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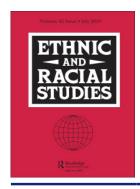
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SYMPOSIUM: ADRIAN FAVELL'S *THE INTEGRATION NATION*

The integration nation for empiricists

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ABSTRACT
Adrian Favell's *The Integration Nation* is a provocative book, inviting academics to think critically about the integration paradigm, a concept that supports entire fields of study in the processes of immigration, settlement, and citizenship in (Western) host societies. The text offers many points of agreement for critical theorists and positivist empirical scholars to agree upon, as well as opportunities for necessary reflection on our shared terminology. Where it falls short is in its characterization of the field, focussing almost exclusively on the contributions of sociology, to the detriment of a more accurate picture of the American case study and the field of integration studies more generally. Moreover, in neglecting to suggest ways to implement these very serious and important critiques, even if a reader agrees with Favell's sentiment, they are ultimately left without solutions, which inevitably preserves the status quo.

The Integration Nation is a provocative book. Its goal is to push the reader by challenging some of core, foundational constructs upon which an entire cottage industry of immigrant integration studies has been built. In this provocation, it succeeds in the extreme. Simply put, the jackhammer applied to the bedrock is that immigration scholars – from political theorists to empirically-oriented political scientists and demographers – need a "critical reflection on the use and centrality of integration as a concept" (4).

The book's chapters walk through each of Favell's critical concerns with integration. The first two centre and deconstruct the concept itself. Integration is flawed as a paradigm (Chapter 1) because mainstream work takes an "unquestioned linear view of immigration, integration and citizenship" (77) wherein it "simply assumes the object of study to be the objective process of transforming outsider 'immigrants' into insider 'citizens' of a pre-existing population container" (21). The concept of "integration nation" is also overly determined due to the "explicit agenda" (39) to generalize off

the American experience as a society built on immigration and assimilation. Comparative exercises are especially fraught because assimilation in the US is deeply racialized (Chapter 2).

The remaining chapters move from concept deconstruction to a critical reflection of its usage. Despite its problems, integration became further entrenched in academic circles – much to the pleasure of European governments and funders – through the "flimsy … typological approach" (74) of comparing national models (Chapter 3). Integration as a concept perpetuates deeply racialized structures, from statistics on ethnic minorities to reifying a type of "quasi-'indigeneity'" in the "production of a dominant majority population of 'natives'" (90) (Chapter 4). As the concept of integration becomes extended to transnational contexts in the 1990s, scholars erroneously believed on could be both at the same time, as if integration was a type of "property of the migrant" (Chapter 5). And, last, where "decolonization must go hand in hand with de-nationalization" (159), the best prospects for anything resembling integration are at the local level (Chapter 6). In terms of implications for academics, Favell suggests these problems – especially in light of the challenge posed by decolonial theory and movements – demand a fundamental rethink of core concepts in migration and ethnic and racial studies.

Let me start by highlighting points of agreement and, indeed, insights of true importance. First, Favell notes early that "what is missing" behind the idea of integration is a "theory of society" (11). To have integration, one must also have an idea of how and to what they are integrating *into*. Sometimes expectations are articulated formally in the requirements that a state attaches to legal status acquisition (Goodman 2014), but oftentimes they are implicit or as a set of intersubjective social norms (Goodman 2022). In their worst instantiations, implied goals are tools for perpetuating ascriptive, racial and class-based discrimination. So, if we leave aside the problematic use of terms to describe how "newcomers" "integrate" into a host "society," preserving unspoken expectations about what they are integrating into only exacerbates inequalities.

Favell goes on to note the implicit "theory of society invoked by the term [integration] is therefore prototypically the modern advanced (western) nation-state" (13). This is important in two ways. First, states may operate by different logics, where nation states themselves are post-Imperial *cum* colonial byproducts. Two, it reminds us that integration is an ongoing nation-building process. This suggests that integration is far closer to nationalism than liberal democratic champions may wish to acknowledge. In Favell's words: "The politics of immigration and integration have come to be one of the prime remaining ways in which nations are able to focus on sovereign nation building and nation hood" (55). Integration is also paradoxical in other ways. For instance, Favell writes that "integration is a modernist

concept … yet also inherently conservative, focussed on restoring stability and inclusiveness. It is the vision of building unity from diversity" (48).

Further, I think Favell rightly points out the problems in some of the key terminology of the field. Beyond integration, Favell calls out concepts like "native-born" and "native attitudes". Terminologically, they are clearly problematic, though they work conceptually (we know what they mean). The measurement of "mainstream" or "native" attitudes also becomes messy in operationalization, even more so when research strives for cross-national comparison. These points of agreement made me root for the argument. I was on Favell's side, I shared these sentiments, and I was eager to be convinced by the evidence. But this is where our agreement ended.

This is expressly a work of critical political theory, but Favell wants empiricists to read and engage with it. So, just to include a word on positionality: I am a comparativist who uses concepts like integration in my work. I use terms like "immigrant" and "native-born", and I often use survey data in my work that includes categories on ethnicity and race. I am also a positivist. I think that makes me the audience of this book and I read it taking Favell at his word that quantitative scholars should take these critiques seriously. But I simply did not recognize the empirical world that motivated Favell's argument. It read more like a narrower critique of certain sociologists and certain comparative approaches to integration studies that Favell attempted to widen to the interdisciplinary field as a whole. But, from my vantage point as a political scientist, the research world *as is* does not look similar. Of course, there are a whole host of *other* problems given the state of empirical research today, and one can agree with the argument and disagree with how it is demonstrated. But it was distracting to read a depiction and critique of literature that is incomplete and skewed.

Moreover, while I can read and engage with the text, it leaves little on how to implement these very serious and important critiques. To be sure, there is merit in sounding the alarm without having to put out a fire. But at the same time, calling for "language like immigration, integration and citizenship" to be "dismantled" (163) without guidelines or alternatives is a bit of a cop out. Favell may accuse me of excessive pragmatism, but I think it's hard to take on the important critiques offered here without any alternatives. This omission leaves the manuscript short of reaching its intended goal – a move toward change.

To begin with, in many ways, one gets the sense that this is not a critique about integration as a concept but rather how certain sociologists have developed theories of integration (e.g. assimilation theory) and tried to extend that theory to other cases. First, the audience here is meant to be integration scholars, but the insights primarily engage with sociologists. Favell is critical of sociological theory on assimilation and integration (e.g. Alba and Nee 2003; Portes and Zhou 1993), of the "convergent transatlantic

scholarship on immigrant integration" (Alba and Foner 2015) – which Favell seems to particularly dislike and which has already been the subject of public dissection (Koopmans 2013), the "standardization of integration" through the development of policy indices, citing only the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), and, especially, the use of statistics that reify and reinforce baseline understandings of a "native population" and a pre-supposed, pre-differentiated "other".

I think political scientists might share in Favell's frustration, which is why sociological grand theories, certain types of cross-national comparisons, and policy indices like MIPEX (see, for instance, Ruedin 2015) feature so infrequently in our work. Put another way, we share the view that these concerns generate problems. But this is also where the political science field has innovated and evolved. A lot of scholars do careful work on studying integration (Givens 2007), with different theoretical approaches (Hochschild et al. 2013), and which recently have been comprised of single-case studies that use a variety of experimental approaches as well as the study of administrative data (e.g. Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Pietrantuono 2017). I have also encountered several policy indexes that maintain fidelity of concept in cross-national contexts (e.g. Vink et al. 2021). And I should say this work – especially research that uses qualitative methods – is readily on display in sociology venues (e.g. Simonsen 2018). And cross-national studies – even those that include the US – of immigration attitudes, cross-pressures, and policy effects remain valuable (Dancygier and Laitin 2014). Simply put, I was not convinced by the force of Favell's conviction that dispensing with empirical approaches that test and develop theory, or rigorous cross-national comparisons, yields some sort of gain that exceeds the cost of lost knowledge.

Second, Favell observes a thorough "Americanization" of the integration paradigm – the "transatlantic convergence on an American model" (54). Through concept stretching and cross-national comparison, European nation-states are assimilated in the research paradigm to the American model (which is "progressive outcomes within a nationalist framework"), using immigration policy but also the idea of the immigrant to citizen pipeline itself as a "reaffirmation and recomposition of the nation-state" (29). I honestly could not tell if this critique allowed for any other type of accommodation strategy that isn't compared to the American experience. If just the idea of integration itself is American, that because of size and temporal sequencing America will serve as the baseline understanding of the concept no matter what, then there is no space for innovation. But the fact of the matter is people do move from one country to another, and they may thrive in their destination, plateau, or stall. How do we describe that? What is the appropriate inductive approach here?

There are other critiques of Favell's depiction of the American model (the quintessential "integration nation") worth mentioning, as it defines the paradigm for Favell. It may be the case that the US was historically influential in this space but does not seem to be the case anymore. Since rapid policy evolutions on the European continent – from integration requirements to Ministries of Integration – the US has never seemed more divergent in its laissez-faire, unregulated concept of integration. Moreover, the US's path to an "integration nation" means we are not comparing apples to apples. In Europe, the absence of integration is exclusion. In the US, the absence of integration was segregation – for Blacks that could not vote or eat in White restaurants, Native Americans who got citizenship in 1924, and Chinese immigrants who were barred from US citizenship as other immigrants had access until the Magnuson Act of 1943. These are programmatically distinct. The liberalism that emerged – and "globalized" – from the US Civil Rights movement may influence other national conversations and practices (Bleich 2003), but rhetorical diffusion is not policy transfer. America's path to integration is distinct. Maybe Favell would agree that *because* of this unique path it is even more inappropriate to use it as a baseline for the concept, but this is not the argument provided in the text.

In sum, I do not see scholars out there saying the US is a model for most any other country. This is so much the case that political scientists treat the study of race and ethnic politics (where US immigration would be "housed") as a distinct literature within the American politics subfield and separate from comparativists who do cross-national work. It is seldom that a comparativist includes the US alongside other countries, not merely because of disciplinary incentives to be "legible" but because the US is quite the outlier. In the past two decades, the trendline has unequivocally bent toward single-case, within-country analysis in data-rich countries like Norway, Denmark, and Switzerland (unrepresentative in the exact opposite direction to the US!).

But there remains a tension here. On the one hand, Favell condemns the extension of the US model abroad while, on the other, also abjures the idea of national models. He writes, "academics have … reified integration models and perpetuated empty comparative debates about their use and relevance" (63). Yes, the "idea of patterns linked to national models that reflect distinctive political cultures is rejected" (42), as are deductive approaches to comparison and simplistic notions of "multiculturalism" or "assimilationism", and many have written on this (e.g. Joppke 2010). But the idea that national institutional policy factors exert a meaningful and *distinct* force on social contexts, expectations, practices, opportunities, and costs is not dated or incorrect. If "thinking about society in integrationist terms" (40) is Americanist, then what do we afford other receiving societies? What alternatives are there? Alienation? Individuation? There is – at a minimum – descriptive

value in understanding what's going on, but Favell does not appear to make space for that.

Comparison remains important and valuable. Cross-national comparisons of immigrant integration provide a great opportunity for testing theory and building sound policy (Goodman 2023). For instance, recent research shows that Muslim immigrants to Canada are about as well integrated as Muslim immigrants to France (Reitz, Simon, and Laxer 2017), which – if anything – should temper how much academics uphold Canada as some sort of idealized, multicultural paradise . This is an important set of findings, and Favell's anti-empiricism moves us in the wrong direction.

There are other observations in the text that left me puzzled. Favell takes issue with the use of "gaps" – measuring an immigrants achievement compared to a native-born counterpart – as a benchmark for evaluating integration. There are certainly problems with this approach (Goodman and Wright 2015), but this is not an ubiquitous approach. For instance, Harder et al. (2018) use a "contrasted groups approach" (see also Adida, Laitin, and Valfort 2016). A newer approach to studying integration also takes a "life course" approach, in which research can follow the same migrant over time (Peters, Vink, and Schmeets 2016). This is just one of many examples where I can see Favell's point, but the accumulation of wisdom that is omitted starts to convince me that the argument has less merit.

I could go on, but in the end, I really want to ask a set of questions: What are we supposed to do with this book? What do you want us to learn? How do you want quantitative scholars to take seriously these critiques? How should scholars move forward in this inherently interdisciplinary field? Practices and incentives suggest that integration studies are not going away, so how do we be pragmatic and do better? Favell's critique is post-modern, and I can't see room in here that acknowledges a utility for empirical work. If the measures (e.g. ethnic minority status) and concepts (e.g. dominant groups, native-born) themselves are flawed, is there any ground? The idea that there is a set of "mainstream" views that "outsiders" do not hold is certainly a political claim, and only potentially scientific with the right research design. But we do know that nations have shared values and traditions that differentiate them from others, even if they are hard to measure. One gets the sense that all empirical work is suspect (statistical work being the most egregious of them all) and measuring anything is a mistake because it reifies politically disturbing concepts. To suggest we simply delete these contexts from our collective understandings and vocabulary because they are produced by bad actors and reify bad outcomes abandons our obligation as social scientists to understand the world. In the end, even if a reader agrees with Favell's sentiment, they are ultimately left without solutions, which inevitably preserve the status quo. So while this book achieves one of Favell's goals – a

critical rethink – it fails to deliver on the other – changing the field toward a new direction.

Disclosure statement

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