



Rethinking Integration

Challenging Oppressive Practices
and Pointing to Ways Forward

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6. Categorization and Racialization in Integration Discourses: Who is Framed as “Needing” Integration in Regional and Local Newspaper Articles

Abstract

Nordic countries often present themselves in terms of racial exceptionalism; however, studies are increasingly considering racialization in Nordic contexts. This chapter questions how integration discourses relate to the categorization and racialization of migrants by examining regional and local newspaper articles in the north of Norway. I argue that integration discourses produce categorizations by drawing on migratory pathway, nationality, and racialization in describing who “needs” or “lacks” integration, making a dispensation of integration apparent (Schinkel 2017; Schinkel 2018). These discourses tend to focus on “visible” migrants, involving a process of “doing race” and reinforcing whiteness as a symbol of Nordicness. It is important to investigate the categories produced by

integration discourses in order to make explicit power relations and potential consequences.

KEYWORDS: integration, migration, racialization, categorization, Nordic

6.1. Introduction

Researchers have argued that the concept of integration produces racialized and gendered non-belonging (Korteweg 2017), involving power relations whereby it is always members of the majority who decide when someone is “integrated enough” (Gullestad 2002). Furthermore, integration has been seen as a marker in discourses, drawing boundaries between who and what is seen as “inside” and “outside” of society (Schinkel 2017; Schinkel 2018; see also Andreasen 2019). Although several authors have examined the relationship between migration and racialization in the Nordic countries (e.g., Keskinen & Andreassen 2017; Hervik 2019; Führer 2021), less attention has been paid to the particular forms of categorization – involving implicit or explicit forms of racialization – that pervade integration discourses (exceptions include Andreasen 2019; Kurki 2019; Masoud et al. 2023). This chapter is based on the understanding that categories are produced by different actors in everyday life and investigates which categories are employed in integration discourses in regional and local newspapers. It is interesting to study categorizations in order “to understand what they do” (Evertsen 2022, 40). I investigated which types of categories are used to identify the subject(s) of public integration discourses and found that migratory pathway and nationality are the primary categories evident in the sampled newspaper articles. I argue that these categories involve underlying, often covert, forms of racialization that should be made explicit in order to identify underlying power relations. Discourse and power are intertwined in that they produce “social realities by generating criteria for inclusion and exclusion, rights, and expectations for particular categories of people” (Andreasen 2019, 331).

The focus of my research was not on a specific group of migrants but rather on who integration discourses target and what categories are used to mark “boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Dahinden 2016, 2216). “Migrant” may be a problematic category in itself due to, among other reasons, the fact that many people who move are not labeled as migrants; the conflation of immigration status, race, and ethnicity; the production

of hierarchies; and embeddedness in the national order of things (e.g., Anderson & Blinder 2015; Tudor 2017; Dahinden, Fischer & Menet 2021; Schinkel 2022). However, I use the term migrant in an inclusive way (Carling 2017) to refer to individuals who have changed their places of residence by crossing international borders. This approach is useful because migrants who become the subject of integration discourses have usually crossed international borders – rather than migrating within nation-states – but it still leaves room to acknowledge that not all individuals who cross borders become subjects of integration discourses (Favell 2022) and that integration discourses may also target individuals who are ascribed as migrants but who have not crossed international borders (Tudor 2017; Tudor 2018). An inclusive understanding of “migrants” allows for a broad examination of the types of categories produced by public integration discourses.

For the purposes of this chapter, integration is not used as an analytical concept or as a practice or process. Instead, I use integration as an emic concept that is employed in popular discourses – in this case, by regional and local newspapers – to critically investigate who the concept is directed toward and to make power relations visible (Rytter 2019) based on the understanding that subject(s) are constituted through discursive practices. Responding to calls to make integration discourses the object of research (Wieviorka 2014; Schinkel 2018; Rytter 2019), this chapter draws on an analysis of 1,056 local newspaper articles to question how integration discourses rely on the categorization of migrants and implicit and explicit forms of racialization. In line with Kurki (2019, 38), I argue that it is important “to trouble discourses of integration in order to find new spaces in which to think about immigration and integration differently.”

I argue that there is value in bringing my findings in dialogue with the results of other studies in Nordic countries, despite important intra-Nordic power relations and racial hierarchies within the Nordic region (e.g., Keskinen 2019). Although many unique aspects relating to the national context impact integration discourses, there are many parallels between my findings in Norway and the findings of previous research in Finland (e.g., Kurki 2019; Masoud, Holm & Brunila 2021; Masoud et al. 2023). By bringing the findings from these two Nordic contexts into dialogue, I aim to challenge some of the nationalist thinking around integration discourses and demonstrate that the instrumentalization of categorization

and racialization is not only a Norwegian phenomenon. Thus, I aim to avoid reducing the findings to a mere outcome of national specificities (Hervik 2019) by including a regional perspective that assumes an entanglement of local and regional factors.

The chapter begins by detailing the conceptual framework underpinning the article regarding categorization and racialization and then presents an overview of relevant literature in the Norwegian and Finnish contexts. Next, I explain my materials, methods, and positionality, followed by a presentation of my findings on the categories that are produced and thus made relevant by integration discourses. I then discuss how my findings relate to other literature on the categorization and racialization of migrants in Nordic contexts. In conclusion, I argue that because integration discourses and the forms of categorization they rely on are not neutral it is important to make inherent power relations explicit (Schinkel 2017; Rytter 2019) as the categorization of populations “has wide-ranging consequences for the ways ‘immigrants’ are portrayed and problematized” (Schinkel 2017, 164).

6.2. Conceptual Framework: On Categorization and Racialization

Categories – for example, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, race, migratory pathway, and nationality – are produced by actors in everyday life; certain categories risk normalizing a “discourse of migration-related differences,” whereby migration-related differences are viewed as “naturally given” (Dahinden 2016, 2208–2210). The categories “migratory pathway” and “nationality” may initially appear descriptive and rather uncontested. However, categorizations based on the migratory pathway – for example, “refugee” and “labor migrant” – often stem from legal categorical distinctions (Amelina 2022), and the terms may also have colloquial and social meanings that differ from or contradict their official legal definitions (Hamlin 2021; Abdelaaty & Hamlin 2022). Categorization is inevitably political, involving geopolitical power relations (Chimni 1998; Crawley & Skleparis 2018; Kurki 2019; Abdelaaty & Hamlin 2022), and categories are highly contested.

Regarding the category of nationality, there seems to be an underlying assumption that nationality is the same as what might be considered

one's "country of origin" or "homeland," but this is an oversimplification of identities that becomes strikingly clear in cases where, for example, individuals are returned to countries in which they are nationals but where they have never lived (Majidi 2017, 2). Thus, categorizations based on migratory pathway and nationality are inadequate for capturing lived experiences and the dynamic realities of migration (Collyer & de Haas 2012; Crawley & Skleparis 2018; Dahinden, Fischer & Menet 2021). Categories are inevitably embedded in historical and political contexts and thus are never neutral (Dahinden, Fischer & Menet 2021) but are produced and renewed via discourses. I argue that the categorization of individuals based on migratory pathway and nationality in public integration discourses often relies on underlying assumptions involving processes of racialization that operate implicitly and explicitly and shape who is portrayed as being "in need" of integration.

Fanon (1963) coined the term racialization to refer to a relational process that may occur on the basis of alleged phenotypic and cultural differences (Keskinen & Andreassen 2017). Racialization is intertwined with coloniality, geopolitics, power relations, and migration (Tudor 2017). Importantly, racialization is not only about minority positions; whiteness must also be understood as a form of racialization and a "constant process of 'doing race'" (Frankenberg 1993; Berg 2008, 214; Keskinen & Andreassen 2017). Whiteness is a geographically contextual phenomenon – historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced (Frankenberg 1993; Berg 2008) – that intersects with other categories such as gender, class, and religion (Garner 2012). Racialization and whiteness are complexly intertwined in Nordic contexts, made evident by, for example, ambiguity regarding racialization and whiteness of the Indigenous Sámi (Keskinen 2019; Siivikko 2019; Dankertsen & Kristiansen 2021), transnational adoptees (Rastas 2005; Zhao 2019), and Eastern Europeans and Russian-speakers (Loftsdóttir 2017; Krivonos 2019).

6.3. Migration, Racialization, and Integration in Norwegian and Finnish Research

The Nordic countries – including Norway and Finland – are often historically framed as homogenous, with whiteness seen as indicative of national belonging (Prieur 2010; McIntosh 2015). However, this framing

silences two important perspectives. First, ideas of homogeneity in the Nordic countries ignore the presence of the Indigenous Sámi, recognized national minorities, and the long histories of migration in the region (Gullestad 2002; Keskinen, Skaptadóttir & Toivanen 2019; Ånensen 2021). Second, equating whiteness with national belonging in Nordic countries excludes Nordic citizens of color and may ascribe an “*extra*-European migration” to individuals who are not racialized as white (Tudor 2017; Tudor 2018). Thus, it involves an “ascription of distance” or “sending elsewhere” within a racist logic that defines Europeaness – or, in this case, Nordicness – as whiteness (Tudor 2017; Tudor 2018, 1064). These ambivalences are crucial for highlighting that racialization and racism cannot be conceptualized solely in terms of migration (Tudor 2017, 24). Moreover, the term “immigrant” is a racialized category in Norway and Finland, often associated with visible differences (Berg 2008; Berg & Kristiansen 2010; Leinonen 2012; Krivonos 2019; Kurki 2019; Masoud et al. 2023). The idea of “visible migrants” reinforces a link between Nordicness and whiteness (Irni 2009), where “whiteness often acts as the unspoken norm against which ‘others’ are measured and defined” (Keskinen & Andreassen 2017, 66; see also Gullestad 2002).

The Nordic countries often present themselves through a lens of “racial exceptionalism” that posits racism as something “far away” or “in the past” (Hevik 2019, 18). Research in both Norway and Finland has shown that integration as a mechanism of racialization is not easily acknowledged in these countries due to notions of Nordic exceptionalism concerning racism and colonial histories (e.g., Gullestad 2002; Masoud et al. 2023). In the Finnish context, Masoud, Holm, and Brunila (2021) show how integration policies and training contribute to binary constructions that produce differences, necessitating integration measures. By elucidating the categories produced by integration discourses, this chapter aims to make transparent implicit forms of racialization that result in certain migrants being framed as “in need” of integration.

6.4. Materials, Methods, and Positionality

The starting point for this study was to make integration discourses the object of research; thus, I collected regional and local newspapers to question what types of categories are produced by and deployed in in-

tegration discourses. I used *Retriever*, a Norwegian archive of media texts, to find and access newspaper articles. The selection of newspapers was based on geographic coverage – regional and local coverage in the County of Nordland in northern Norway – and the number of readers, which led to the ultimate inclusion of nine newspapers: *Avisa Nordland*, *Rana Blad*, *Helgelendingen*, *Fremover*, *Lofotposten*, *Helgelands Blad*, *Saltenposten*, *Brønnøysunds Avis*, and *Vesteraalens Avis*. The search included newspaper publications from January 2013 to December 2020, using only the search term “integration” (*integreering*) to determine newspaper coverage (see also Kvalvaag 2023).¹

The search resulted in 1,596 articles that I read and categorized, paying particular attention to the relevance of the articles and the subjects of integration discourses. Articles that used the term in other contexts, such as the integration of drones into airspace, were not included. A total of 1,056 articles were determined to be relevant to the research, covering three main categories: news articles (49%), letters from readers (24.8%), and editorials (6.9%). I consulted the Norwegian Centre for Research Data and the guidelines produced by the Norwegian National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and Humanities regarding the publication of newspaper excerpts. Since all the selected publications were edited forms of media, it was determined that there was a reasonable expectation of publicity and that they could be used for research purposes.

In order to analyze the newspaper articles I employed content analysis, driven by a theoretical and analytical interest. This involved a two-step approach to analysis in order to answer my research question on the categorization and racialization of migrants in integration discourses. In the first step, I read all 1,056 articles and coded them for the categories used in integration discourses. This involved using descriptive statistics to consider the frequencies of use of different categories (i.e., references to migratory pathway, nationality, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, phenotype). These categories were not predetermined but were derived from the data. The results of this first step showed that migratory pathway and nationality were the most frequently used types of categories in

¹ This date range was selected due to political projects aiming to attract and retain international migrants in Nordland County, Norway, during the same time frame, including a Resident Recruitment Project (2013–2017) and a Pilot Municipality Project (2016–2019).

the dataset. The second step involved an in-depth reading of the chosen examples, going beyond the manifest content based on a dialogue between my empirical material and earlier literature on integration, categorization, and racialization. The presentation of these readings is inspired by Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) "thinking with theory," where my findings are organized in terms of three analytical readings of common material to engage with multiple layers and different aspects of the data. While categorization in terms of migratory pathway and nationality was clearly evident in the data, racialization was more latent and required more interpretative work, informed by literature on racialization processes in the Nordic context.

The discourses in newspaper articles use a particular journalistic language, are produced for and consumed by an intended audience, and have specific relationships with agencies that have symbolic and material power (Richardson 2007). As suggested by Richardson (2007, 1), "the sourcing and construct of the news is intimately linked with the actions and opinions of (usually powerful) social groups". At the same time, migrants are underrepresented in the Norwegian media (Retriever 2021). Thus, the discourses used in newspaper articles may be understood as dominant in two senses: 1) the discourses are distributed via a large number of people, and 2) those with epistemic authority dominate the discourse. It is crucial to keep these elements in mind when considering "who has the power and legitimacy to demand *integration* of others" (Rytter 2019). As 24.8% of the material was letters from readers, newspapers may also be understood as places where the voices of different actors converge. The excerpts included in the analysis are not approached as personal opinions, but rather as general discourses situated and embedded in structural conditions. All data excerpts were translated by the author.

My research question was influenced by my positionality in Norway: as a migrant from a so-called "third country" outside Europe, whose migratory pathways in Norway have changed over time and could have been different. In addition, being a national of the United States and being racialized as white has led to conversations with people who have suggested that I am not a migrant and who have told me that integration was not relevant for me, despite being a formal target of Norwegian integration policy. Furthermore, the geopolitical power relations between

Norway and the United States have inevitably affected my mobility, legal and social categorization in Norway, and ability to be classified within certain migratory pathways rather than others. These experiences have resulted in many reflections on categorization and racialization, which sparked my interest in investigating these topics within a research context. In addition, this positionality informed my analysis due to my understanding of categories as dynamic, racialized, and mobilized by integration discourses to target specific groups.

6.5. Who “Needs” Integration? Categorization, Racialization, and Potential Consequences

First Reading: Naturalization of Categories and Migration-Related Differences

Migratory pathway and nationality were the primary categories used to describe the subjects of integration discourses across all 1,056 newspaper articles. Regarding migratory pathway, the categories “refugee” or “refugee background” were used in 29.9% of the articles, while the more general “immigrants” was used in 18.9% of the articles. Ultimately, 51.6% of the articles explicitly addressed varying categories of forced migrants. Other terminology included, for example, “new countrymen” (2.4%), “ethnic and religious minorities” (1.0%), “labor migrants” (0.8%), and “family reunification” (0.1%). For example:

In the report [focusing on refugees], we can read that the Norwegian welfare model is vulnerable due to the high rates of immigration of adult individuals with low qualifications. On the other hand, the relatively small economic inequalities in Norway and the good educational system contribute to high mobility among the children of immigrants. In short, there needs to be even more investment in measures that result in good integration. (*Rana Blad*, 3 February 2017)

Here, as in other articles, although the primary focus is stated to be refugees, the authors alternate between “immigrant” and “refugee” rather freely. On the one hand, this can be interpreted quite positively since

contrasting “refugee” with “migrant” may undermine access to protection (Carling 2017). On the other hand, it may also be interpreted as a subtle equating of “immigrant” with “refugee” (Penner 2021, 149), which overlooks other types of migratory pathways in integration discourses.

The subjects of integration discourses were also frequently categorized by nationality, with the countries most commonly referred to being Syria (11.2%), Eritrea (4.8%), Afghanistan (4.6%), Somalia (4.5%), and Iraq (1.7%). However, these do not reflect the largest groups of migrants in the area – Poland, Syria, Lithuania, Thailand, and Sweden (The Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi) 2022) – indicating what Schinkel (2017, 2018) terms a “dispensation of integration”: the distinction in integration discourses is “between those for whom integration is not an issue at all, and those for whom it is” (Schinkel 2018, 5).

At the same time that the white paper on integration (*integre-ringsmeldingen*) was sent to the Norwegian parliament, Statistics Norway published a report about immigrants and employment rates. [Researcher’s name] meant that it was difficult to understand the numbers as anything other than integration in Norway being “rather successful.” Who are these immigrants that are a part of the statistics? Well, Swedes top the list. 81.5% of Swedish immigrants are in work. We have, in other words, been successful in “integrating” Swedes! Integration has been almost equally successful when it comes to Poles; they are well-employed as well. However, at the other end of the statistics are Somalis. According to these numbers, 20% of Somali women are working, and the situation is not much better when it comes to women from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Eritrea, and Iraq. When we know that every non-Western immigrant costs the state 4.2 million Norwegian kroner, it becomes questionable whether we should call integration policy successful. (Fremover, 14 May 2016)

Reflecting the concerns of other newspaper articles, this excerpt problematizes Statistics Norway’s understanding of both 1) who constitutes an “immigrant” and 2) whom to include when discussing integration, or framed differently, who is “in need” of integration. This definition of mi-

grants is criticized specifically in relation to the concept of integration and the interpretation that migrants are rather well integrated in Norway when the nationalities of migrants employed at the highest rates are Swedes and Poles. Here, nationality plays a key role where it is presented as a problem that Swedes and Poles are included in Statistics Norway's definition of migrants in their report on migration and employment rates. I interpret the quotes around "integrating" as reflecting an understanding that Swedes do not actually "need" to be integrated in Norway despite being one of the largest groups of migrants in the country. Rather, there is a gendered appeal to nationality – utilizing statistics in a different way than the Statistics Norway report – to argue that those who really "need" integration are women from "non-Western" countries, particularly Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Eritrea, and Iraq.² Categorization based on nationality in these types of arguments is an indicator of who is described as "needing" integration; it is almost absurd to consider Swedes or Poles "in need" of integration. Rather, only certain migrants are portrayed as "needing" integration, and this may often intersect with other categories such as gender (Korteweg 2017; Kvalvaag 2023).

Dahinden (2016) argues that migration-related differences have been normalized, with certain categories of differences being (re)produced through migration research vis-à-vis a nation-state logic. My findings suggest that migration-related differences are also normalized in public integration discourses, where migratory pathway and nationality are naturalized. Thus, "migrants are, always in contrast to non-migrants and the 'ethnic, cultural self,' considered to be fundamentally (culturally) different" (Dahinden 2016, 2210).

Second Reading: Racialization and a White National Imaginary

The dominant integration discourses focusing on the refugee, asylum seeker, or unaccompanied minor risk reinforcing a dispensation of integration: Some migrants are perceived as "in need" of integration, whereas integration is not perceived as an issue at all for others (Schinkel 2017; Schinkel 2018). This was reflected in the extremely small percentage of articles using integration discourses that focused on "labor migrants" (0.8%)

² For a deeper discussion on integration discourses in Norway and gender, see Kvalvaag (2023).

or “family reunification” (0.1%). The predominant focus on refugees, asylum seekers, and unaccompanied minors in integration discourses – despite 73.6% of migrants coming to Norway via labor migration or family reunification in 2021 (Statistics Norway 2022) – may highlight an unspoken racialized aspect of integration discourses, with the media contributing to racialized thinking by framing integration as primarily an issue for forced migrants.

Statistics Norway has defined an immigrant as a foreign-born person with two foreign-born parents, and thus has grouped immigrants from all countries of the world into the same category. Statistics Norway has found matters related to culture, language, and values to be irrelevant, and whether the immigrant is self-reliant and a financial contributor to society also has no significance to Statistics Norway [...] A labor migrant from Sweden is assessed the same way as an illiterate mother of five from Somalia on welfare. (Avisa Nordland, 30 July 2013)

As mentioned earlier, previous studies have shown that “immigrant” is a racialized category in Norway and Finland (e.g., Berg 2008; Berg & Kristiansen 2010; Masoud et al. 2023). The empirical material suggests that it is migrants who are perceived as “visible” that are positioned as the subjects of integration discourses in the media. This supports the assertions of previous literature that integration discourses often target individuals who are perceived as “ethnically” or “culturally” marked (Schinkel 2017; Favell 2022). When “visible” migrants are the subjects of discourse, the national “society” they are expected to integrate into is simultaneously and implicitly racialized as white; this reinforces an image of Norwegianity as whiteness, where whiteness can be left unspoken, claiming “neutrality” and “non-racial universality” (Schinkel 2018, 5). Whiteness thus becomes indicative of national belonging (e.g., Irni 2009; Guðjónsdóttir 2014). Here, whiteness is a “system of *domination*” that may be reproduced by denying its existence (Schinkel 2018, 12), with integration becoming a “vocabulary of power” (Rytter 2019, 692) and whiteness a norm and measuring stick (Keskinen & Adreassen 2017).

Furthermore, when considering the subjects of integration discourses by nationality and continent, 52.2% of the references were to Asian na-

nationalities, 29.2% were to African nationalities, and 16.6% were to European nationalities, the majority of which were Eastern European. As argued by Schinkel (2017, 102), nationality is often equated with ethnicity, and, in turn, ethnicity is often framed in light of migratory roots; however, important distinctions are likely to be ignored when national origin is treated “as a proxy for ethnicity or race” (Favell 2022, 109). Equating nationality with ethnicity transforms non-migrants “into ‘nonethnic’ persons” so that “ethnicity becomes a marker of the ‘other’” (Schinkel 2017, 102; Schinkel 2018, 6). This is inherently linked to an ideology of whiteness by which the subjects of integration discourses “are racialized in particular ways” (Schinkel 2018, 3; see also Korteweg 2017; Favell 2022). This categorization of the subjects of integration discourses by reference to nationality, I argue, involves implicit references to visibility and racialization, through which the media amplifies racialization by framing integration discourses as relevant only to particular nationalities.

Third Reading: Economic Considerations and Calculating the “Cost” of Migrants

Rather than taking a holistic perspective, there is an economic appeal to how much each “non-Western” migrant financially costs the Norwegian state, ignoring other forms of contribution and value-making. This implies an understanding of migrants as individuals “who might not have been here”: “to imagine, and make a record of, what the nation would be if the people marked as migrants ... did not exist” and to “record *what it costs* the nation now that these migrants *are* here” (Schinkel 2022). It becomes intelligible to talk about these costs because certain individuals are categorized as migrants in these discourses, and migration-related differences are assumed to be naturally given. Recording these costs subsequently results in “degrees of indebtedness” that relate to racialized hierarchies (Andreasen 2019; Schinkel 2022; see also Kurki 2019). In this case, racialized hierarchies are implicitly embedded in the category of nationality, made visible by arguments about who is a relevant subject of integration discourses. At the same time, “non-Western” migrants are homogenized in a dichotomy of “Western”/“non-Western” in the argument regarding who is “in need” of integration – a divide that may highlight the neocolonial nature of integration discourses.

In the report [focusing on refugees], we can read that the Norwegian welfare model is vulnerable due to the high rates of immigration of adult individuals with low qualifications [...] The big problem is that many refugees have a lower connection to working life than the population at large. Getting these individuals to work is a big challenge. (Rana Blad, 3 February 2017)

This appeal to “refugee” is not only used in its strict legal sense, but it also reflects social assumptions of low qualifications for entering working life that, although unspoken, are often associated with racialization. Furthermore, the “lower connection” to working life seems to be attributed to individuals with low qualifications; hence, their “need” for integration. Although acknowledging that there is a need for better pathways for migrants to complete or build on their existing education later in the newspaper article, it pays little attention to other systemic issues that have been documented by research in both Norway and Finland, such as racism and discrimination (Midtbøen 2015; Midtbøen 2016; Kurki 2019; Ahmad 2020b; Masoud et al. 2023), employers’ stereotypes (Friberg & Midtbøen 2018; Ahmad 2020a), and the lack of recognition of relevant education and experience or migrant educational mismatch (Larsen, Rogne & Birkelund 2018; Heikkilä & Yeasmin 2021) that may present difficulties for newcomers entering the labor market. In addition, the “big challenge” for integration referred to in the excerpt is to get migrants into work: there is no acknowledgment that migrants may be integrating into a stratified workforce (Favell 2022).

6.6. Concluding Remarks: On the Categorization and Racialization of Migrants in Integration Discourses

A main empirical contribution of this chapter is to make explicit the categories that are produced by and underlying assumptions present in public discourses on integration. The findings make explicit the “covert racialization” that is “smuggled into conceptions of integration” (Favell 2022, 6) and suggest that there is no Nordic racial exceptionalism when it comes to integration discourses: racism is neither far away nor in the past. These empirical findings have implications for at least four issues:

the naturalization of migration-related differences, racialization, the production of a white national imaginary, and economic calculations of the “cost” of migrants.

First, these findings illustrate the naturalization of migration-related differences in integration discourses that make such discourses intelligible in the first place. Critically questioning who the subjects of integration discourses are allows us to gain insights into what types of categories are produced by and made relevant in public discourses on integration. My findings indicate that migratory pathways and nationalities are naturalized and produced as important forms of migration-related differences in integration discourses, where they “become essentialized and come to appear natural” (Dahinden 2016, 2210). Take, for instance, the earlier argument where it is presented as almost absurd to include Swedes or Poles in reports on migrant employment and integration. The media contributes to the naturalization of these categories and of migration-related differences by amplifying the racialization implicit in integration discourses by framing integration as something that is relevant for certain groups in particular and, in doing so, “becomes a performative agent of racialization” (Hervik 2019, 6).

Second, the perceived need to manage differences of migrants vis-à-vis integration is not equal in these discourses but differentially applies to different categories – a dispensation of integration – with humanitarian migrants and migrants from “non-Western” countries being portrayed as most “in need” of integration. By highlighting certain migratory pathways and nationalities, and implicitly and explicitly racializing integration discourses, certain individuals are framed as “in need” of or “lacking” integration. This supports earlier research arguing that the subjects of integration discourses are often perceived as “ethnically” or “culturally” marked and “racialized in particular ways” (Schinkel 2017; Schinkel 2018, 3; see also Korteweg 2017; Favell 2022). This makes apparent the relevance of colonial legacies and racial hierarchies in current integration thinking, which ultimately positions certain migrants as a problem (Mayblin & Turner 2021).

Third, these findings corroborate whiteness as indicative of national belonging. Public integration discourses appear to target “visible migrants,” corroborating earlier findings on racialization and whiteness in the Nordic countries (e.g., Irni 2009; Guðjónsdóttir 2014). I argue that

this reifies the idea of whiteness as indicative of national belonging and Nordicness: a white Nordic imaginary. This involves an equating of nationalizing and racializing categories that reproduce Europeanness/Nordicness as whiteness (Tudor 2017; Tudor 2018) and equate the civic category of citizenship “with a racialized ethnic distinction” (Favell 2022, 109). Through a dispensation of integration, the “society” that migrants “need” to be integrated into is coded as white (Schinkel 2018, 5; see also Favell 2022). Simultaneously, individuals racialized as non-white, the Indigenous Sámi, national minorities, and transnational adoptees, disturb the “white hegemony” produced in the “connection between whiteness and national identity,” and this instability may create an opportunity for social change (Keskinen 2022, 349).

Finally, the findings suggest an understanding of migrants as individuals “who might not have been here,” making it conceivable to “re-record *what it costs* the nation now that these migrants *are here*” (Schinkel 2022). The categorization and racialization of migrants in these integration discourses are linked to calculated costs regarding the presence of migrants and “degrees of indebtedness” that result in racialized hierarchization (Andreasen 2019; Schinkel 2022), whereby migrants who are categorized as “needing” integration are also the ones who are argued to create the highest costs for the state. Thus, integration discourses position migrants as “in the debt of gratitude” where they “have a duty” to be worth the money spent on them (Kurki 2019, 58). This is an example of how the categorization and racialization of migrants has wide-ranging consequences for how migrants are portrayed and problematized. Ultimately, a focus on the categorization and racialization of migrants shows that public integration discourses are not neutral, also in the case of the Nordic region (e.g., Gullestad 2002; Kurki 2019; Rytter 2019; Masoud, Holm & Brunila 2021; Masoud et al. 2023). The processes of categorization and racialization that ascribe some migrants as “in need” of integration, and the surrounding power relations that allow some to have “the power and legitimacy to demand *integration* of others,” should continue to be investigated and made explicit by researchers (Schinkel 2017; Rytter 2019, 690) in order to refuse them and imagine how they may be thought about differently.

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