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Integration

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[Integration (from Lat. *integrare*, "to renew, complete, reconstruct") designates, on a sociological level, the assimilation of an individual into a group or the incorporation of a minority into the majority. On a more general level, it designates the complete (re)construction of a social unity. S*ocial* integration is distinct from *systemic* integration, which concerns the interplay of social subsystems.]

Betül Durmaz is a teacher at a school for children with learning disabilities in the Ruhr area with a high ratio of immigrants. Her engagement has made her famous across Germany. A documentary that chronicles her school-day routine, captures a scene in the classroom: "Have you ever heard of the word 'integration?'" asks the teacher and a student answers "Yes, that is when one excludes others."[1]

The awareness of the fact that the debate on integration in Germany is mostly conducted in a demanding, often hostile tone is manifest in this Turkish student's answer. This is only partially a consequence of the contemporary crisis atmosphere and its politicization. The manifold connotations incorporated into the concept of integration during its century long career also exercise an influence on public discourse. However vague this concept may be—both in political confrontations and in the emergence of theory in social sciences since the days of Emile Durkheim, Ferdinand Tönnies, and Georg Simmel—it answers, in practically all uses, to an often unarticulated, subterranean plot of endangerment. An omnipresent, generalized fear of dis-integration imbues requests for integration with emotional force. This force amasses the memories of the many experiences of modernity that are not yet entirely overcome. The list is long. It includes the transition from agricultural to industrial communities as well as the interrelated growth of cities; the triumph of the capitalist economic mode and its principle of ruthless competition of one against all; democratic states based on dissent and political parties, but also the weakening of democracy; the nationalization of social functions that had been the responsibility of local or familial associations as well as the eventual retreat of the state from such welfare functions; the increase in the power of supranational institutions, networks, and cartels; the increasing consumption of media and the related concerns regarding the diminishing significance of direct communication, intimacy, and a sense of family. One must not forget to include in this catalogue the culturally pessimistic diagnoses that—in even more general terms—mourn the loss of all certainties in modernity. Even where concessions are made that processes of modernization will eventually bring about the emergence of new social ties, losses dominate the profit calculations resulting in a negative balance.

Whether explicitly or implicitly, uneasiness with modernity accompanies the integration debate. However, the window of time constantly changes—like when relevant book publications suggest even in their titles that Germany is currently "on

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[1] Betül Durmaz, "Betül Durmaz," accessed October 1, 2013, http://www.betuldurmaz.de/fernsehen/integration-in-gelsenkirchen.

the path from a society of consent to one of conflict."[2] The idea of integration carries a promise of holism that imbues those concerned with it almost automatically with nostalgia—both in the original sense of the word (the re-establishment of a moral whole) and in accordance with its historical usage (the desire to overcome modernity's general tendency toward disintegration, supposedly in contrast to earlier times). In almost every case, the discourse of integration is related to the prevailing political system in its national framework. In contrast, the development of a highly independent global society is publicly thematized mainly as a weakening of intra-national cohesion. In other words, the subject of nostalgia is the sovereign territorial state. More precisely, it is the phantom image of a state built on the basis of a nationally inflected, ethnically and linguistically homogenous population with shared religious and cultural requirements and a high level of consent, especially in regards to values. As a matter of fact, only in the national states of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries did cultural homogeneity become a political necessity. The pre-modern, agrarian polity, on the other hand, overemphasized cultural differences between populations.[3]

Consequently, there is a populist temptation accompanying the discourse of integration: it consists of a fantasy of organic unity which is then impacted by the presence of migrants. However, even where, in xenophobic reactions, the discourse takes on aggressive features, it is defensive because of the structure of the term—an expression of a vague sense of threat that is perceived as insurmountable. This is why the migrant—at least in German integration debates—has only one form: the *incomer* who is followed by many and who possibly intends to stay for a long while. Dieter Thomä's informative essay dealing with *masterless men*, and thereby with a broader understanding of migration, shows that another figuration is possible.[4] The *masterless man*, in contrast to the migrant worker or asylum seeker, is not only someone who arrives or to whom arrival is denied. His form is much more connected[5] with the scenario of *departure* because he was set free from a disintegrating social order—whether in sixteenth- or seventeenth-century England, which set off a mass migration leading to the formation of slums on the edges of towns,[6] or from the village communities of colonial Africa, or, today, from many third world countries. The concept of *masterless men* thus places tendencies toward disintegration in regions of origin ahead of concerns about integration, which are triggered by the arrival of migrants in target countries. This not only changes the discursive framing of migrant fates but also moves the discussion of integration/disintegration into the sphere of transnational dependencies in the form of streams of money, goods, and people.

In the meanwhile, we have acquired a lot of knowledge about global interdependencies, transnational networks, *diaspora communities*, and their specific hybrids. We know what crucial roles family loyalties and heritage ties play, along with new forms of religious, mass-medial, and subcultural tele-communitarization. All of this has, at this point, only very little in common with the visions of territorial cohesion and organic unity of a political body as they were long determined by the

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[2] Wilhelm Heitmeyer, *Bundesrepublik Deutschland: auf dem Weg von der Konsens- zur Konfliktgesellschaft* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997).
[3] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983).
[4] Dieter Thomä, "Der Herrenlose: Gegenfigur Zu Agambens „homo Sacer" - Leitfigur Einer Anderen Theorie Der Moderne," *Deutsche Zeitschrift Für Philosophie* 52, no. 6 (2004): 965–84.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid., p. 972 in reference to Toynbee, Polanyi and other historians of the industrial era.

remnants of the conceptual tradition of the body politic in Europe.[7] On the other hand, one can hardly sum up such phenomena under the headline of "disintegration." Many of these communitarizations are highly integrative—often in reaction to poverty and marginalization. Precisely this is disturbingly apparent in immigration regions (which are coined as somehow threatening "parallel communities" in Germany) and can potentially lead to conflicts. The problem is thus not the disintegration of community that is invoked by many critics of modernity. One can, much more adequately—and less apocalyptically—describe it in terms of a structural transformation and the shifting of interdependencies that will, in the medium term, pave a way out of the sphere of national regulations and related cultural reflexes.

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[7] For a history of such organic holistic models see Albrecht Koschorke et. al, *Der fiktive Staat: Konstruktionen des politischen Körpers in der Geschichte Europas* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2007).