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— SPECIAL SECTION ONE —

Beyond Integration: A Re-Evaluation of Migrant and Host Society Relations

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This CEEMR special section examines encounters and interactions between migrants as newcomers and their hosts. Our exploration derives from harnessing, first, a sense of belonging and, second, social interactions as two interrelated processes of encounter. To the extent that the host develops a sense of belonging with the newcomers and cultivates social interaction with them as the others, the newcomers would become visible and encounters followed by meaningful interactions with them would be possible. To look at this from another perspective, the newcomers develop a sense of belonging with their hosts as they encounter them and engage in social interactions with them in their everyday. We note that there is ample research that takes a critical stance on integration and inclusion already but there is still space to explore encounters and interactions in greater detail and why they matter for newcomers and host societies to establish intimacies with each other.

Keywords: migration, integration, narratives, nationalism, social inclusion

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Introduction

This CEEMR special section examines encounters and interactions between migrants as newcomers and their hosts. Our exploration derives from harnessing, first, a sense of belonging and, second, social interactions as two interrelated processes of encounter. To the extent that the host develops a sense of belonging with the newcomers and cultivates social interaction with them as the others, the newcomers would become visible and encounters followed by meaningful interactions with them would be possible. To look at this from another perspective, the newcomers develop a sense of belonging with their hosts as they encounter them and engage in social interactions with them in their everyday. We note that there is ample research that takes a critical stance on integration and inclusion already but there is still space to explore encounters and interactions in greater detail and why they matter for newcomers and host societies to establish intimacies with each other.

Within our criticism of existing integration research, we harness the contribution that encounter-and-interaction-focused research could make to enable a deeper understanding of the sense of belonging and social intimacies that it can involve. Therefore, we foreground the everyday experiences of migrants and the significance of the narratives that these experiences produce when migrants and their hosts encounter and interact with each other. We first focus on the interaction between macro narratives of nationalism and integration and, second, micro and lived experiences of migrants' lives to illustrate migration stories. In the end, we look beyond the existing discussion around indicator-induced integration research and practice. We contend that social inclusion processes can become a lot more complex when we propose a deeper elaboration on micro processes while keeping an eye on the importance of macro politics, narratives and specific discourses. We also note that the existing research underlines the importance of interactions between migrants and the host society. Yet, it does not reflect on, first, the essence and forms of such interactions and, second, on how people interact.

In a nutshell, therefore, our special section proposes the following. The primary encounter between migrants as newcomers and wider society as their host takes place through their expressing their self-narratives to each other in everyday situations. Along with their verbal component, self-narratives can also relate to how we carry and present ourselves to wider society.

We have selected five papers as well as an introduction and a conclusion. The discussion paper is a creative effort to involve a live discussion and reflection on the theme and studies of integration in this special section. It brings together Adrian Favell, Kesi Mahendran, Jenny Phillimore, and Jon Fox as established scholars and critiques of policy and research in the integration field in discussion with each other while queried by Peter Scholten.

Special section overview

This special section examines the concept of integration for migrant groups across Europe and beyond. Our exploration derives from our critical stance on (1) sense of belonging and spaces of encounter, (2) place-making and inclusion initiatives, (3) negotiated identities and informal migration processes and, finally, (4) integration policy, practice and critiques. We develop this discussion over five articles, including a discussion with Adrian Favell, Jon Fox, Jenny Phillimore and Kesi Mahendran on their reflections of migration and integration studies. The special section brings together a fascinating array of studies covering the UK, Germany, Cyprus, Croatia, Italy, Austria, Malta, Slovenia, the Netherlands and the US. Our research covers both urban, rural and peri-urban spaces. We achieve this by bringing together a strong body of authorship comprising both junior and senior academics.

Moving on from such empirical breadth and conceptual richness, we are critical of existing integration research and, instead, adopt multiple new perspectives to investigate the value that everyday narratives possess.

While we are criticising the theory of integration, therefore, we are supporting our approach through foregrounding the everyday experiences of migrants and the significance of narratives in social inclusion processes. We also focus on micro-level social interactions and the discourse and policies that influence them. In this manner, we seek to deepen our understanding of migrant trajectories in their new host society.

Much of the integration literature has highlighted the importance of social interactions between migrants and the host society (Ager and Strang 2004, 2008; Phillimore 2012, 2020). However, the existing literature is not specifically dealing with *how* migrant individuals are interacting with host society members nor *why* these interactions need to take place. Furthermore, the existing integration literature often overlooks *where* migrant–host social interactions may emerge and under *what* circumstances. These unanswered questions are the gaps in the integration literature that this special section elaborates on and addresses.

What is its theoretical/conceptual framework?

This special section builds on a theoretical interpretation of migrant social inclusion as a micro-level process. In so doing, we foreground the importance of everyday narratives and micro interactions to foster social inclusion. The articles in the special section draw from a wide range of theoretical standpoints, which illuminate our understanding of social inclusion. In particular, we evaluate the roles of self-narratives and how these affect peoples' engagements with the *other* in everyday relationships. The articles harness the small stories (Bamberg 2004) of individual migrants and their reflection on mundane everyday interactions.

Our authors deal with these theoretical issues in a plethora of ways such as the importance of 'light' connections and relationships in lived spaces (Peterson); the accumulation of diverse experiences (Peristianis); the offering of free labour to practice good citizenship (Harper); and the roles that NGOs play in migrant reception and protection (Korkut and Fazekas). Moreover, the special section concludes with a critical discussion of integration with some of the key theorists in the field.

How it builds on the state of the art and goes beyond this

The main critiques on immigrant integration have only become manifest during the 2010s (Anderson 2010; de Genova 2010). This research has criticised the fundamental principles of integration (Dahinden 2016; Favell 2019; Klarenbeek 2021; Schinkel 2018) while indicator-induced integration (III) remains an aspiration for policymakers. However, in this special section we argue that integration cannot be measured through such indicators. The authors within this special section contend that integration is not a measurable process. Rather, we turn to inclusion as a more accurate term of reference and use social inclusion throughout the special section in order to explore those migrant narratives which mirror their interactions with the host society (Phillimore 2012).

In our exploration of the everyday and informal essence of integration, we refer to a myriad of place-making and inclusion initiatives informed by volunteering (Reeger, Carla, Mattes, Lehner, Flarer and Psenner).

Integration as a notion moved away from assessing immigrant integration from fitting into national models towards civic integration processes (Joppke and Morawska 2003). Integration approaches are prone to imply that the host society would have a superior position over migrants, organising integration as 'the inclusion [of individuals] in an already existing social system' (Penninx 2019: 3) or integration as 'a generations-lasting process of inclusion and *acceptance of migrants* in the core institutions, relations and statuses of the receiving society' (Heckmann 2006: 18).

However, our volume argues that integration is also a two-way process concerning the host society. Social interaction between migrants and host society members do matter (Ager and Strang 2008, 2010; Penninx 2019;

Phillimore 2012, 2020). In this special section, we explore how newcomers and their hosts interact with each other and the narratives that they generate amidst their interactions. In particular, we examine how mundane spaces, including sports and arts settings, work as environments of encounter and can facilitate these interactions. We also consider volunteering activities as an everyday mechanism through which migrant individuals and the host society can collect and share their experiences. This spatial element helps us to operationalise our theoretical approach to integration in everyday environments.

What are the key issues it addresses?

The integration of migrants matters but we hardly understand what integration entails. Neither policymakers nor integration scholars pay much attention to how the public, involving the host and the newcomers, experience integration. This special section focuses on processes of social inclusion and migration, involving topics such as a sense of belonging and social interactions, arts and sports encounters and informal interactions, negotiated identities and migration narratives, integration practice and critiques. Social inclusion is an everyday phenomenon that relates to the course of one's life in the new host country. We propose that we need to understand the narratives that this process involves and the intimacies that it generates.

What are its objectives and how these will be achieved?

Our objective is to re-imagine the concept of integration and further critical research in the field of migration studies. In particular, we believe that revisiting micro-level interactions can deepen our understanding of social inclusion processes for migrants. This special section builds on the strengths of both established and early-career scholars to re-examine integration from multiple perspectives. In particular, our special section addresses the following questions:

- *How* do migrant individuals interact with host society members?
- *Why* do these interactions need to take place?
- *Where* do migrant–host social interactions appear?
- Under *what* circumstances?
- How does discourse and policy shape migrants' everyday lived experiences?

The key societal question that this special section addresses is the integration of migrant individuals in host societies across Europe and beyond. Much of the debate on integration has focused on evaluable indicators, such as employment, housing, language acquisition and income. However, policy and indicator-orientated research is not confronting the everyday challenges that migrants face in the host country. We see these challenges expressed only if we pay attention to emerging narratives. The existing migrant integration literature often overlooks the importance of micro-level processes and encounters. The relevance of micro-level social interactions has been foregrounded in the wake of increased migration to Europe since 2015 (Pisarevskaya, Levy, Scholten and Jansen 2019).

Firstly, we examine how individual migrants negotiate their own identities and the influence of migration narratives on their everyday experiences (Peristianis; Korkut and Fazekas). These identity negotiation processes are often informed by how the wider society perceives them as well as the most prevalent political discourse and narratives. Understanding identity formation processes is an important pre-requisite before examining everyday interactions.

In light of the findings from above, we endeavour to make sense of the essence of migrant and host-society interactions through investigating narratives, sense of belonging and social interactions (see, among others, Peterson). We pay particular attention to everyday, mundane events and their effects on processes of belonging.

We also look at how disruptive interactions are affecting the self-narratives of migrant individuals. This can lead to the creation of counter-narratives or the upholding of master, national narratives of inclusion.


In order to understand the potential for spaces of interactions – including sports, arts and volunteering spaces – to facilitate informal interactions, we use specific case studies (see, among others, (Reeger, Carla, Mattes, Lehner, Flarer and Psenner). These case studies build upon examples of local integration programmes from across Europe and beyond. We also look at the potential of art and sports programmes to develop intimate relationships across migrant and host-society groups. We position these as examples of social interaction between these two groups.

The discussion section of the special section deals with integration practice and critiques. This includes a discussion on perspectives on integration by a number of leading scholars in the field (Jenny Phillimore, Adrian Favell, Peter Scholten, Kesi Mahendran and Jon Fox). This concludes our special section.

Conflict of interest statement

No conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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