social, political and economic spheres of life of the receiving society is their ethno-cultural and religious distinctness from the majority society (Heitmeyer et al., 1997; Hughes, 1993; Sarrazin, 2010; Scheffer, 2000; Schlesinger, 1991). This ethno-culturalist and religious-based academic discourse conceals deep-rooted structural problems such as deindustrialisation, poverty, unemployment, exclusion, racism, heterophobia, and xenophobia. It is partly the prevalence of the Huntingtonian civilisational discourse (Huntington, 1996) that distances the members of migrant-origin communities from integrating because of its emphasis on cultural differences that shadow all the socio-economic, spatial, and political similarities the groups have. It should be noted that the processes of globalisation and deindustrialisation (or post-industrialisation) have created socio-economic and political pressures that, in turn, have driven uneducated, unqualified, property-less, and marginalised immigrant communities to develop ethno-cultural and religious identities as a form of response. The same explanation is however, also applicable to native communities who are exposed to similar material processes of alienation, perceived discrimination, and resentment (Kaya et al., 2023). In what follows, the impact of the civilisational turn on different generations will be delineated further.

5.4.4 *Generational Differences*

Research consistently shows that immigrants of non-European descent, particularly those identifying as Muslim, report experiencing the highest levels of discrimination, with perceived causes ranging from skin colour and nationality to ethnic background. Yet, these dynamics evolve significantly across generations. As Mirna Safi's large-scale survey in France (2019–2020, N: 27,000) demonstrates, first-generation Muslim immigrants attribute discrimination primarily to visible markers such as skin colour, nationality, and origin, whereas their children and grandchildren—born and raised in the host country and fluent in its language—identify religion as the principal source of exclusion (Safi, 2024). This pattern underscores a broader European trend indicating a generational shift: for younger cohorts, religious identity to a larger extent functions as a salient marker of difference and boundary-making (Kaya, 2012).

This shift is particularly relevant to understanding the formation of nativist and faith-based communities at the local level. Both native and migrant-origin youth, as they navigate experiences of exclusion and marginalisation, often resort to sub-political strategies to reclaim recognition and a sense of spatial belonging. Whether expressed through nativist movements or religio-political solidarities, these groups position themselves as “new minorities,” contesting dominant narratives of integration and negotiating spatial ownership within segregated neighbourhoods and

urban enclaves. Similar patterns have been documented across European contexts—regardless of whether integration policies have historically leaned toward multiculturalism, assimilation, or interculturalism (Giuliani et al., 2018 for Italy; Jacobsen & Bergmann, 2024 for Germany; FRA, 2024 for the EU).

In the study on youth radicalism, religious symbols such as the headscarf, the holy book, and a non-alcoholic lifestyle were often reiterated by the interlocutors, who also shared their stances on the politics of integration prevalent in their countries of settlement. A 29-year-old female with a Turkish background and German citizenship residing in Berlin said the following when asked about the political situation in Germany:

A few months ago, there was a debate about the neutrality law. The debates centered around whether Muslim women were being compelled to wear the headscarf. Well, there are maybe some people who are forced to wear a headscarf. This may be the case within a small minority among many, but nobody talks to the majority [of Muslims who wear the headscarf by their own choice]. It is never about what we want. It's only about presenting us as a target. If one doesn't talk to us, they can't know what we want. That leads to a lack of interest in politics among us. Then, they talked about integration. If you don't talk to people and pretend that they aren't there, you can't expect people to contribute to this country economically and socially or integrate themselves. It is not integration itself that is the problem, but how it is interpreted. (In-depth interview, Berlin, 21 July 2020)

This testimony shows that young Muslim individuals often experience integration policies as misdirected and alienating. The interlocutor emphasises that debates, such as those on the headscarf, focus on symbols rather than consulting communities, leading to political exclusion. It is not the politics of integration itself, but how it is interpreted, that undermines recognition, participation, and engagement.

The growing attachment to faith among young Muslims in Europe can be understood as a relational response to experiences of neglect, marginalisation, and misrecognition by state authorities and dominant institutions. The increased visibility of religious identifiers in their everyday lives appears less as a withdrawal from society than as a reaction to political and institutional attitudes that frame them as culturally or religiously inassimilable. Speaking from the margins through a religious idiom is thus perceived as a more effective way of making claims on the political centre, particularly in contexts where secular or civic forms of expression are experienced as ignored or delegitimised. In this sense, religious self-identification becomes a strategic and symbolic language of protest and recognition, rather than merely a matter of belief. This dynamic resonates with Robert Young's observation (2004, p. 5) that marginalised groups are not incapable of political speech, but that dominant actors often refuse to listen to voices articulated from the periphery.

The descendants of migrants who speak the host country's language since childhood and who have received part of their education there are often more attuned to experiences of discrimination. Early socialisation within the host country's educational system can raise expectations of social inclusion, which in turn may shape how immigrants perceive discrimination (Safi, 2024). Since the turn of the century, it has been increasingly common to see the descendants of non-European migrants in Europe and elsewhere raising their voices in the public space against all kinds of

epistemic, socio-economic, spatial, legal, political and cultural injustices that they experience in everyday life (Fricker, 2007; Cin, 2017; Kaya et al., 2023; Bell & Barbera, 2025). When young self-identified Muslims speak out, this provokes parts of the majority society to perceive them as a challenge to the general social, political, economic, demographic, and cultural security of society. Across Europe, right-wing populist parties have increasingly used the vocal presence of migrant-origin youth to fuel anti-immigrant rhetoric and advance their political agendas (Kaya, 2019).

The increased public visibility and assertiveness of migrant descendants is often perceived as a challenge, particularly by working-class, precarious, or unemployed members of the majority population, who had become accustomed to the relative silence and perceived gratitude of the first generation. In a study on populism (Kaya, 2019), a 56-year-old male worker in Rotterdam articulated this sense of unease when reflecting on Turkish-origin youth who were actively demonstrating in public spaces around issues of religion, nationality, and ethnicity. When asked about his views on migration, he stated:

The young Turks are even worse. While their parents or grandparents were grateful that they could come and live here in the Netherlands, they had some respect for us, but the young generation doesn't have this anymore; they don't integrate. It's not only failed, but migrants are even fighting against us. There is no assimilation, but segregation or polarisation. It's unbelievable. (PVV Supporter, Rotterdam, interview date 12.03.2017, italics ours)

Rather than seeing public outspokenness as a sign of successful integration, our interlocutor interprets it as evidence of integration failure in Dutch society. His remarks resonate strongly with the dynamics described by Sacha Hilhorst and Joke Hermes (2016) in their analysis of the Zwarte Piet debates in the Netherlands. Through an anthropological survey of Facebook discussions on Sinterklaas festivities, Sacha Hilhorst and Joke Hermes uncovered a dominant popular narrative portraying young people with immigrant backgrounds as “ungrateful”: “With open arms, we accept these people to give them a better future, and as a thank you, we get a slap in the face” (Hilhorst & Hermes, 2016, pp. 225–226). This trope, frequently echoed during the debates, frames participation in the public debate by minority voices as a betrayal of Dutch generosity rather than as a civic virtue of democratic engagement.

Findings from the two research projects (CoHERE, Agreement Number 693289, and Islam-phob-ism, Agreement Number 785934) reveal that most supporters of right-wing populist parties are not religious in their everyday practices—instead, many describe themselves as secular, agnostic, or even atheist. Yet, they increasingly invoke a culturally Christian Europe as a symbolic boundary marker to articulate their opposition to Islam and migration. A 67-year-old female pensioner from Dresden, for instance, explicitly distanced herself from religion while simultaneously appealing to Christian European heritage to legitimise her Islamophobic stance:

There is no European culture or heritage. Perhaps the high level of education in Europe is a heritage. The European level is higher compared to other countries. And faith, Europe is a Christian region. I cannot understand this. For me, all religious people are manipulated people. However, I still prefer manipulated Christians to murdering Islamists. (Dresden, interview date 15.04.2017, italics ours)

This interlocutor may be perceived as someone who, on the one hand, is socially, economically and politically deprived and, on the other hand, is in search of communities to defend herself against the destabilising effects of globalisation. Such individuals are more likely than other segments of majority societies to be drawn to right-wing populist discourses that simplify, binarize, culturalise, civilisationalise, and religionize what is social, economic and political in origin. The increasing civilisational focus on Islam within European populist movements has significantly altered the political language around identity. Instead of being confined to national boundaries, the collective identity is now framed in broader civilisational terms. This civilisational narrative incorporates liberal values such as secularism, philosemitism, gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, and free speech as defining features of the Christian West, positioning it in opposition to what is perceived as an inherently illiberal Islam (Brubaker, 2017, p. 1208).

These broader civilisational narratives and the rise of right-wing populism have also shaped public and political responses to refugees and migrants, contributing to resistance, exclusionary policies, and, in some cases, violence across Europe. In recent years, refugees and migrants have faced increasing nativism and right-wing populism across Europe (Kaya, 2019; Kešić & Duyvendak, 2019). The 2008 financial crisis amplified fears around Islam, Muslims, and migration, fueling cultural and religious reification and political radicalisation, particularly in remote regions (Brubaker, 2017; Rodrigues-Pose, 2018). While 2015 saw a temporary convergence of public support for refugees, this has largely eroded. Right-wing populist groups now resist refugee reception, sometimes violently, and have instrumentalised integration policies for xenophobic mobilisation, pressuring governments to restrict protection, limit integration, and implement punitive measures against asylum seekers (Kaya & Nagel, 2021; Oxfam, 2017; Schaub et al., 2021).

5.5 ‘Resilience’: Responsibilising Individuals and Local Actors

To understand the politics of integration in many European and non-European countries, it is important to consider the broader context of the neoliberal turn—a shift in which central states have increasingly delegated responsibilities to local actors, including residents, migrants, and refugees themselves. In times of crisis, such as war, epidemics, pandemics, or natural disasters, the weakened ‘centre’, such as a nation-state or the European Commission, is likely to ‘escape responsibility’ by delegating crucial tasks to local actors or individual members of civil society in the periphery (Panizzon & Riemsdijk, 2019: 1233). On a semantic level, these developments were closely associated with the increasing popularity of the term ‘resilience’ in everyday life as well as in the fields of migration and refugee studies (e.g., Bourbeau, 2015; Kaya & Nagel, 2021; Lester & Nguyen, 2016; Mythen, 2012).

One of the most widely cited definitions of 'resilience' was offered by W.N. Adger (2000), who describes it as the ability to persist—absorbing shocks and stresses while maintaining societal functioning and the integrity of ecological systems—as well as the capacity to adapt to change, unforeseen circumstances, and risks. Various disciplines, for instance psychology and public health, embrace 'resilience' as a valuable analytical concept, and in the field of public health, the concept is used to explain the coping mechanisms of individuals and collectives (*inter alia* see Simich & Andermann, 2014). From a critical perspective, one may also address the interplay between the prevalent forms of neoliberal governance in everyday life and the growing popularity of the term 'resilience'.

The term 'resilience' has also met a lot of criticism for its relevance to a late-modern form of governance. For instance, David Chandler (2014) has criticized the promotion of the term in contemporary scholarship from a Foucauldian perspective, arguing that current forms of neoliberal governance aim to manage the complexities of everyday life 'from below' while shifting responsibility for structural problems onto individuals and institutions, particularly the most vulnerable. Other scholars have also explored how resilience has become a defining feature of a neoliberal governmental regime that is progressively shifting from equilibrium to adaptation. Mitchell Dean (2007, 2014) argues that this shift is a product of a qualitative transformation of neoliberalism. Based on a constant pattern of crises (e.g., financial crisis, refugee crisis, pandemic, war, etc.), poor economic growth and growing injustice and inequality, neoliberalism seeks to fashion ways to make individuals, communities, migrants, refugees, systems and institutions fit for the rigidities of 'the catastrophe yet to come' (Dean, 2014: 161). The COVID-19 pandemic has legitimised the claim for individual and institutional resilience in everyday life. The notion of resilience thus entails an ultimate acceptance of the view that the world can neither be changed nor mastered; hence, the only rational strategy for survival is to adapt to externally imposed changes (Joseph, 2013; Mavelli, 2017; Walker & Cooper, 2011).

The notion of *resilience* cannot be regarded as entirely dysfunctional or purely ideological. As said earlier, certain disciplines, such as psychology and public health, continue to employ *resilience* as a valuable analytical concept. From a social scientific perspective, however, it is essential to critically examine the relationship between the widespread adoption of the term *resilience* and prevailing forms of neoliberal governance in everyday life. In this regard, greater analytical emphasis may be placed on Ulrich Beck's (1992, 1999) notion of *subpolitics*, or Michel de Certeau's (1984) sociological notion of *tactics*. As De Certeau (1984, p. 37) highlights, a tactic represents "an art of the weak," employed to navigate and resist the destabilising effects of institutional strategies and ideologies—whether enacted by the state, traditions, or customs—as well as the challenges inherent in daily life.

Both empirical studies cited in this chapter found that for self-identified Muslim youth in Europe, as well as native European youth drawn to right-wing populist movements, resilience in times of crisis and social disruption often relies on different but functionally similar adaptational systems. For many Muslim youth, religion, spiritual practices, and communal bonds within families and diasporic networks serve as crucial buffers against experiences of discrimination, marginalisation, and identity

conflict. Emotional and social support rooted in shared faith, open dialogue within the community, and participation in religious rituals provide stability and meaning amid uncertainty. Similarly, right-wing populist appeals among native youth frequently draw on ethnic heritage, imagined homogeneity, and nostalgic narratives of a cohesive national past. These elements function as protective resources that reinforce a sense of belonging, purpose, and strength during periods of rapid societal change and perceived cultural threat (Kaya, 2021; Pickren, 2014; Simich & Andermann, 2014).

Both groups rely on value systems and collective memory to navigate challenges to their identities. Migrant families, particularly Muslim households, often face tensions between inherited forms of socialisation and the dominant cultural expectations of European societies. Yet, rather than representing mere obstacles, these cultural differences can serve as sources of resilience. The studies found that religious beliefs, family cohesion, and cultural continuity, understood as dynamic, adaptive practices rather than fixed traditions, enable young Muslims to preserve self-definition while engaging with pluralistic societies (Kaya & Benevento, 2022; Kaya et al., 2023). Similarly, native youth attracted to populist movements invoke cultural homogeneity and ethnic rootedness as strategies for coping with feelings of displacement and social fragmentation. Nostalgic imaginaries of national unity and shared ancestry act as a counterweight to the perceived erosion of stable social norms. In both cases, the negotiation of identity is complex, resisting simplistic models of assimilation or acculturation (Kaya, 2023). Hence, maintaining a strong, albeit fluid, cultural or religious identity can bolster resilience by providing coherent narratives of selfhood, fostering solidarity networks, and offering symbolic resources for confronting structural and existential challenges that appear in everyday life.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored how contemporary Europe—marked by intersecting crises of migration governance, economic precarity, political polarisation, and cultural anxiety—shapes the lived experiences of young people positioned at the contested politics of integration. The analysis of the empirical research conducted in the two empirical research projects cited earlier has shown that individual responses are far from uniform. Muslim youth frequently articulate belonging through faith-based networks that provide emotional support, moral guidance, and pathways to civic participation, while simultaneously negotiating external pressures of suspicion, discrimination, racism and exclusion. Native youth attracted to populist narratives, on the other hand, mobilize ethnicity, territorial rootedness, and nostalgic imaginaries of a culturally homogenous past to reclaim a sense of security and recognition in times of socio-economic and cultural uncertainty.

Across both groups, sub-political forms of community-building emerge as coping mechanisms in environments where institutional avenues for inclusion appear fragmented or inadequate. These networks—whether grounded in religious solidarity or nativist sentiment—constitute attempts to re-establish collective meaning in settings

where established social fabrics have frayed. At the local level, these dynamics create “new minorities”: Muslim youth who stand out in demographically homogeneous communities, and native youth who perceive themselves as minorities within a Europe imagined to be drifting toward multiculturalism.

The claims to spatial ownership we observed are thus deeply relational and contested. Everyday negotiations over public space, neighbourhood boundaries, and symbolic markers of belonging illustrate how both Muslim and native youth enact strategies of inclusion and exclusion. These claims are further complicated by generational differences: while older generations often maintain the tropes of skin colour, nationality, and origin, younger cohorts display a more civilisational rhetoric, underscoring religious and cultural differences.

Finally, the chapter highlighted how resilience—often celebrated in policy discourse as an individual or community asset—can also function as a form of responsabilisation. By placing the burden of adaptation on individuals and local actors, structural drivers of inequality and exclusion remain insufficiently addressed. Yet, resilience also manifests as agency: Muslim youth draw on faith, transnational networks, and flexible cultural repertoires to endure marginalisation, while native youth engage collective memory, nostalgia, and local solidarities to counter feelings of displacement and disempowerment.

These findings challenge simplistic binaries of integration versus exclusion, migrant versus native, and vulnerability versus resilience. Instead, they point to a more nuanced understanding of how young people in Europe—whether Muslim minorities or native majorities—actively forge meanings of belonging, community, and future horizons amidst poly-crises. Their strategies are simultaneously adaptive and resistant, grounded in both continuity and change. Recognising these complex, localised forms of negotiation is essential for rethinking politics of integration and social cohesion in ways that move beyond responsabilising individuals toward addressing the deeper structural fractures shaping contemporary European societies.

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Chapter 6

Conclusion



This chapter brings together the central insights of the book, reflecting on migration and integration as multifaceted, relational processes shaped through the interactions of migrants, native populations, states, and institutions. This book has used the concept of the politics of integration as an analytical lens to capture integration not as a technical policy domain, but as a deeply political and contested field in which belonging, membership, and social cohesion are continuously produced and disputed. Drawing on the notions of state, nation, nationalism, transnationalism, neoliberalism, belonging, and citizenship, we have shown that integration constitutes a key battleground where national identities are reaffirmed, reworked, or challenged, and where borders are symbolically and institutionally drawn through citizenship regimes, nationalist imaginaries, and approaches to ethnocultural diversity. Crucially, integration emerges in this perspective as a relational process that reconfigures power relations between social groups, pitting different categories of residents against one another, while simultaneously reshaping the lives, expectations, and self-understandings of both newcomers and established members of society. Rather than being about the incorporation of migrants alone, the politics of integration reveals how political communities in Europe and elsewhere renegotiate the boundaries of the *demos* in times of intensified mobility, socio-economic transformation, and political polarisation.

Throughout the chapters, this book has revisited core political concepts—such as the state, nation, citizenship, governance, and belonging—to demonstrate how they operate across macro-, meso-, and micro-political levels, shaping both institutional frameworks and lived experiences of inclusion and exclusion. By engaging with European-level policy debates, national integration regimes, and local governance practices, the chapters collectively show how broader political-economic transformations, including neoliberal restructuring and the rise of populism, reconfigure power

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relations and intensify social insecurities and inequalities. These dynamics generate, on the one hand, exclusionary and securitised forms of ultra-politics, and on the other, meso-level and everyday sub-political practices of contestation, adaptation, and solidarity among both migrant-origin populations and established residents. Conceived as a critical reader, the book brings together and critically discusses key debates from both academic scholarship and political discourse, treating integration not as a fixed or purely cultural problem but as an ongoing, context-dependent negotiation of boundaries and memberships. While critical perspectives have rightly called for “writing against integration,” our analysis highlights the continued political relevance of integration as a contested field of struggle within specific institutional and societal settings, and points toward future trajectories in which global transformations are likely to further reshape the politics of belonging.

6.1 Rethinking Integration

One of the key insights that has emerged across this volume is that debates about integration are not, and never were, only about migrants. They reflect deeper societal conflicts and anxieties about social change, identity, and power. The fault lines that structure these debates are less about cultural background or legal status and more about uneven access to resources, rights, representation, and justice. From this perspective, the question of integration cannot be reduced to a binary between hosts and guests, or citizens and foreigners. Instead, it must be understood as a broader negotiation between socially, economically, politically, and spatially differentiated groups, between majorities and minorities, however these are defined or constructed.

While public discourse demonstrates an enduring preoccupation with framing integration as the successful inclusion of migrants into host societies, a key conclusion of this volume is that such a framing is both overly narrow and simplistic. What is at stake is not only the adjustment of newcomers but the broader renegotiation of how modern societies define belonging, citizenship, and justice in the face of increasing diversity, inequality, injustice, and political uncertainty.

Integration, then, is not only a question of whether newcomers adapt, but whether societies are capable of accommodating difference, whether they can make space for those who do not conform to dominant norms, whether for reasons of ethnicity, religion, class, or geography. The real test of integration lies in how societies treat those who fall outside their imagined centre: those living on the economic margins, those without political voice, those pushed to the physical peripheries of urban and national space, those who reside in remote places that no longer mean anything to the ones in the political centre. As such, the challenge is not cultural but structural.

Based on the findings presented in this volume, one core conclusion is that it is essential to move beyond the notion that successful integration depends solely on individual effort or willingness to assimilate. Integration should instead be understood as shaped by institutional structures, public narratives, and historically entrenched power relations. What is often perceived as a lack of integration may, in fact, reflect

active exclusion, discrimination, or limited structural opportunities. This perspective suggests that apparent failures of integration may be less a result of the actions of migrants—or other marginalised groups—and more a consequence of narrowly defined criteria for belonging and unevenly distributed basic resources. In making that argument, it is further crucial not to idealise integration as a naturally inclusive or progressive concept. Indeed, the idea of integration has often served as a form of governmentality to discipline difference, to demand conformity, and to legitimise the exclusion of those who are deemed unfit or unwilling to adapt. This is why some critical scholars have called for abandoning the concept altogether. And while we take these critiques seriously, we have argued that integration, rethought in relational and political terms, can still serve as a valuable framework for analysing how societies manage diversity, negotiate boundaries, and imagine community.

Rather than discarding the concept of integration, we advocate for its critical reappropriation. Integration should not be understood as a process confined to migrants alone, but as a societal condition that involves all members, regardless of origin. It is not merely a technocratic policy objective, but a contested arena in which questions of value, recognition, and power are continuously negotiated. Integration, in this light, is not the attainment of a fixed endpoint of inclusion, but an ongoing, reflexive process of negotiation, adaptation, and mutual transformation within plural and internally fragmented societies. It is better conceived as a dynamic reconstitution of the social—a process of reassembling the social, fractured solidarities and reimagining coexistence across lines of difference, whether those differences are based on ethnicity, class, religion, or citizenship status.

This rethinking also requires us to shift our focus. To that effect, this book calls for attending not just to national integration policies but to everyday encounters in neighbourhoods, workplaces, schools, and civic spaces where people live and negotiate their differences. It demands greater sensitivity to the role of cities, local institutions, and grassroots movements in shaping more inclusive forms of belonging. And it invites us to ask not only how migrants integrate, but how societies themselves change, and must continue to change, in response to the realities of mobility, diversity, injustices, and inequality.

The debates around integration open up broader questions about what kind of societies we want to build: who belongs, who decides, and on what grounds. If integration is to mean anything meaningful, it must be about expanding the boundaries of belonging, not reinforcing the hierarchies that divide us. It must be about making room for multiple ways of being, living, and contributing, without demanding erasure or conformity. The conclusions of this book should therefore be understood as an invitation to ongoing reflection rather than definitive statements. We propose that integration should be approached not as a definitive solution, but as a persistent and evolving question, one that each society must grapple with afresh, shaped by its historical trajectories, internal tensions, and visions for the future.

6.2 Integration as Relational Approaches and Boundary Constructions

Drawing on Fredrik Barth's (1969) work on ethnic boundaries, one core conclusion is that integration should be approached as an ongoing process of social boundary negotiation, rather than as the assimilation of fixed cultural differences. Barth's insight that group membership is not determined by inherent or objective cultural traits, but by the maintenance of symbolic boundaries through everyday social interactions, offers a valuable framework for analysing migrant integration processes. According to this perspective, the content of culture itself is not what matters, but rather the processes through which lines are drawn to distinguish 'us' from 'them'. This understanding enables us to move away from the idea that cultural difference is the root of exclusion and to focus instead on how power-laden social mechanisms construct and reinforce the divide between insiders and outsiders.

This perspective shifts the analytical focus from the presumed deficiencies of migrants to the dynamic and often contested processes through which membership is regulated, negotiated, and resisted. As Henri Tajfel and his colleagues' minimal group experiments and subsequent social psychological research have shown, even arbitrary group distinctions are sufficient to produce in-group favouritism and out-group bias (Tajfel et al., 1971). When these symbolic boundaries, be they based on language, race, religion, or citizenship, are embedded within institutional hierarchies, they acquire material consequences, shaping access to rights, resources, and recognition. Integration, from this angle, involves more than individual adaptation; it is fundamentally about the renegotiation of group boundaries and the restructuring of power relations that determine who belongs.

This boundary-oriented approach reveals how integration policies and discourses often function not as neutral frameworks of inclusion but as instruments that reaffirm social hierarchies under the guise of cohesion. The acquisition of language, formal citizenship, or employment is frequently framed as a route into the national in-group. Yet, as numerous studies have shown, crossing one boundary does not guarantee equal standing within the social body. Legal inclusion may coexist with racialised exclusion, and cultural proximity may still be insufficient to overcome political marginalisation, especially when strategic political actors selectively emphasise new lines of difference (Scuzzarello & Moroşanu, 2023). In this way, boundary-shifting does not necessarily equate to boundary-erasure; rather, it often leads to the re-inscription of new forms of inequality within the in-group.

This perspective also opens space for revisiting contemporary critiques that urge scholars to "write against integration" by exposing its normative underpinnings and exclusionary effects. While these critiques remain vital, there is a need for more nuanced, context-sensitive analyses that recognise the enduring salience of integration debates in specific socio-political settings. Integration, even when problematically framed, remains a key site where questions of national identity, social justice,

and political community are contested. Writing integration off entirely risks abandoning the terrain on which the very struggles for inclusion, recognition, and equality are being fought.

At the same time, a boundary-focused framework encourages scholars and policymakers to move beyond binary notions of “in” and “out” that obscure the complexities of social membership. Integration is not a singular threshold to be crossed, but a layered and ongoing negotiation that may yield uneven, partial, or conditional forms of belonging. One area for future research is therefore to examine how the permeability and meaning of social boundaries are being redefined in an era marked by heightened mobility, digital connectivity, and resurgent ethno-nationalism. As global dynamics continue to unsettle traditional notions of citizenship, identity, and territoriality, the politics of integration—understood as ongoing boundary-making—remains a crucial lens through which to understand the evolving landscapes of belonging and exclusion.

6.3 Changing Political Economy of Integration

Building on the expanded understanding of integration, discussed above, which is a relational and structural process between majorities and minorities, it is also imperative to consider how the global political economy intersects with integration regimes to produce and sustain migrant precarity. Michiel Baas and Nina Glick Schiller (2024) argue that migration today is being fundamentally reshaped by shifting historical conditions and the recalibration of state priorities. The centrality of the nation-state, they contend, has been reinforced not in the service of protecting vulnerable populations but to fortify political and economic interests, often at the expense of human rights and lives. This reassertion of national sovereignty, frequently expressed through restrictive asylum and integration policies, has enabled states to control mobility more aggressively while deflecting accountability for the long-term structural marginalisation of migrants.

Integration policies, under such a framework, are not neutral or technocratic instruments for fostering social cohesion. Instead, they are often deeply embedded in systems of governance that prioritise the interests of powerful actors, including political elites, corporate employers, and transnational institutions, over the well-being of migrant populations as well as those who feel “left behind”. Michiel Baas and Nina Glick Schiller (2024) also remind us that the production of migrant “inclusion” is frequently tied to conditions of economic exploitation and legal precarity. Migrants may be selectively integrated into labour markets while being denied full social and political rights, producing what some have called “differentiated inclusion.” The formal language of integration, emphasising participation, adaptation, and responsibility, thus obscures the underlying political economy of exclusion that enables capital to benefit from flexible, disposable, and often undocumented labour.

This reality further reinforces the need to move beyond a narrow focus on cultural difference or symbolic belonging in integration debates. Instead, it calls for a

grounded analysis of how integration regimes are structurally implicated in systems of inequality that affect not only migrants but broader segments of society defined as “minorities” through spatial, economic, or racialised lenses. The political deployment of integration discourse often masks the uneven distribution of rights, protections, and opportunities, even among those who are formally considered members of the polity. By focusing on the conditions under which people are differentially included or persistently excluded, we can better grasp how integration intersects with broader logics of governance, capitalism, and nationalism.

One core insight from this book is that the future of integration research lies in reframing the concept as a site of political struggle—one that reveals rather than conceals the operations of power in contemporary societies. Whether framed in terms of ethnic boundaries, relational negotiations, or structural marginalisation, the question of integration ultimately raises normative concerns about who belongs, on what terms, and under whose authority. It challenges us to ask not only how societies can accommodate diversity, but how they can transform themselves to address the systemic inequalities that condition the lived experiences of both migrants and minorities alike.

6.4 Everyday Life and Integration: Ultra-Politics vs Sub-Politics

By revisiting the conceptual tools of *ultra-politics* and *sub-politics*, this book has underscored how the challenges of integration today unfold within a deeply polarised and unequal global context. Drawing on Carl Schmitt’s notion of *ultra-politics*, we have observed how political actors, particularly within populist and nationalist movements, deploy existential narratives of cultural threat to suppress democratic contestation and justify exclusionary policies. Migrants, refugees, and racialised minorities are framed as antagonistic outsiders, whose mere presence is treated as an existential crisis for the imagined national community. This mode of politics thrives on simplification, manufacturing a binary between “us” and “them” that forecloses the space for negotiation and mutual recognition.

Yet, against the totalising logic of *ultra-politics*, everyday life continues to generate what Ulrich Beck called *sub-political* responses. These are the informal, often uncoordinated practices through which individuals, both migrants and native-born, navigate the fragmented realities of life under global capitalism. In cities marked by austerity, housing crises, labour precarity, and affective polarisation, people engage in forms of solidarity, improvisation, and everyday negotiation that rarely fit the dominant narratives of integration. Migrant-origin individuals and groups form cultural networks, online platforms, and grassroots initiatives to claim visibility and belonging. Native-born individuals, especially in marginalised regions, also turn to alternative modes of meaning-making in the face of economic dislocation and political disillusionment. Sometimes these responses lean toward nativism

and nostalgia; at other times, they give rise to new forms of collective agency and intergroup cooperation.

This duality reflects the contradictory pressures of our time. While *ultra-politics* seeks to impose rigid boundaries of identity and belonging from above, *sub-politics* reveals how those boundaries are constantly reworked from below, often in surprising and creative ways. Integration, seen through this lens, is not a matter of conformity to pre-given norms, but a field of interaction shaped by asymmetries of power and opportunities for transformation. Both migrants and non-migrants find themselves navigating an increasingly uncertain world where state support is eroding, economic mobility is narrowing, and cultural certainties are being unsettled.

Understanding integration in this context requires more than a focus on policy instruments or institutional frameworks. It demands attention to how people, regardless of origin, respond to shared vulnerabilities, forge solidarities, or retreat into hardened identities. It invites us to consider how belonging is practised, contested, and sometimes resisted in daily life, beyond the formal scripts of citizenship and nationhood. By pairing the macro-logics of exclusion with the micro-practices of adaptation and agency, the conceptual pairing of *ultra-politics* and *sub-politics* helps us see integration not as a linear process, but as a deeply political terrain, shaped by both domination and possibility.

6.5 Underscoring Similarities: Against Integration?

Summarising the core lessons of this book, we argue that reframing our understanding of integration also requires a deliberate move away from approaches that essentialize ethno-cultural and religious differences between social groups. Research and debate need to be foregrounded by the socio-economic, political, spatial, and psychological commonalities influencing the experiences of both native and migrant-origin populations. As Marina Lazëri (2023) insightfully argues, what often drives the construction of “minorities” is not inherent cultural otherness but shared conditions of vulnerability, dispossession, and systemic neglect. These conditions, such as precarity of labour, spatial marginalisation in neglected neighbourhoods, political disenfranchisement, and experiences of social stigmatisation, cut across ethno-national lines and connect individuals through their exposure to structurally produced forms of inequality.

This perspective invites us to reconsider integration not as a challenge of managing “difference,” but as an opportunity to recognise convergences in the lived experiences of diverse groups. Migrants, racialised citizens, and economically marginalised natives may all find themselves situated in precarious housing markets, subjected to bureaucratic indifference, or targeted by securitised state practices. Marina Lazëri’s (2023) insight compels us to move beyond a binary logic that pits “native” against “migrant,” and instead to foreground the structural conditions that render entire segments of society invisible, undervalued, or politically dispensable. In this light,

one important task would be to rethink and reframe the politics of integration—perhaps more as a politics of redistribution—both when it comes to recognition and structural resources. It is not enough to ask how migrants adapt or how host societies can become more inclusive. Rather, one must ask how societies can dismantle the systems that generate social vulnerability and hierarchical belonging in the first place. This entails confronting the economic logics that produce precarious labour markets, the urban planning practices that segregate populations spatially, the political structures that limit participatory citizenship, and the cultural narratives that pathologise poverty and marginality.

In recent years, a growing body of scholarship has promoted a policy field called *against integration*. Integration, it is claimed, is inherently entangled with state-led efforts to classify, discipline, and subordinate migrant-origin populations, and integration discourses therefore reproduce a logic of ethno-national hegemony by framing the migrant or racialised “Other” as a problem to be managed and normalised (Rytter, 2019; Schinkel, 2018). This critique draws attention to the epistemic violence embedded in integration regimes, where inclusion is conditional upon conformity to dominant norms, and where the very category of “migrant” is produced and stabilised through bureaucratic and political interventions.

We maintain, however, that rather than rejecting integration wholesale, it is more productive to approach it as a *contested field*, a site of struggle where meanings, practices, and expectations are constantly negotiated and redefined. This means critically engaging with how integration is deployed by state actors and institutions, while also remaining attentive to the ways in which migrants and minority communities appropriate, resist, or reframe the language and goals of integration to suit their own interests and aspirations.

Such a nuanced stance requires that social scientists move beyond abstract denunciations of integration as a concept, and instead conduct grounded, context-sensitive analyses that account for local histories, political economies, and social dynamics. It also entails recognising that the politics of integration are not only about how societies treat migrants, but about how societies manage differences in general, how they distribute rights and resources, how they define belonging, and how they construct hierarchies of human worth. In this broader sense, integration debates open up questions that remain profoundly relevant in diverse democratic societies: Who gets to belong? Who defines the terms of belonging? And how can shared social life be organised in a way that respects plurality without imposing conformity? To write *critically* about integration, rather than simply *against* it, is to confront these questions head-on, while refusing both the technocratic narrowness of policy models and the rhetorical absolutism of rejecting integration altogether. A critical approach to the politics of integration, then, is ultimately about keeping the space open for transformation.

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Correction to: Conclusion



Correction to:

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In Chapter 6 ‘Conclusion’ the section heading 6.4 term “Supra-Politics” was printed incorrectly.

The correct heading should read: 6.4. Everyday Life and Integration: Ultra-Politics vs Sub-Politics.

The updated version of this chapter can be found at
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