

## ‘Against immigrant integration?’

A review of the logics of recognition among the ‘mainstream’  
and the populist radical right in Europe

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# ‘Against immigrant integration’?

## A review of the logics of recognition among the ‘mainstream’ and the populist radical right in Europe

### Abstract

This paper offers a review of the logics of recognition that shape mainstream and populist radical right (PRR) imaginaries of ‘immigrant integration’ in Europe. In doing so, it links a radical critique of immigrant integration imaginaries recently revived by scholars in the field of Migration Studies to the conceptualisation of the PRR as a growing political movement that seeks to radicalise mainstream norms. Taking the core insights of Taylor and Honneth’s classic work on the struggle for recognition as its starting point, the paper illustrates how PRR attitudes to ‘immigrant integration’ emerge from, rather than simply oppose, mainstream norms. This concerns in particular the centrality of the nation state, the focus on control, and the location of deviant behaviour outside ‘society’. Against this background, the paper suggests ways for re-approaching ‘integration’ precisely at a time when these norms are becoming increasingly politicised in the context of new immigration dynamics in Europe.

### Keywords

Recognition, Immigrant Integration, Mainstream, Populist Radical Right

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## 1. Introduction

‘Immigrant integration’ remains a contested concept in academic research and policymaking, both on the conceptual and the empirical levels (see e.g. Cherti and McNeil, 2012).<sup>1</sup> This paper engages with ongoing conceptual debates in the scholarly and political realm to identify emerging trends and lines of conflict.

In a “frontal assault” on the very concept of ‘immigrant integration’, social theorist Willem Schinkel (2018) has recently argued that:

[t]he agenda of those who insist on ‘immigrant integration’, and who thereby a priori assume that migrants have not really arrived, are not yet ‘members of society’, is in its effects only slightly removed from the explicit racism of the current white backlash on the (alt-) right (p. 15).

This provocative claim provides inspiration for complementing Schinkel’s critique of the mainstream agenda of ‘immigrant integration’, pertaining to both scholarly work and political practices, with an analysis of the integration imaginaries promoted by the populist radical right (PRR) in Europe. As will be commented on further below, the focus here is on the PRR rather than the ‘(alt-) right’ because it is indeed this growing political movement that is “only slightly removed” from the ‘mainstream’, and for specific reasons (Odmalm and Hepburn, 2017).

This review seeks to show precisely *why* this is the case, focusing specifically on the logics of recognition that shape both mainstream and PRR approaches to ‘immigrant integration’. The answer, simply put, is that they share fundamental (and fundamentally problematic) mechanisms for dealing with pluralist and diverse societies.

Questions of recognition play a central role in the literature on both immigrant integration and the populist radical right. However, not only do the two fields of inquiry not speak well to each other; the notion of ‘recognition’ also remains theoretically underexplored in both of them. This paper therefore seeks to investigate further the conceptual links between the politics of recognition, (mainstream) integration imaginaries, and the populist radical right.

The paper addresses the following questions: how does Schinkel’s call for a mainstream imagination of modern societies that positions itself ‘against immigrant integration’ compare to populist radical right parties’ at best dismissive attitude to immigrant integration? How much overlap is there between the diagnoses both sides offer, and what conception of recognition do they reveal? Finally, what are the implications for how we may imagine ‘integration’ in increasingly diverse and complex European societies in the years and decades to come?

To explore these questions, the paper first provides a brief overview of the role that the notion of recognition occupies in liberal-democratic and diverse (national) societies, and why it has made a

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<sup>1</sup> See also the project “Rethinking Integration“ funded by the Robert Bosch Foundation, <https://www.bosch-stiftung.de/en/project/rethinking-integration/details>

comeback in political debates in recent years. It does so by connecting key insights from Charles Taylor and Axel Honneth's classic post-Cold War work to more recent accounts of the challenges faced by modern democratic societies (section 2). Section 3 offers a review of the critical approach to mainstream conceptions of immigrant integration that Schinkel and several prominent colleagues in the field of Migration Studies have recently put back on the research agenda, highlighting where they disagree. While these scholars' critique primarily concerns the entanglement of the social sciences in the reproduction of asymmetrical power relations, this paper will focus on the broader political implications of these 'neo-colonial' imaginaries, and carve out the particular space for recognition within them. Section 4 presents an analysis of immigrant integration imaginaries and the politics of recognition that sustains them among the PRR, as evidenced by party manifestos and political speeches. The concluding section 5 assesses the overlaps and differences between 'mainstream' and PRR approaches. It also makes suggestions for how we may think of integration in a way that avoids the pitfalls of these approaches precisely at a time when the nation state and issues of control and deviance are becoming increasingly salient in Europe's response to new immigration dynamics.

## 2. The struggle for recognition in modern societies

*...this paper is interested in immigrant integration as a long-term project of community building that takes place in countries across Europe*

The political issue of 'immigrant integration' has had a revival in the context of the crisis of migration management that unfolded in Europe in 2015/16. It has since shaped the political competition over how to deal with the consequences of the new migration dynamics. As the link between immigrants and the need to integrate them into 'host societies' has become naturalised (Meissner, 2018, p. 8), the crisis swiftly translated into

perceptions of an 'integration crisis' of and for those who had been granted asylum, refugee or subsidiary protection.<sup>2</sup> This integration crisis has been assessed in light of previous experiences with immigrant integration in post-war Western Europe (see e.g. Verkuyten, 2016; Caponio and Cappiali, 2016).

While immediate policy challenges of providing resources to 'newcomers' (e.g. orientation courses, housing, jobs; see Collett, 2011) have dominated much of the agenda in recent years, this paper is interested in immigrant integration as a long-term project of community building that takes place in countries across Europe. The concept of recognition with its key components of order, conflict, reciprocity, and agency is useful to explore current contestations surrounding this project, because it allows us to dig deeper into what it means to be(come) a member of a particular community.

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<sup>2</sup> For an overview of different kinds of protection see the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF): <http://www.bamf.de/EN/Fluechtlingsschutz/AblaufAsylv/Schutzformen/schutzformen-node.html>.

## 2.1. Recognition: a modern phenomenon

The understanding of recognition as a political problem to be solved is a modern phenomenon. It is rooted in the historical shift from stable social hierarchies structured by honour for the few to the creation of pluralist, mobile societies built on the (human) dignity of *all* its members.

Since the French Revolution, this quest for recognition has gradually evolved into a universal political project that needs to reconcile the ‘rights of man’ with the individual freedom to make personal choices (as well as the *ability* to do so based on sufficient resources) through a social process of (necessarily conflictual) negotiation between individuals and their surrounding society. Recognition, in other words, is *relational* and requires dialogue with others to build individuals’ trust in themselves and their own needs – thereby allowing them to reach their full potential within society (Taylor, 1992, pp. 32–33; see also Honneth, 1995).

While recognition, then, is a “vital human need” (Taylor, 1992, p. 26), it also continues to be unevenly distributed in modern societies that remain stratified in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality. Demands for due or ‘proper’ recognition therefore shape much of the social conflicts in modern societies by challenging existing recognition orders (Smith, 2012, p. 5). The modern state is *expected* to respond to these demands by providing the infrastructure that alleviates misrecognition and, ideally, facilitates the establishment of relations of mutual recognition. In doing so, stabilising (promoting the sameness of rights, including the basic right to free self-expression) and de-stabilising (tolerating particular forms of self-expression) elements, applicable to both individuals and collectives, as first elaborated on by German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder, need to be balanced out on a constant basis (Fukuyama, 2018a, p. 26; see also Jones, 2006). In other words, demands for recognition in terms of equal respect, manifest in both rights and resources, and individual and collective self-esteem stand in a tense relationship as they often compete with each other.

*...demands for recognition in terms of equal respect and individual and collective self-esteem stand in a tense relationship as they often compete with each other*

## 2.2. The liberal-democratic approach

Liberal democracies have developed specific ways of dealing with these inherent tensions. Following Kymlicka (1989), (at least some versions of) liberalism acknowledge(s) that individual rights and freedoms, while taking precedence over those of groups and their specific understanding of the ‘good life’, are inextricably shaped by the socio-cultural context in which they exist, including the multi-culturalism of modern states. Steven C. Rockefeller states in response to Charles Taylor’s famous 1992 essay on the politics of recognition:

[...] from the liberal democratic point of view a person has a right to claim equal recognition *first and foremost* on the basis of his or her universal human identity and

potential, not primarily on the basis of an ethnic [or religious, national, etc.] identity” (Rockefeller, 1992, p. 88, emphasis added).

In this sense, there is a clear hierarchy between the different dimensions of recognition (rather than between human beings themselves) in terms of the legitimacy ascribed to them vis-à-vis each other. Claims to recognition for particular identities on the individual or group level can only be democratically legitimate if they acknowledge that all humans are of equal (moral) worth, and thus equal in their status as autonomous agents. In relation to the recognition awarded to particular cultures Rockefeller elaborates further:

From the democratic perspective, particular cultures are critically evaluated in the light of the way they give distinct concrete expression to universal capacities and values. The object of a liberal democratic culture is to *respect* – not to repress – ethnic identities and to encourage different cultural traditions to develop fully their potential for expression of the democratic ideals of freedom and equality, leading in most cases to major cultural transformations (Rockefeller, 1992, p. 89, emphasis added).

A liberal-democratic culture is thus specific in that it seeks to find a balance between:

- *guaranteeing* the equal dignity of all individuals;
- *promoting* the freedoms of the individual; and
- *respecting* the “intrinsic worth” and critically appraising “the achievements and practices” of different cultures (Rockefeller, 1992, p. 98).

As Amy Gutmann explains with reference to Taylor, equality and individual freedom require that there is “mutual respect for reasonable differences”. This, in turn, demands “a widespread willingness and ability to articulate our disagreements, to defend them before people with whom we disagree, to discern the difference between respectable and disrespectable disagreement, and to be open to changing our own minds when faced with well-reasoned criticism” (Gutmann, 1992, p. 24).

This ability to deal with conflict and criticism (and thereby manage societal transformation), Fukuyama argues in his recent book *Identity* (Fukuyama, 2018a), is increasingly under threat by an anti-institutional, exclusionary, and short-sighted “populist nationalism”, embodied by both US President Donald Trump and the campaigns surrounding the Brexit referendum 2016 and its aftermath. He considers this form of nationalism the “chief threat to the liberal international order that has been the foundation for global peace and prosperity since 1945” (Fukuyama, 2018b, p. 16) because it equates, so his argument goes, the demand to have one’s particular identity (and that of one’s group) recognised with the acknowledgment of human dignity and self-worth. This logic, reserved for the ‘national people’, only leaves space for positive, pride-inducing recognition, i.e. validation, lest the recogniser wants to violate the most basic principles of (liberal) democracy (Fukuyama, 2018a, p. 10).

This diagnosis raises the question how new this ‘threat’ really is, and to what extent the mainstream politics of recognition as they relate to ‘(immigrant) integration’ as a nation-building project are implicated in this development.

### 3. A critique of the mainstream: ‘immigrant integration’ as a never-ending story

#### 3.1. ‘Society’ vs. ‘immigrants’

“Against Immigrant Integration” is the title of a provocation piece by social theorist Willem Schinkel, published in *Comparative Migration Studies* in 2018. Building on the author’s earlier work (Schinkel, 2013, 2017), it offers a critique of mainstream research on and political practices of immigrant integration. The argument that the latter are somewhat removed from debates in the critical (i.e., power-questioning) social sciences (e.g. postcolonial, feminist, and critical whiteness studies) and from the call for a participation-focused ‘post-migrant society’ are, of course, not new (see e.g. Foroutan, 2019; Dahinden, 2016).

Schinkel’s intervention has nevertheless received particular attention because of its blunt and radical nature – and because it comes at a time of heightened debate surrounding the very place of migration and immigrants in European societies.

*As an immigrant, one can be ‘more or less’ integrated, be more or less ‘in’ society based on economic, social, cultural, and emotional indicators, but never be free of demands to integrate further*

The central argument put forward by Schinkel is that the mainstream (although he does not use the term himself) imaginary of immigrant integration, both within and outside the social sciences, serves to reinforce (racialised) hierarchies of status by producing neo-colonial (that is, subordinating) knowledge about immigrants. This is because it pits the latter against existing society as an (allegedly) integral ‘whole’ that they can never actually become a part of – at best, they can move *closer to* it over time by closing the cultural, social, economic, and political gap that is purported to exist between themselves and society.

This imagination of a society/immigrant dualism has several implications. For one, it turns integration into an individual’s responsibility. It is *they* who are expected to close the gap by having others recognise them as equal members. Consequently, they are the ones who are to be blamed if they fail. At the same time, immigrants’ integration is measured in relation to the groups that they are believed to belong to. The result is a “de-individualised individualism” (Schinkel, 2018, p. 3; 2013, p. 1154).

As Schinkel explains, this is the very logic that gave rise to the notion of “failed multiculturalism”, which politicised ‘immigrant integration’ in the shadow of the global recession a decade ago (see also Collett, 2011, p. 2; Triadafilopoulos, 2011). Contrary to what this notion may suggest, there has never been a policy that valued cultural groups’ autonomy over individuals’ autonomy, or that expected the emergence of a common (liberal-democratic) frame of reference that all members of society could subscribe to.

Rather than trading a supposedly realistic perspective for political correctness, Schinkel maintains, immigrants have always been problematised, and our horizons for judging cultural worth never merged (Schinkel 2017, p. 22; Taylor, 1992, p. 73).

Integration, then, is a question of degree. As an immigrant, one can be ‘more or less’ integrated, be more or less ‘in’ society based on economic, social, cultural, and emotional indicators (e.g. education, friendships, language), but never be free of demands to integrate further (Schinkel, 2018, pp. 7–8; 2013, p. 1157). In this imaginary, they – even as citizen or permanent resident with formally equal political and socio-economic rights – can never completely close the gap and cross the threshold that would recognise them unequivocally as a member of society and make integration a non-issue for them, as is the case for ‘natives’.

Through this entrenched recognition order, the process of integration becomes a never-ending story, a “game that cannot be won” (Horner and Weber, 2011). The fixed categorisation *as* ‘immigrants’ makes them forever visible and (thus) controllable – just like migration itself remains a permanent, visible anomaly (Hadj Abdou, 2019, p. 3; see also Favell, 2019, pp. 7–8).

Policy interventions operating on the basis of this society/immigrants dualism, consequently, seek to control *potential* threats rather than manage social relations and conflicts. Along the continuum of being ‘more or less integrated’, integration policy can only reduce the relative *distance* between ‘society’ and ‘immigrants’. Filling gaps becomes its key task (Schinkel, 2018, p. 13).

‘Immigrant integration’, then, cannot be employed as a neutral category of analysis that merely describes an empirical process. It is always (also) a normatively charged category with which we *think about* this process (Schinkel, 2018, p. 2). This is where Schinkel’s call for a social science that positions itself ‘against immigrant integration’ altogether emanates from. It is a call to radically challenge the recognition order expressed by it.

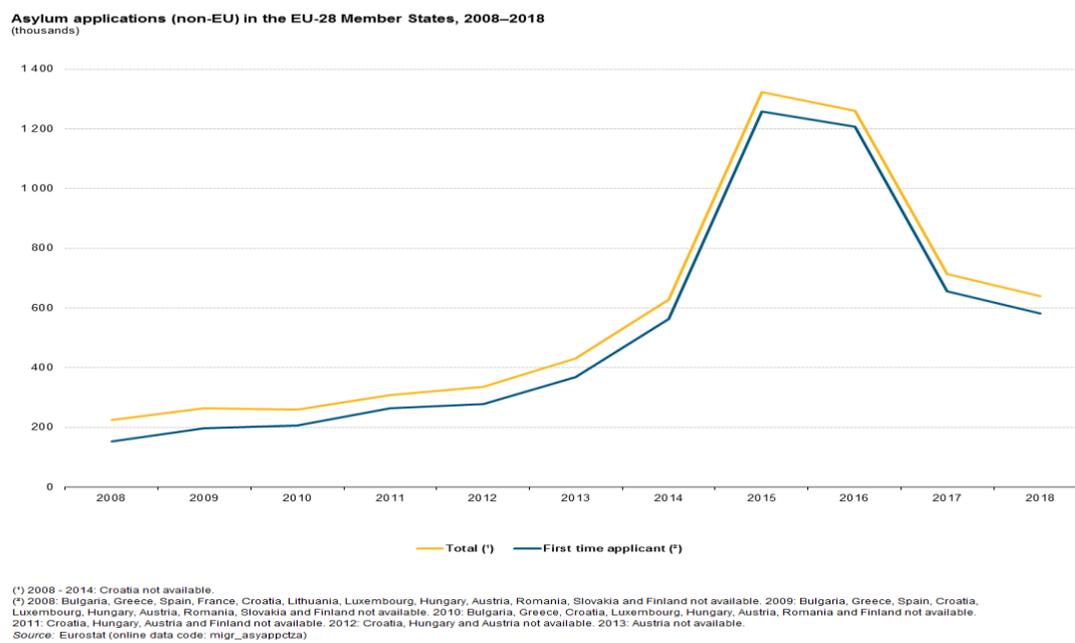
### 3.2. Critiquing the critique, Part 1

Schinkel’s critique may rest on a somewhat selective review of immigrant integration research, highlighting particularly objectionable instances of the concept’s operationalisation (Penninx, 2019, p. 3; Klarenbeek, 2019, pp. 6–7; Meissner, 2019, p. 6). However, the responses to his intervention also make clear that the implications of the society/immigrant dualism are difficult to refute, or only based on particular normative assumptions.

Penninx, for example, is only able to defend the concept because for him, immigrant integration primarily relates to policies that can regulate the immediate situation following the reception of migrants, i.e. of ‘newcomers’ (Penninx, 2019, p. 5; see also the issue’s editorial, Saharso, 2019). Schinkel, however, speaks of immigrant integration as a *permanent* mechanism for negotiating (or, rather, avoiding) mutual recognition, with those who never migrated themselves also being subjected to

*The “conditions of participation” that need to be fulfilled are not the same for ‘natives’ and ‘immigrants’*

integration demands ('2nd' and '3rd' generation). The record number of applications for asylum in the European Union since 2015 (see Figure 1) may have led to difficulties with providing adequate housing, healthcare, orientation courses, etc., in local settings (see e.g. Lara Montero and Baltruks, 2016). However, these difficulties have generally been debated with a view to the national integration histories linked to previous immigration movements (in particular those coming from outside Europe) since the 1950s – thereby inadvertently confirming that integration is, indeed, a never-ending story.



A second objection brought forward by Penninx (2019) is that there is a fundamental difference between scholars using the concept of immigrant integration to describe a process and policymakers using it to steer this process into a particular direction to achieve a prescribed goal. The underlying logic and the terms used (e.g. 'receiving society'), however, remain the same, i.e. normative and problem-oriented. The "conditions of participation" (Penninx, 2019, p. 3) that need to be fulfilled are not the same for 'natives' and 'immigrants' – and also not determined by the latter, because their status as recognisers (rather than just the ones to 'be recognised') is denied.

Consequently, the task left to policymaking is, in Schinkel's terms, to define the size and nature of the gap between immigrants and society, and how exactly it should be filled. Researchers, in turn, are under "increasing pressure [...] to inform policy making, which supports the adoption and reproduction rather than the questioning of present perspectives" (Hadj Abdou, 2019, p. 3; see also Favell, 2019, p. 4).

Finally, Penninx (2019) and Klarenbeek (2019) have suggested that the expectation that immigrants close an existing gap can be solved by conceiving of immigrant integration as a 'relational' or 'two-way' process. This process would not only account for newcomers' characteristics, but also the reception of these characteristics by society on an individual, organisational, and institutional level, as well as the change they effect in society.

This is also the view guiding the *Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the European Union*, agreed at the European Council Meeting in Brussels in November 2004. The first principle stipulates that “Integration is a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States” (Council of the European Union, 2004, p. 13). Accordingly, the remaining 10 principles understand integration as a policy process tasked to fill the permanent space that exists between immigrants and national citizens. This is to be achieved through acceptance of values, acquisition of language skills, a willingness to educate oneself, and the uptake of employment on part of the former, and provision of access to these services and institutions, as well as spaces for dialogue and participation on part of the latter.

Penninx does acknowledge that this process is shaped by power and resource imbalances and that, therefore, “[t]he receiving society [...] is far more decisive for the outcome of the process than the immigrants themselves are” (Penninx, 2019, p. 5). But this only reinforces the fact that ‘society’ controls the process and subjects immigrant ‘others’ to integration demands in order for them to become “an accepted part of society” (Penninx, 2019, p. 6), i.e. to receive the social recognition necessary for fulfilling their individual potential. This assumes that ‘natives’ (i.e. those who have not ‘come’ from anywhere, but have presumably always ‘been there’) are *already* an accepted part of society, there is no conflict over their belongingness. The purpose of integration as a “dynamic, long-term, and continuous two-way process of mutual accommodation” (Council of the European Union, 2004, p. 13), then, is to enable ‘newcomers’ to *eventually* evade such conflict, too.

Klarenbeek (2019) holds that the notion of integration is useful if its goal is defined as increasing “relational equality”, i.e. equal recognition of individuals’ moral worth, agency and chance of participation, by detaching it from actually existing, i.e. ‘objective’, difference that marks certain individuals as improper members of society. This approach may well open pathways for looking at actually existing levels of basic equality of recognition in societies as a whole. But how exactly it can help to overcome the boundary of proper/improper membership in a polity, which builds on more than equal rights (and is not necessarily crossed by formally acquiring citizenship, either, as other resources are often denied), remains unclear.

Countless examples illustrate that ‘newcomers’ hardly ever become ‘natives’. Penninx himself lends evidence to this when he speaks of “organizations of immigrants” and “migrant-specific institutions” that may or may not “become accepted parts of society, equivalent to institutions of native groups” (Penninx, 2019, p. 8). A gap remains here between being ‘accepted *as equal*’ and being a ‘*proper* member of society’, which amounts to a qualitative difference in recognition. The consequence is that as the process of social diversification continues – not just through immigration, but also through intermarriage, procreation, naturalisation, conversion, etc. – an allegedly homogeneous ‘society’ is pitted against a growing number of people who are, at best, (provisionally) ‘accepted’ (see also Foroutan, 2019).

And so it is indeed the case, as Hadj Abdou suggests, that immigrant integration is “a phenomenon that reveals more about those who articulate ideas about integration and decide on integration measures than it does about those who are the target of integration (i.e. the migrant ‘other’)”. This applies regardless of the

fact that these ideas and measures are proposed out of benevolent motives to achieve a goal defined as desirable for everyone (Hadj Abdou, 2019, p. 1, p. 4; Schinkel, 2019, p. 5).

### 3.3. Critiquing the critique, Part 2

If distinguishing between ‘newcomers’ and ‘settled immigrants’, separating scientific and political uses of the term ‘immigrant integration’, and conceptualising the latter as a ‘two-way’ or ‘relational’ process are inadequate responses to the dilemma identified by Schinkel, what are better alternatives? Schinkel (2019) notes that the task is precisely *not* to look for conceptual alternatives. His respondents, however, are in agreement that his radical critique of the profession and its impact on policy circles call for “a discussion of productive ways out of this problematic research path” (Hadj Abdou, 2019, p. 1).

*...an intersectional approach can equip policymakers to pay more attention to inequalities in society as a whole, but also to deal better with the uncertainty accompanying a multiplication of diversities in post-national societies*

First, as Favell (2019, p. 3) argues, abandoning the notion of ‘immigrant integration’ does not render the need to manage societies irrelevant. It is not (negatively connoted) notions of difference, but the assumed need for *control* due to differentiation that perpetuates divisions (Meissner, 2018, pp. 19–20; Meissner 2019; Hadj Abdou, 2019; Favell, 2019, p. 5). Much of this control, it is implied, is due to the one-dimensionality ascribed to difference (for example the measuring of difference in terms of being secular/non-secular, as pointed out by Schinkel, 2018, p. 5). In fact, differentiation is the result of an overlap between different categories that define humans’ social status, including social class, race, and gender (Hadj Abdou, 2019, p. 3).

Acknowledging this intersectionality would move the focus away from controlling the ‘foreigner’ or ‘the migrant’ and towards, for instance, issues of masculinity at the intersection of individual freedoms, socio-economic status, and cultural identities. Such an intersectional approach can equip policymakers to pay more attention to inequalities in society as a whole (Hadj Abdou, 2019, p. 5), but also to deal better with the uncertainty accompanying a multiplication of diversities in post-national societies (Meissner, 2018, p. 17; Foroutan, 2019, 146).

Second, respondents agree that the central role of the nation state as the sole democratic space for decision-making and identity-building is problematic. As Favell writes:

[t]he idea of national integration is an absurd anachronism. [...] [I]n Europe, national integration is blatantly a fantasy of late nineteenth century nationalism, at best only conceivable as a certain illusory image of the container national (Marshallian) welfare state of the 1950s (Favell, 2019, p. 3).

This illusory image, Favell observes, is reflected in Migration Studies' "nation-state-centered obsession with immigrants, national politics and national integration" – which, coincidentally, also reinforces the hierarchal value system of global citizenships (2019, p. 3, p. 7).

More weight, therefore, needs to be given to non-national levels and dimensions of social system management. As Hadj Abdou explains, the core difference between the nation state and cities as spaces for integration (and thus for providing recognition to residents as (proper) members of the community) is the following:

The nation state and national citizenship are institutions based on principles of social closure. While rights and resources are widely accessible to members, this is not necessarily the case for others. In contrast, in modern cities [...] membership is relatively open (Hadj Abdou, 2019, p. 4).

In modern cities, membership is attached to residency, i.e. a result of the act of moving itself – largely regardless of what other (national) affiliations someone may have (Saharso, 2019, p. 2). This is facilitated by the positive effects of urban diversity on economic development. The neoliberal commodification of diversity as a thoroughly positive 'product', however, also tends to reinforce rather than alleviate classed and racialised inequalities of recognition (Hadj Abdou, 2019, p. 6) – also as an effect of avoiding honest debates about societal change. In this sense, the city may offer both positive (regarding the meaning of 'membership') and negative (concerning diversity rhetoric) lessons for state-wide integration politics.

Third, the 'post-national' moment is also seen as being reflected in the concept of *superdiversity*, which has become increasingly relevant for policymaking (see e.g. Phillimore, Sigona, and Tonkiss, 2017). For Schinkel, superdiversity is merely a "continuation of immigrant integration by other means" because of its focus on governing those who "brought diversity with them" (Schinkel, 2018, pp. 9–10, emphasis removed). It is also "utterly redundant" because it would not go beyond the complexity already accounted for by postcolonial studies, critical race studies, etc. (2019, p. 3; see for a related conceptual critique Sealy, 2018).

Meissner, in her response to Schinkel, maintains that this does not adequately capture what superdiversity as a "thinking tool" is all about: not just differentiations produced by migration flows in terms of ethnic and origin diversity, but differentiations in social environments more generally due to "multidimensional reconfigurations". As such, the concept actively questions the construction of groupness and seeks to overcome native/immigrant binaries and estimations of degrees of membership by emphasising the (spatial and temporal) situatedness and uncertainty behind the emergence of differentiations in power-asymmetrical contexts (Meissner, 2019, p. 3). In this sense, superdiversity accommodates Schinkel's preference for talking about "modes of relating and of entanglement" (Schinkel, 2018, p. 8) rather than simply higher levels or changing patterns of diversity *within* or *between* pre-categorised groups of immigrants (Meissner, 2018, p. 11).

Whether superdiversity can (further) detach itself from the study of (immigrated) minorities in urban contexts and fully overcome the image of a gap that policies need to fill in their pursuit for ‘integrated societies’, remains to be seen.

## 4. Recognition in the populist radical right: ‘immigrant integration’ as a non-story

### 4.1. Fascists, alt-right, or populists?

As indicated at the beginning of this paper, Schinkel claims that the never-ending story of immigrant integration sustained by the political and scholarly mainstream agenda is not as far removed from the racism of the ‘alternative right’ as some may want to believe. Elsewhere he speaks of “new forms of fascism” that are on the rise and “sometimes euphemistically called ‘alt-right’, sometimes simply called ‘populism’” (Schinkel, 2019, p. 6). A clarification of terminology therefore seems to be in order.

The alternative right is an extremist (i.e., anti-democratic), white supremacist movement fed in particular through online platforms (Hawley, 2017; Main, 2018); it denies outright the equal dignity of individuals belonging to certain races and cultures. (Right-wing) populism, by contrast, is generally considered a political ideology built on an antagonistic relationship between ‘the people’ on the bottom/inside, on the one hand, and ‘the elite’ on the top and outside groups, on the other hand.

*...the populist radical right is a “pathological normalcy” of democratic politics that radicalises its mainstream views*

The problem that Schinkel identifies, namely an ideological proximity between the ‘mainstream’ and the political fringes in relation to the ways that they imagine immigrant integration, however, is best captured by a

different, but related group of actors: the populist radical right.

The populist radical right is a growing political movement that shares some of the illiberal and nativist streaks found in an extremist form in the alt-right, but – crucially – ostentatiously supports popular sovereignty, majority rule, and pluralism as core democratic values. As such, the populist radical right is a “pathological normalcy” of democratic politics that radicalises its mainstream views (Mudde, 2010 and 2013; see also Mény and Surel, 2002, pp. 3–5; Betz and Johnson, 2004, p. 324). In relation to immigrant integration, a particular set of (conservative) mainstream views emerging from notions of democratic sovereignty is being radicalised. This includes, as discussed in the previous section, an emphasis on the *nation* state as a democratic space, a preference for order and control, and a stress on individuals’ potential for deviant behaviour, but also an inclination for more popular participation outside of elections. Speaking of the populist radical right thus allows us to dig deeper into the relationship between ‘mainstream’ and supposedly deviant approaches to immigrant integration.

## 4.2. Recognition in the populist radical right

(Populist) radical right actors have a preference for mobilising issues of immigration, multiculturalism, and integration precisely because they promise the greatest potential for connecting their views to those of the mainstream (Mudde, 2010; Zaslove, 2004; Han, 2015). Their growing salience in the European public sphere due to the dynamic migration movements of recent years has helped these actors to increase their (electoral) success and reinforce their prominence in the public debate in turn (Dennison and Geddes, 2019; Dennison 2019).

The politics of recognition are closely tied to the populist radical right's broader political programme and ideology. At their core is the antagonistic opposition between 'the people' as a carrier of a particular national culture (as Herder saw it, see Taylor, 1992, p. 31) and 'the elite'. More specifically, this antagonism, following Freedon (2017, p. 4), is built on three mutually constitutive elements:

- 1) monism – the image of the people as a “singular unitary body” that does not allow for ambivalences;
- 2) natality – the notion of the people as ‘having been here first’; and
- 3) a “visceral fear” of change imported by both internal and external elites and (immigrant) others.

Together, these elements lay the basis for radicalising (i.e., essentialising and prioritising) the claim to recognition of 'the people'. 'The people' are simultaneously a *part* of society (as the 'common' people who have been denied appropriate levels of recognition from others) and the *whole* (as those who make a claim to legitimate representation of the sovereign nation, see Brubaker, 2019, p. 7).

This claim for recognition, it is important to note, is made *on behalf of* the 'people' whose voice is appropriated by its (usually elitist) leaders. It is decidedly *not* a project emerging from 'below' (Freedon, 2017, pp. 4–5). This corresponds with Fukuyama's account of the dynamics behind the populist politics of recognition, drawing on Plato's study of the human soul: a combination of political leaders' “desire to be recognized as superior” (*megalothymia*) and supporters' perceptions of a lack (or, more specifically, a loss) of equal recognition (*isothymia*) for their “nation or religion or way of life” (Fukuyama, 2018, p. xv, p. 81).

The aim, then, is to incite resentment among followers over this loss of a national culture (often in lieu of a loss of socio-economic status), of a “true self”, that the elites and (other) outsiders have caused. This ultimately enables them to “rebind the individual to a social group and reestablish a clear moral horizon” (Fukuyama, 2018a, p. 56, p. 89; see also Betz and Johnson, 2004). This is to happen by returning to an old order, one in which the cultural rights of an (alleged) majority are not simply recognised *equally*, but *prioritised* over those of 'others'.

Integration policy is key to this project, because it is a prime space not only for “form[ing] social identities around feelings of disrespect and experiences of misrecognition” (Hirvonen and Pennanen, 2019, p. 36), but also for critiquing the modernist cult of rapid change that populist forces generally oppose (Stavrakakis, 2017, p. 6).

### 4.3. Re-establishing an old order of recognition

In relation to the core tensions inherent in the liberal-democratic politics of recognition – between universality and particularity, the individual and the group – then, the populist radical right positions itself in a specific way. Central to it is the belief that the people’s ‘common will’ as a supposedly democratic will is tied to its ‘authentic’ identity as a nation to which the individual is bound.

This logic largely resembles Rousseau’s notion of the *volonté générale* (or ‘general will’), which is predicated on reciprocal respect and the recognition of individuals’ pursuit of their ‘authentic inner selves’ and valorisation of their personal, subjective feelings. The ‘general will’, according to Rousseauian, is only achievable through recognition because it eliminates bilateral competition that hampers the pursuit of common goals (Taylor, 1992, pp. 45–48; see also Fukuyama, 2018a, p. 110). That is, in the Rousseauian tradition of thought, the eradication of social hierarchies does not serve the liberation of the individual, but enables them to pursue an absolute ‘common will’ that does not leave space for any form of differentiation (Taylor, 1992, p. 51; see also Fukuyama, 2018a, p. 31). This is where the PRR splits the ‘liberal’ from the ‘democratic’, and the recognition of minorities from the will of the majority.

As regards integration imaginaries, this majority/minority division built into the populist people/elite opposition gives rise to two core arguments of the PRR. First, previous efforts to recognise members of (allegedly) marginalised groups by granting them equal rights and acknowledging their particular cultural identities has meant a factual decline in equal recognition for the majority, whose alleged privileging is decried as myth. That is, the gap between ‘society’ and ‘immigrants’ is not only considered legitimate, but narrowing it is also seen as tantamount to a constraint on the singular native culture (*monism*) of those who have ‘been here before’ and therefore get to make the (democratic) decisions (*natality*). The worth of the majority’s cultural identity with its “distinctive set of traditions and practices and a distinctive intellectual and aesthetic history” is not being recognised or even rendered invisible altogether – with negative implications for its collective self-esteem (Wolf, 1992, pp. 75–76; see also Fukuyama, 2018a, p. 32). In the logic of the PRR, then, relative equalisation means loss; recognition as a zero-sum-game.

Essentially, this is a demand – which PRR actors often explicitly make – for reversing the transaction of the multiculturalist idea, which demands the equalisation of the risk of cultural non-survival, but also the minimisation of this risk for all communities in a given state (Walzer, 1992, p. 102). The ‘elites’, according to the PRR, have unduly shifted the risk of non-survival to the (native) ‘majority’ by giving others too much support in violation of their obligation to integrate themselves (i.e. make them deserving of recognition), while also giving the majority culture too little support. Consequently, any form of affirmative action or differential treatment that benefits minority groups is to be eradicated, because it is “undue favouritism” (Taylor, 1992, p. 39; see also Betz and Johnson, 2004, p. 320).

The second argument put forward is that equal recognition is dependent on the nature of the particular cultural identities of specific groups, not just the equal value of all humans in an abstract sense. Not all identities and cultures, according to the PRR view, are allowed to pursue their authenticity and demand

equal rights and entitlements in a (democratic) society, if these identities themselves violate “universal, difference-blind principles” (Taylor, 1992, pp. 42–43).

On its own, this latter demand is within the realm of the liberal-democratic approach to recognition. It is therefore important to acknowledge that only together the two arguments become distinctively ‘populist radical right’ in character. The unjust loss of the ‘people’s’ native culture due to decisions taken by the ‘elites’ is made even more unjust by the granting of equal recognition to cultures that ‘do not deserve’ it based on the standards prescribed by that same native culture. This non-deservedness is often attributed to their alleged lack of ‘modernity’ – a perspective that denies them the very capacity to act as an autonomous agent bound by moral rules.

In effect, the PRR explicitly aims to do what Schinkel criticises in ‘mainstream’ immigrant integration imaginaries: to uphold the gap between those in need of integration (‘immigrants’) and natives (‘society’) *in order to* give back to the latter what has unjustly been taken away from them. Schinkel’s demand to radically challenge the existing ‘mainstream’ order of recognition is met with a demand for radicalising this very order even further.

Crucially, the PPR logic of recognition extends beyond the formal acquisition of citizenship (see also Schinkel, 2013, p. 1156) or the aspects usually measured in integration research (social contacts, language skills, etc., see Harder et al., 2018), often with serious personal and political consequences. The debate surrounding the former player for the German national football team, Mesut Özil, is a case in point (Chazan, 2018). In response to accusations of racism within the German Football Association that ultimately led to Özil’s resignation, the parliamentary leader for the Alternative for Germany (AfD), Alice Weidel, spoke of Özil as an “example of failed integration of too many immigrants with a Turkish-Muslim cultural origin”.<sup>3</sup> This gives the lie to the aim of “absorbing foreigners into society”, in particular through the acquisition of national citizenship, to prevent a transformation into a “country of immigration”, as not only the AfD, but also other PRR parties, such as the Danish People’s Party (2002, p. 4) and the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ, 2011, section 2), claim.

Building on the mainstream’s ‘de-individualised individualisation’ criticised by Schinkel (2018, p. 3), the populist radical right thus strategically blurs the boundaries between the recognition based on equal rights and the recognition offered to particular cultural identities. On the one hand, they separate an individual’s rights to live within a national society from the claim to cultural recognition of the groups to which they allegedly belong. The slogan “Islam does not belong, but Muslim citizens do”, prominent with both the AfD and the FPÖ, is a prominent example of this logic. On the other hand, this separation between individuals as moral agents and their ascribed groups is abandoned whenever a naturalised immigrant or native-born citizen with a (non-white) ‘migration background’ exhibits deviant behaviour, including unemployment, homelessness, and criminality. Such behaviour is not associated with a ‘lack of integration’

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<sup>3</sup> See Facebook, 23 July 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/aliceweidel/photos/a.1063313067013261.1073741828.1061322973878937/2067594819918409/?type=3&theatre>.

for those for whom integration is “not an issue” in the first place (Schinkel, 2017, p. 3; 2013, p. 1146), i.e. those naturally considered as members of the (national) ‘society’.

In other words, the mainstream frontier of ‘society’ and ‘immigrants’ enables the PRR to deny the recognition awarded through national citizenship at the end of a “successful integration process” (Alternative for Germany, 2016, p. 65) by making that recognition forever conditional on non-deviant behaviour – the criteria of which are defined by the PRR itself. Membership in society, then, cannot be achieved through integration, *even if* it is the result, as demanded, of immigrants’ own efforts to be

*Membership in society, then, cannot be achieved through integration, even if it is the result, as demanded, of immigrants’ own efforts to be deserving of recognition, and even if it leads to the acquisition of citizenship*

deserving of recognition, and *even if* it leads to the acquisition of citizenship. As in mainstream imaginaries, ‘being integrated’ remains a state of being of the individual that marks them as less powerful and allows ‘society’ to remain ‘purified’ (not just) from notions of ethnicity and race (Schinkel, 2018, pp. 3–5).

This ‘freezing’ of opportunities for social transformation makes societies more easily readable (Brubaker, 2016, p. 47), but it also runs the risk of creating “dead societies” (Hirvonen and Pennanen, 2019, p. 38). As Hirvonen and Pennanen have

argued, the populist politics of recognition is pathological because it denies others the status as legitimate recognisers. These ‘others’ have caused their loss in the first place, so they no longer have a legitimate claim to representing the nation. In a prominent speech in 2019, the leader of the Sweden Democrats (SD), Jimmy Åkesson, put this as follows:

They want to shatter what binds us together, what holds us together as a nation. Our answer to them is: See what society you have created! [...] They have destroyed our country, dismantled welfare and the feeling of security, but they do not see that. [...] Of course, they all still think that they are a little bit nicer and a little bit better than us [...] but it is our agenda that they need to respond to [...] it is the others who are forced to adjust to our politics. Friends of Sweden, it was us who were right! [...] And we will continue to be right and to do what is right (Sveriges Television, 2019, author’s translation).

This rhetoric is a step back from the Rousseauian–Herderian understanding of equal recognition, because it does not acknowledge that the quality of one’s own (legitimate) need for being recognised depends on the worth ascribed to others within a community as legitimate recognisers (Smith, 2012, p. 10). Winners need losers; the master needs the slave. Defining the political opponent as an enemy who is after one’s self-worth disables this central mechanism – and lets the demand for restoring an allegedly once existing level of equal recognition “slide over into a demand for recognition of the group’s superiority” (Fukuyama, 2018a, p. 22).

## 5. Conclusion: whither ‘immigrant integration’?

The discussion above reveals that imaginaries of ‘immigrant integration’ among mainstream politics and research and the PRR considerably overlap with each other in relation to their respective logics of recognition. Both of them respond to tensions between individuals and groups inherent in liberal-democratic cultures and diverse societies, exacerbated by the growing trend towards emphasising the ‘particular’ over the ‘equal’, and severing them from each other (see Fukuyama, 2018a, p. 90).

Through restrictive means they seek to make the complexities of modern social life with its multiple demands for recognition legible, and thus controllable. Both the political ‘mainstream’ and the PRR externalise the ‘abnormal’ and emphasise the need to control the boundary between distinctly *national* societies and (deviant) immigrants in order to uphold a purified, positive image of the former.

Granted, the never-ending story of mainstream integration politics promises to eliminate the other’s deviance *eventually*, even if this promise is projected into the future indefinitely. There are also promising developments in the scholarly and policy discourse that point towards new ways of imagining post-national and superdiverse societies, in particular in urban areas as experimental spaces.

The populist radical right, by contrast, *depends* on maintaining the gap permanently to uphold the antagonism between the (national) people and the elites/outgroups. At the same time, the PRR benefits from the never-ending story perpetuated by the mainstream because it legitimises the idea that there may indeed be differences between immigrants, their communities and (the rest of) society that are, ultimately, irreconcilable.

If mainstream politics (with its supposedly good intentions) is serious about limiting the political influence of the PRR as an allegedly deviant form of democratic politics, it needs to reflect on how much it contributes to imaginations of ‘society’ that allow the latter to appeal to (legitimate) concerns over growing diversity in European societies (Schain, 2018, p. 6). Nothing less than the imagination of new ways of living together is at stake (Schinkel, 2019, p. 1). The above discussion suggests three important steps towards achieving such an imagination.

*First*, an alternative approach to the etymological meaning of integration – ‘making something whole’ – needs to be developed, one that can account for the *entanglements* that shape modern European societies. ‘Rethinking integration’ does not necessarily mean that the nation state itself needs to be overcome. Rather than writing the ‘national’ *out of it*, it is about writing the local, regional, and supranational *into it* as additional paths of thinking about conviviality.

*Second*, as a precondition for step one, an *awareness* of the problematic society/immigrant dualism and how it renders conflicts invisible needs to be mainstreamed across disciplines, policies, and levels of governance. Integration, as Ralf Dahrendorf suggested more than 60 years ago, needs to be linked to the management of conflict (1958). These conflicts are not between ‘society’ and ‘immigrants’, but between

genders, classes, races, ethnicities, ideologies, etc., and remain invisible if otherness is located outside 'society' and attributed to those who are subjected to demands for integration. Making these conflicts visible and managing them adequately is also key to disrupting the logic of recognition promoted by the populist radical right.

*Third*, managing these conflicts effectively requires a new understanding of dealing with uncertainty as opposed to controlling the boundaries between 'society' and its (abnormal) 'outside'. This is perhaps the most important contribution made by the concept of superdiversity and its emphasis on the multiplication of differentiations that may, indeed, soon make the measuring of immigrants' 'integration into society' unfeasible.

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