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Monographic Section

Contesting 'Integration': Personal-Experience Narratives of Scotland's Immigrants

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Abstract. This article unpacks 'integration' by problematizing the term's nebulous usage in political contexts and by re-examining it through the personal-experience narratives of immigrants in North-East Scotland. By focusing on three emergent narrative themes, the article explores how immigrants recount and make sense of their own experiences and encounters with integration. It considers the concept with relation to other immigrants, Scottish society more generally, and British migration policy. Emphasizing the creative narrative expressions of those most affected by wider discussions of integration, the author calls for the use of ethnographic methods to better examine immigration and integration from a ground-level perspective.

Keywords: migration, integration, Scotland, narrative, Folklore, Ethnology.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'integration' in the context of migration is problematic, rarely defined, and dependent on simplistic interpretations of societal structure and interaction. This article contests hegemonic conceptualisations of integration and examines the idea through extracts from the personal-experience narratives of immigrants in North-East Scotland. I begin by rationalizing my use of the creatively expressed life stories of individuals to inform understandings of migration on a micro and macro level. I then describe the ethnographic context, explain my methodologies, and clarify my usage of terms such as 'immigrant' and 'narrative'. After giving examples and problematizing the use of the term 'integration' in political and academic contexts, I turn to my contributors' narratives and try to understand how individual immigrants understand the concept. Specifically, I look at integration through three themes that are emergent in the narratives of my contributors:

'adapting by not looking back'; 'imposed communities'; 'exclusion and disintegration'.

Though the term ‘integration’ is not always directly used by my contributors, their narratives reflect notions of integration both in terms of what they consider to be their responsibilities as immigrants, and what they feel is imposed on them by the nation state, the communities they have moved to, and fellow immigrants. In this article I do not propose specific changes to migration policy. Rather, I aim to problematize the concept of integration itself, and to prioritize the voices of immigrants who are affected in myriad ways by ambiguous calls for ‘integration’.

MAN THE STORYTELLER

In his essay ‘The Problems of Categories of Folk Prose’, the German folklorist Kurt Ranke (1967 coins the term *Homo narrans*, that is, man the storyteller. He writes that

Homo narrans is, at one and the same time, the representative of humanity, the representative of humanity’s wishes, dreams. [...] Homo narrans is directly involved in the great creative processes of the human spirit. (15)

We are all members of *Homo narrans*, and as such we are natural, innate storytellers, each of us making our own creative contributions to the ‘human spirit’. Telling stories is how we make sense of the world, and how we try to give order to the chaos that is our everyday lives (Nicolaisen, 1993: 61 Every day each of us creatively crafts stories. Through story we share our hopes, our regrets, our fears, our epiphanies, and even the banalities of our everyday lives. Academics are, of course, not immune. We tell our family and friends of our time at work, we make (or breakbonds with our colleagues by telling personal-experience narratives of our lives, of our research and fieldwork. As a folklorist and ethnologist, and most specifically, a narrative scholar, this creative response to and interaction with everyday life is at the heart of what I study. If telling stories is, indeed, how we make sense of the quotidian, how can we hope to make sense of macro-level issues without at least considering their micro-level responses? By examining life through the intimate voices and contexts of its actors, we can learn a great deal about broader concepts like immigration and integration.

And who are the actors in this particular study, then? The people I have interviewed come from a wide variety of nationalities, from Western and Eastern Europe, from Africa, Asia, and the Americas. The ages of my contributors range from eighteen to eighty. One person I interviewed had been in Scotland a week, and another had been there for forty-five years. Why focus on such a disparate group of contributors? Occupation-, gender-, and nationality-based studies have been the focus of much immigrant research across disciplines, as seen in works such as *The Bracero Experience* by María Herrera-Sobek (1979), Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo’s *Gendered Transitions* (1994), and Anna De Fina’s *Identity in Narrative* (2003). But though these are highly useful prisms through which to explore immigration, I try to understand the broader notion of immigrant experience itself through the thematic links that exist in the stories of immigrants’ everyday experiences, no matter their nationality, gender, or occupation. My argument is that some of the underlying concepts of these narratives – like the idea of ‘home’ or, in this case, the concept of ‘integration’ – are applicable to immigrants of any nationality, profession, class, or gender.

This is not an attempt to deny individual experience or privilege or neglect the multiplicity of personal and collective contexts. Reflexively, I recognize my own clear privilege as a white, male immigrant to Scotland with both French and American passports. Clearly the experiences of someone who comes to the UK for work or education will be vastly different from those of, for example, an asylum seeker, and the differences in the stories they tell (or do not wish to tell), will reflect that¹. That experiential and intersectional difference does not negate, however, that some thematic overlap does exist across these personal-experience narratives. By examining individual narratives from a wide range of immigrants, I hope to emphasize the universal ability to creatively express our unique life experiences through narrative. By listening to these voices and recognizing their distinctiveness and commonalities, I aim to better understand immigrant experience as a whole. Through this

¹ See Shuman and Bohmer (2004) for an exploration of the internal and external pressures that exist in political-asylum narratives.

concept-based categorization of my research, I choose to focus on fieldwork-derived theory, and thereby contributor-derived theory, as opposed to theory-derived fieldwork. In other words, to understand immigration, I speak to those who have experienced it and then consider it on their terms.

The contributors I have spoken to have all spoken to me in English. This means, of course, that they are at least somewhat linguistically 'integrated', though the linguistic context of the North-East of Scotland is perhaps more nuanced than it may at first seem, due to its distinctive dialect of Scots (McColl Millar 2007). For obvious practical reasons I have been unable to conduct interviews in the dozens of native languages of my contributors, and though this significantly narrows the category of individual with whom I have spoken, I am confident that common emergent themes such as 'home', and 'integration' would appear in any language, even if the discussion of such concepts may differ depending on linguistic context. My research is qualitative, based on ethnographic interviews, auto-ethnography, and participant observation. It is not empirical and does not attempt to be representative of the demographic diversity of immigrants in Scotland. It is not meant to usurp quantitative studies or macro-level theories about migration but rather to complement that type of research with ground-based fieldwork. Recorded ethnographic interviews, of course, imply audiences beyond just the fieldworker and contributor (Sawin 2004). While these narratives emerged from conversations between me and my contributors, in many ways the contributors were speaking not just to me, but to the people who have shaped their lives and experiences, and beyond that to the unknown audiences who might one day listen to the recording (or read extracts in a publication).

I am aware that while I am putting forward the importance of immigrants' own words, in this written context their voices are inaudible, stuck to the page through transcription and thus disconnected from the tonality, gestures, and facial expressions that are so important to interpersonal communication. These transcriptions are only my interpretation of the recordings of our conversations, and the implications thereof have been examined by ethno-graphers for decades (Fine 1994; see also Hymes 1981). These discussions are beyond the scope of this article but my revised verbatim transcriptions have been created to present the contributors' words as accurately and accessibly as possible. Further, these extracts are framed on either side by other extracts and my own text and analysis. In pre-senting them in this way, I recognise that I have cut them off from their original dialogic context. Folklorist Patricia Sawin (2004) addresses this in her own long-term ethnographic work, writing:

I admittedly create the larger text that frames Eldreth's stories. While she "speaks" copiously in the following pages, I cannot deny the effects of my selection and shaping on what readers "hear." I nevertheless have faith that, in this thoroughly dialogized text, her self-depiction will necessarily exceed and escape my control. (21)

Readers should therefore keep in mind the written context and surrounding academic framework of these extracts, while recognizing that these printed voices can and do 'exceed and escape' some of the limitations placed upon them.

DEFINING TERMS

The term *narrative* is so widespread across disciplines now that it can be tempting to apply it to any form of expressive language, whether written or oral. My own research is concerned primarily with oral personal-experience narratives. The American folklorist Sandra Dolby Stahl (1989) defines personal narratives as having three features: 1) dramatic narrative structure, 2) a consistently implied assertion that the narrative is true, and 3) a protagonist who is the narrator (p. 15). This definition, which I happily accept, is applicable to large sections of the creative, expressive language I have recorded in my interviews, though some of it – as has been noted by other scholars examining narratives of immigrant experience (Maeva 2015) – may be said to be missing a dramatic narrative structure, unless seen in the greater context of implied experience and/or the interview as a whole.

I define *immigrant* in its simplest, most unadorned form, as someone who moves from one country to another. Definitions of 'immigrant' which consider permanence in the place of immigration or intention to settle to

be inarguable characteristics seem to me to be a poor fit for contemporary realities. Lives are not predictable, and immigrant experiences can be felt by people who do not fulfil the requisites of time-based or intent-based definitions. I have interviewed people who were certain they would retire in Scotland who have since left, and I know others – myself included – who came for one year only to find themselves still in Scotland a decade later. Standard definitions of immigrant also miss out on the growing number of people I have come to call ‘peripatetic immigrants’ (Le Bigre 2015). Peripatetic immigrants – and I include myself among them – are those immigrants who do not only move from place A to place B, but also to C and D, back to B, and so on. Their lived experience mimics that of other immigrants, but the processes and consequences of immigration are reset and repeated throughout their lives.

This simple definition of ‘immigrant’ intentionally disregards inconsistent government-ordained categories of immigration, residency, asylum, and so on, in which some people are deemed ‘legal’ or ‘illegal’ depending on changing government policies. Largely because of such political contexts and constraints, the term ‘immigrant’ is not without controversy; some of my contributors use it as a label quite freely while others eschew the term. I use it, then, not as a political label, but as a pragmatic description of people who move and who experience this movement in innumerable ways. The term ‘immigrant’ derives back to the Latin participle of *immigrare*, made up of *im-* ‘to remove, go into, move in’ and *migrare*, ‘to move from place to place, to pass into a new condition or form’ (OED). The word expresses not just movement but implies agency², and emphasizes both coming *into* and *being changed* by a place. It nicely sets up the question: what is it to move to a new place? Or in other words, what is it to be an immigrant today?

CONTESTING ‘INTEGRATION’

The term ‘integration’ is regularly used by scholars, individuals, the media, politicians, and governmental agencies, but it is rarely defined. Government reports are replete with sentences like ‘at the national level, there is limited scope for either robust quantification or monetization of the impacts of migration on cohesion and integration’ (Migration Advisory Committee 2018: 99), but these reports almost never offer a definition for integration. For such a seemingly ubiquitous term definitions must seem superfluous, but we must think more critically about the terms we use. Some scholarship does consider integration (and the related, though separate, concept of ‘assimilation’) critically, but still focuses on how integration can be used to shape society and policy (Pfeffer 2014), rather than on unpacking the term itself. What exactly do we mean by integration? For whom and what reasons are we employing the term? And are the societies to which individuals are asked to integrate truly ‘integrated’ themselves?

Tony Blair (2019), former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, wrote the foreword to a report on integration prepared by his Tony Blair Institute for Global Change. In it he writes that,

Politics has failed to find the right balance between diversity and integration. On the one hand, failures around integration have led to attacks on diversity and are partly responsible for a reaction against migration. On the other hand, the word ‘multiculturalism’ has been misinterpreted as meaning a justified refusal to integrate, when it should never have meant that. Particularly now, when there is increasing evidence of far-right bigotry on the rise, it is important to establish the correct social contract around the rights and duties of citizens, including those who migrate to our country. (3)

Blair maintains that immigrants have neglected implicit social contracts and that flawed national policies have allowed them to enter British society without imposing an expectation of integration. He does not define what integration is, or what successful integration looks like. His nebulous usage of the term integration assumes two things: 1) that each immigrant ‘community’ is monolithic in culture, intent, and experience, and 2) that all citizens of the destination country itself – in this case the United Kingdom – are integrated.

² Agency here does not refer necessarily to agency in coming to a new country (many people do not have such agency and come due to reasons outwith their control). Rather, it reflects the agency – however limited – one has in responding to life in a new country.

As to the first point, I have interviewed several individuals whose personal-experience narratives of immigration reflect a strong feeling of not belonging to their wider national 'community', despite linguistic and ethnic links. Some examples are given below in the narrative extracts on the theme of 'imposed communities'.

Blair's implicit second point – that all citizens of the UK are integrated – is made explicit when he continues with the words: 'there is a duty to integrate, to accept the rules, laws and norms of our society that all British people hold in common and share' (3). But is that a fair claim in a country in which, for example, a famously rigid class system often prevents working-class people from 'integrating' and participating fully in wider society? Or in which people of black and minority ethnic backgrounds are continually reminded that, for some, the term 'British people' only includes them when politically expedient? The lack of internal societal integration in society is not a new idea. We can go back to Émile Durkheim's (1897) ground-breaking sociological work *Le Suicide*, or as recently as the best-selling polemic, *Poverty Safari* (McGarvey 2018), to see clear evidence of a lack of internal societal 'integration'.

In other words, those like Blair who speak comfortably of people having to integrate do so because they have the societal privilege to pretend that the societies in which they live are integrated. To give a historic Scottish example, we need only look at the othering of Gaelic Highlanders within Scotland until these 'wild people' were tamed by Romantic Nationalism and notions of the noble savage, most famously exemplified when Sir Walter Scott organized festivities to welcome King George IV to Edinburgh in 1822. Many citizens of Edinburgh, who a few decades earlier would have scoffed at their Highland compatriots, attended the festivities wearing Highland kilts, thus not only integrating the idea of the Highlander as part of the wider construct of Scottish society, but appropriating and misrepresenting Highland culture, as well (Zuelow 2006).

Finally, regardless of an individual's efforts to integrate, nation states' interpretations of whether one is integrated or not are highly changeable (Pedroza, 2020). This can be seen in recent European Union integration policies that only target non-EU citizens on the assumption that citizens from other EU states are already integrated, reinforcing notions of unified European identity (Bărbulescu 2015), just as Blair reinforces ideas of Britishness that may or may not be wholly adopted across the four countries of the United Kingdom. In the British context, European Union citizens like myself were, until recently, bureaucratically integrated into British society – we had a right to live, work, and settle in the country, with the only exclusion being national voting rights. With the complications and uncertainties of Brexit, EU citizens now find themselves officially as 'other'. EU citizens who want to remain in the UK must apply for what is termed settled status – no matter how many years they have been legally resident. (I explore this further through an extract in the 'exclusion and disintegration' category.) Infamously, in the case of the so-called 'Windrush Generation', this changing governmental definition of who is and is not British and politically integrated has had devastating consequences (Gentleman 2019). Changing the integrated status of individuals and communities following political whims is not new – for another historical example from the other side of the world from Scotland, we can look at the Ainu people of Hokkaido in northern Japan, who only began to be considered integrated and Japanese when the Japanese government wished to reinforce claims of sovereignty in the face of its Russian neighbor in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries (Loy 2015). In this way, integration is often only addressed as a matter of political convenience, veiled in vague claims of the benefits of societal or cultural integration.

Astute readers will notice that though I have expressed my misgivings, I have not offered my own definition of integration. This is by design. As I have explained, the term implies a homogeneity that can never exist in any society. Its application is sporadic and dependent more on those requesting integration than on those being requested to integrate. If a society itself is not integrated, there is therefore no 'standard' to which to integrate. Integration, then, can only ever be inconsistent in definition and application, and its dynamic states mean that integration can be fleeting, whether from the perspectives of individuals or governments. Further, all too often, integration is presented as a goal and task for immigrants themselves, ignoring the key roles played by the nation state, transnational political contexts, and local communities.

PERSONAL-EXPERIENCE NARRATIVES

If folklorists have one particular skill within our ethnographic skill set, it is the ability to listen. There is an old joke about the folklorist's response to the question: what exactly does a folklorist do for a living? The answer goes something like 'We go to people's homes, drink their tea, and obligingly eat whatever they feed us'. Though it is a humorous simplification, it underscores our ethnographic duty of listening to people in the context of their everyday lives, all while recognizing their creative contributions to the world around them. I am keen therefore to move on to some of the voices I have listened to over several years, as it is through their words that I have tried to gain a ground-level perspective on integration.

The themes of integration I discuss ('adapting by not looking back', 'imposed communities', 'exclusion and disintegration'), have been selected not because they are the sole emergent themes one might fashion from my contributors' life stories, but because they richly inform each other, and help us gain a better understanding of what 'integration' means to someone who has moved from one place to another. I begin with 'adapting by not looking back'. The gerund form of the verb to adapt is intentional, as my contributors' narratives emphasize the active aspect of adaptation. The following extracts focus particularly on the personal and collective responsibility these individuals feel to adapting to Scotland, and how part of this responsibility is one of not looking back but looking forward.

One woman living in Aberdeen and who is originally from India³, told me:

I think it is important to respect the customs where you're living. [...] Like, I'm living in Scotland so I need to respect Scottish customs. I need to respect Scottish people. And, I... I should make it a point, and I should try myself... I should try my best to get integrated in the society. Not just be with Indians and follow Indian customs, but you need to know what are Scottish customs, what Scottish people think, what are different stories, myths, and legends and things like that. So I'm very much interested in that. We had this big event, I was talking about, last month when we had three hundred people, so we wanted to make sure that people understand that even if you're Marathi by birth, you're immigrated to some other society and you need to accept that. So we had a *ceilidh* night there. So we had Marathi programmes as well. We had a *ceilidh* night organized. And people just loved it! I mean, they enjoyed it a lot, and even the *ceilidh* band, they were very happy, and they said, "We've never played for so many Indians".

In this quote, the responsibility for adaptive integration into Scottish society is not just presented as an individual one, but as a collective responsibility of all Marathi people in Aberdeen. The incorporation of Scottish cultural practices such as a *ceilidh* night reflects the active adaptation that the contributor feels is necessary to 'get integrated in the society'. She emphasizes that it is not simply about learning about and practicing Scottish culture, but accepting that, as immigrants, they have moved away from India to another country and must live within the confines of Scottish society. The quote from the Scottish *ceilidh* band implies approval from the wider Scottish community, suggesting in this context a successful step towards integration. The adapting described here is presented as a positive and responsible act, but there is the implication that those who do not accept and take on this responsibility do not respect Scottish society or the other immigrants from their wider ethnic community.

This sense of needing to accept one's new status in a different country in order to be integrated is reinforced in this quote from Ade, from Nigeria, who says:

I've been to a Nigerian church here before. And in that church there was, like, people – Asian people, people from Aberdeen – and the pastor was just talking about Nigeria all the time. And I was like, "You're not in Nigeria, mister!" You know what I mean? You understand. I was, I was getting angry.

³ Unlike anthropologists and sociologists, folklorists – focusing as we do on people's creative outputs – like to credit our contributors' achievements and narratives, and so we tend to eschew anonymisation (Glassie and Truesdell, 2008). Most of my contributors have given me permission to use their full names so as to be credited, but in this case my contributor has asked me not to use her name. Due to the sensitive nature of what is being discussed in many of these quotes, I have decided for this article to only use first names or no name at all, even when permission has been given.

His frustration is directed at the pastor and other Nigerians who he feels cling too much to their lives in Nigeria. By looking back to Nigeria, Ade implies that they are rejecting their present life in Scotland, and are neglecting their responsibility to integrate to their new society. Pride in integration and not needing to look back to one's home country is not uncommon. Tomasz, a Polish-born resident in Aberdeen, expresses such pride by demonstrating his ability to dismiss advice his family and friends gave him before he moved to Scotland.

But, the thing was that other people who were speaking with me about Aberdeen who are in Poland, and who actually had never been in Scotland – they were saying some different things to me, and kind of.... For example, that in August it would be -15 degrees here, you know, and it'd be very, very cold. [*Laughter*] So here was me coming here with all my winter jackets and stuff. [...] Actually, half of my luggage... [*Laughs*] It's funny, half of my luggage was filled with canned food from Poland. [*Laughs*] Here's me again, you know, getting all these worries from other people, you know, like "oh the food there will be terrible – you won't be able to eat", you know. "Better get as much as is possible Polish food", you know. So, honestly, half of my luggage was like twenty cans of food or something, which I actually never really even touched them. I just gave them away to other people.

Adapting to Scotland is presented by Tomasz's friends and family as an obstacle to his good health and happiness, whereas looking back to Poland is seen as a key to survival. These cautionary stories indicate that Scotland is a very different place, difficult to live in, and, by implication, a place where integration will be difficult and where cultural links will need to be maintained in order to survive. Tomasz's response is to laugh when remembering this. Recounting stories like this can be cathartic, allowing the teller to feel pride at the idea of not needing to look back, of being able to adapt and overcome the obstacles foreseen in such warnings. In a sense, by heeding and then ignoring the advice of his advisors, Tomasz demonstrates to himself and to Scottish people that he has taken the first steps to adapting and integrating into his new country.

But other contributors find that looking back is key to maintaining one's mental and emotional health as well as cultural links. This is the case for Sarah, who moved from England to Scotland⁴.

I mean that initial "can't breathe" feeling took a couple of weeks to settle and so eventually the water got to my chin rather than my nostrils, and slowly, slowly, slowly the levels go down. I guess it took me... well over a year. I would say two, maybe three years to start to feel... really easier in my heart about it. If you spoke to my children now, they all have perfectly OK lives, but one of them would go back tomorrow. The other one, the second one, would think hard about it and would probably go back. And only the third one would probably rather stay here now. And that's after five years. So, I don't know whether that's our fault, because we, we have family and friends there. We're regularly down there [in England]. They're still in touch with their old friends and their cousins, so maybe if we didn't do that, if, you know, like, if you go somewhere and you're only visiting your old place, maybe once every eighteen months or two years, maybe you don't keep those links as much. But we certainly have kept up our links. So, I don't know, maybe we've done a disservice to our children? But... I'm very happy that they still have so many friends, and so many people who want to see them when we go back down.

Sarah adeptly considers both sides of this notion of looking back, considering the possible negative consequences it has had on her children's feelings of integration in Scotland, while also being thankful that her children can look back to their lives, family, and friends in England and feel genuine connection. Perhaps the perfect compromise can be found in her youngest child who would probably 'rather stay' in Scotland, but who is comfortable with the family's links to England and the religious and cultural communities there that Sarah makes clear are of importance to her in the rest of our conversation.

That Sarah describes this context of adaptation through her children is significant. It is not unusual in the stories of my contributors that those with children are most likely to find compromise between 'adapting' and 'looking back'. Olga, a peripatetic immigrant from Russia who eventually made her way to Scotland after living in Germany and Switzerland, brings up a similar point when she tells me that during her life in those countries,

⁴ My definition of 'immigrant' is open to a wide range of people. When Sarah contacted me to be interviewed, despite qualifying herself as an outsider and not an immigrant, I happily agreed because she was facing and describing many of the same topics mentioned by other contributors. Again, the narrative themes of moving from one place to another are what interest me, though I recognize that intranational migration can be significantly different from international migration.

I just wanted more to integrate to the country that I was in. But here [in Scotland], because of the daughter who was growing, and I wanted her to speak Russian, first of all, I opened this Russian school. [...] And it's not because I wanted it. It's not because that I think, "Oh, I'm Russian. I want to have these contacts only." [...] No. It was just, it happens with me without my special will.

Having felt integrated in Germany and Switzerland, Olga now feels the need to look back to Russia and its language and culture when raising her daughter in Scotland. There is no reason at all, of course, that this would preclude her adapting to Scottish society, but Olga recounts this detail of her life with a hint of self-conscious worry, clarifying that she did not set out to have only Russian contacts and that her involvement with other Russians in Aberdeen was more by accident than by design.

Olga's words nicely inform the next theme, that of 'imposed communities'. The tendency by government officials, journalists, British-born residents, and immigrants themselves to pigeonhole immigrants within national and ethnic 'communities' is the source of some frustration for a number of my contributors, some of whom indicate that ascribing individuals to 'communities' flattens the inherent differences that exist within any group. And though most contributors indulge Scots' interpretations of immigrant 'communities', they reserve particular frustration for immigrants from their own national background who attempt to impose rigid constructs of community on them.

One contributor, who is Malay and Muslim, answered in the following way when I asked him if he spent time with other Malaysians in Scotland:

I struggle with Malaysians who are Malays, who are generally Muslims. Because I think [...] they tend to judge you if you don't do or behave as they do. At least this is my opinion. You know, so, I find it quite difficult to get along, really. So, I find myself getting along better with the non-Malays, you know, Malaysians, like Chinese Malaysian or Indian Malaysian.

He resents attempts by other Malays in Scotland to impose their rigid interpretation of a Malay community – and associated expectations of behavior – onto him. As a result, he intentionally seeks out non-Malay Malaysians, and, as he tells me elsewhere in the interview, also Scots and people of other nationalities. Julia, from Poland, likewise expresses her difficulties 'integrating' with Aberdeen's 'Polish community', a construct which in many ways seems imposed upon her:

Polish people usually, when, when they meet me the first time, if, if we do have some common interests then we talk about that, and you know, it's fine. And then when they learn that I'm training to be a Church of Scotland minister, they're like, "Oh. Right." They just don't know what to do about it. In Poland... Poland is 98 per cent Roman Catholic, so they just don't even realize there's anything else in the world other than the Roman Catholic Church. And I know they realize that Scotland is slightly different, but I think it's, it comes as a shock to them that one of their people might be on the other side! [Laughter] So, sometimes it is the end of a friendship. [Laughs] Because they just... You know, it's just too much for them.

In these two examples, the internal integration of immigrant communities that is often assumed both by immigrants and non-immigrants, is put into question. These constructed and imposed communities enforce a rigidity on the daily life of immigrants that can cause emotional harm to those who do not feel 'integrated', whether by their choice or that of their peers. In both the examples above, the narrators express how they feel rejected by, or different to, other immigrants of their nationality. Immigrants I have spoken to who express such frustrations often pro-actively try to adapt to Scottish society to side-step imposed communities, as seen in some of the 'adapting by not looking back' examples above. In many cases, though, despite these adaptative attempts, interactions with locals or the bureaucratic arms of government policies remind them that their integrated status is not decided by them.

This brings us to our final theme, of 'exclusion' and 'disintegration'. In Julia's case, her religion causes tensions with other Polish residents, but it also allows her to feel integrated to some degree with local Scots. In some instances, Julia can feel both simultaneously integrated and excluded, as she explains when she reveals the xenophobia of a Scottish woman with whom she volunteered. She tells me:

I was working under, under a lady who was incredibly rude. I actually thought that I'm going to give up entirely and just leave then, then and there, because she was really rude, and she was really dismissive, and I just hated it. And I thought, "I'm a volunteer, and you should show some respect". But then after some time she, she came back yet again, and for some reason – God only knows why – she decided to ask me what I did. So I said I was the probationary minister [at the local] church. And suddenly she was my best friend. She said, if I want time off, then she's going to take over my duties and I can go and do whatever. She'll be more than happy to help. And I thought "This is so hypocritical". This was just, awful, awful, awful. [...] I thought "This is in many ways so typical." And I just hate it. Because I, I try and treat people well, regardless of who they are. I know that it's easier to like somebody and respect them if you know what they do, and if you've got some common interests. And I do realize we all fall into this trap, but, but this is just bad. This is wrong. Especially from my Christian point of view. I mean, God loves us all the same way. We should treat one another the same way! What's the big deal that I'm a minister? I, I'm a person! And you should respect me the way I am. So, there's some of my frustrations. [*Laughter*]

In this case the Scottish woman excludes Julia by lumping her in with the very Poles who might not see her as one of their own. No matter where Julia turns, it seems, she is excluded. This exclusion becomes integration when the woman realizes Julia's connection to the local church, but Julia understands the woman's hypocrisy. In this single xenophobic and hypocritical act, the woman emphasizes Julia's inability to integrate no matter her efforts.

If native-born residents, like the woman in the above example, purportedly imagine integration as the end-goal for immigrants, many narratives bely this claim by noting instances in which local institutions, councils, or businesses have actively worked against integration, as in this story from Riza. Riza originally comes from Turkey and is married to a Scottish woman, with Scottish-born children. He owns a small business, speaks English, and is a good example of someone who has strived to adapt to the local community. He tells me:

You know my English is not so perfect. Not so good. Not perfect. And people can understand straightaway from my accent I am foreign. So I was phoning many different, different places. "Excuse me, I see on advert this street, this number, there is a shop I like to rent now." "Oh, it's gone. It's gone." One, two, three, four, five, six, seven – whenever I phone, they are all gone! Eventually, I said my wife, "Excuse me. But I phone, I phoned one number. I, I asked for one shop." She said, "Oh, it's under offer now", you know. I say, "Very bizarre. Three months this shop was – four months, maybe year – was empty!" I said my wife, "Can you phone for me please? Can you ask?" You know what they say straightaway? "Oh. I'll send you details." But don't get me wrong. I am not complaining. I am not saying they are racist, discrimination that... I am not talking about this one.

Though Riza is, by all accounts, integrated linguistically, financially, and socially within wider Scottish society, something as simple as trying to rent a shop reveals that he can easily be 'disintegrated'. This 'disintegration' is impossible to overcome no matter what Riza does. Racism manifests itself and undoes all of the work that Riza has put into actively integrating to Scottish society. In this case, then, integration relies not on the agency of the individual, but on the willingness of locals to accept newcomers. Later on in the interview, Riza emphasised his rejection of the possibility that he was discriminated against by leaning into the microphone and making it explicitly clear that he was fond of his country of immigration:

But, I can't complain. No. Thank God. God save the queen; God save the Scotland. [*Laughter*]

Aware that integration is expected of them, many immigrants with whom I have spoken often rationalise incidents of racism and xenophobia, making sure not to imply that all Scots would treat them this way, or even generously giving an excuse on behalf of the perpetrator of the racist and xenophobic acts. By doing this, they politely raise issues regarding locals in a careful way that guards them against criticism, and importantly, in a way that demonstrates their continued eagerness to integrate.

Beyond outright racism, there are other means by which people who feel integrated can suddenly find themselves 'disintegrated'. Societal mechanisms such as public policy and bureaucratic regulations can very easily negate one's efforts at adapting, making it clear that integration is an impossible task. Sepideh, who came to Aberdeen from Tehran, describes such a situation:

When I, before sorting out this visa, I used to receive like ten e-mails from HR always threatening that, "Oh, do you know that your

visa expires? And, you know, you would be considered as an illegal, you know, working blabla.” And I’m like, “Yes. I know it very well, thanks to you!” But, I just didn’t like that approach. Because it is like, it is... There’s a certain level of negativity against that, whenever that word ‘immigration’ comes up. So, you know... And it’s funny, because on an everyday life, you know, people are really nice to you. You know, you don’t feel that you are different, but then, deep inside you know because you are dealing with all these limitations and problems.

That last line is particularly relevant and poignant in demonstrating that integration is often out of one’s control. This lingering feeling of being different, and therefore Sepideh’s hope to be considered equal and integrated in Scottish society, is intensified by bureaucratic regulations which consistently show her and her colleagues that her time in Scotland is not guaranteed, and that she is not integrated in the eyes of the nation state.

Vera was raised in East Germany and now lives in North-East Scotland. She explicitly discusses how British-governmental policy excludes her assumed status as an integrated European Union citizen in Scotland.

If all this talk about depriving European citizens of, of, you know, benefits takes any shape, I already told my [British] husband, “I am out of here”. Then, you know, they can, kind of, leave Britain to itself and close the door behind them. I don’t want to be some sort of second-class citizen here. Because I, I didn’t come here under these... I came here because I thought, you know, as a member of, of a... as a citizen of a member state of the European Union I am within my full rights to be here, otherwise I wouldn’t have been here. I wouldn’t have moved here. And if those conditions change then, you know, I’m out of here.

Interestingly, I conducted this interview well before the Brexit referendum, but Vera clearly expresses the frustrations of European Union citizens who feel like they are part of British society, that they have fulfilled all the unwritten requirements of successful integration, but who are now realizing that the British government is changing their integrated status before their very eyes. Vera, who speaks immaculate English, who contributes to Britain both economically and intellectually, finds herself unwelcome in the country to which she has devoted her energies, in which she has made her home, and where she has raised her children.

CONCLUSION

If we are to begin to define and critically consider this nebulous term of ‘integration’, we must take into account that integration does not always mean the same thing to individuals, scholars, or national governments. Its meaning and application are as dynamic and diverse as the transnational political contexts in which integration is so often mentioned. Often, the term ‘integration’ is simply used as a societal or political tool to ostracize diverse groups that are mistakenly seen as monolithic. Integration is not simply enacted through the agency of immigrants like Tomasz and Ade, or through the cultural networks like those that exist for Marathi Indians in Aberdeen. It can be both politically imposed or retracted by administrative powers or by individuals through everyday acts of recognition or xenophobia.

These contributors’ creatively expressed narratives demonstrate the nuanced understanding immigrants have of the concept of integration. In actively ‘adapting’ to a new country, by resisting ‘imposed communities’, or in being ‘excluded and disintegrated’ by acts of xenophobia or public policy, immigrants navigate integration as best they can, never sure when or how other immigrants, locals, or governmental policies will stand in their way. By describing their experiences and structuring them as narratives, immigrants are able to make sense of the complex world around them. Recognizing these creative outputs of our fellow members of *Homo narrans* allows scholars to better understand the sentiments and experiences of individuals moving to a new country. This more intimate ethnographic examination of immigrant life, this act of actively listening to and focusing on the voices of immigrants themselves, is an important and beneficial tool in our broader attempts to understand migration and the complex realities faced by immigrants in their everyday lives.

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