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To decolonize migration studies means to dismantle it. On Adrian Favell's *The Integration Nation* and question-ability

Willem Schinkel

Faculty of Social Sciences, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

ABSTRACT


What might remain after the “decolonization of migration studies”? Nothing that could have to do anything with “migration”. The contradictions of migration studies cannot be solved within its liberal parameters. To decolonize migration studies is to dismantle it.

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On question-ability

The genre-specificity of the kind of contribution, or intervention, titled “response” is such that it assumes a call or a question. The call and response or question and answer thus set in motion befits what is here called, with a classical term, a “symposium”, in which a dialectic of question and response would ensue. That symposium is of course extended in time and space: some might call it “migration studies”, some prefer the conceited epithet of “reflexive migration studies”. It involves many different voices, even if, and this should be marked at the outset, it has all the features of the classical symposium: it is a privileged space that tends to reproduce white male scholars’ academic property right in the dialectic of question and response. And to a certain degree, it is the very figure of the scholar as individuated, bounded being that in ways that remain to be specified already undergird and condition the entire problem field of “immigrant integration” in the sense that, if Valéry (1957, 1093) said “all politics implies some idea of man,” then surely also every idea of man – or every practice, including that of the scholar – implies a politics. Such an inversion would certainly be in accord

CONTACT Willem Schinkel  Schinkel@essb.eur.nl

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with the decolonial work of Sylvia Wynter (2003), who has drawn attention to the “overrepresentation” of a certain, specifically Western, conception of “Man” – the one, we might add, who ended up giving birth to “the migrant”. And it would be consistent with Adrian Favell’s attention, in his welcome intervention *The Integration Nation*, to modernist social science and its hegemonic figure of the “voluntaristic individual” (Favell 2022, 52).

Could it be that right there, already buried in the practices of liberal academia through which we get to be individuated as scholars, as social scientists, thinkers, some even as “migration scholars”, lies a reason, if not a cause, for what, usually (necessarily) elsewhere, appears as a demand that certain people “integrate”? (Only ever the violence of that demand, never a practice, let alone a state of being that could be called “integration”). Can the habits by which we perform scholarship be disentangled from their participation in a liberal conception of man, and thus from specifically liberal, border-reproducing conceptions of politics, all of which are part of the immediate stakes in “immigrant integration”, as the subtitle of Adrian’s book already shows: “Immigration and Colonial Power in Liberal Democracies”? Obviously, there is no time to get into this here, although we are likely into it over our ears, and have been for a long, too long time.

The questions I am putting forward here serve also to displace everything that follows them in this response, by me, someone in a paradigmatically similar position as Adrian (“paradigmatically” here not in a Kuhnian sense but in the way Wilderson [2020, 168] uses it). I have asked them as a first, preliminary engagement with Adrian’s book, so to speak as a way of approaching it sideways, rather than head-on, which one would do if one were to tediously draw out the “points” his book makes, the central “theses”, so to speak, only to then weigh them in order to ultimately come up with some antitheses – a symposium, indeed. I have no interest in that kind of engagement, not only because it would repeat the exhausting, energy-draining tropes of “critique”, but also because I believe I am in near-total agreement with what would be the theses of this book, clearly spelled out as they are in its introduction. In my own words, which, in order to be brief, will fail to do justice to the subtleties of Adrian’s book: immigrant integration is a racialized and colonial concept that is blindly reproduced by journalists, politicians and scholars alike, and the result is the enactment of a mode of power that is both global and (perhaps paradoxically) typical of liberal democratic capitalist entities imagining themselves as “nations”. Integration, therefore, must be decolonized. Indeed, “immigrant integration” names a set of highly questionable practices.

I am, then, not in the least bit interested in the tiresome rehearsals of scientific disagreement, nor do I assume a settled consensus. I am, however, (you will have guessed it) interested in slowing (you) down, in slowing down everything and everyone interested in, with an interest in (or so they – you, I – believe) “immigrant integration”. And I am interested in re-centering

questions deemed answered, in opening up the question (I'm paraphrasing Isabelle Stengers [2009, 49] here) what the *questionable thing* is upon which we confer the power to make us feel and think in the mode that its question-ability calls for.

What's the question?

Let me thus take a second turn, and return to the beginning: in this symposium, where I and several others answer, what was the question? What is the question animating Adrian's book? Here, again, I am not referring to what one might tease out as a "research question". Rather, I wish to approach the singular question organizing the intervention that this book seeks to be as a whole. That is to say: what is the questionable thing, the *sedimented relations* recognizable as *the present incitement to think* that this book, by way of a "critique" (Favell 2022, 4), endeavours to render no longer (or perhaps merely a little less) questionable? Or: what is this book trying to *salvage*, in the double sense of both the stowing or the cleaning up of a wreck, and of saving and restoring, perhaps even rescuing? We get a first sense of this if we consider *The Integration Nation* as, itself, a response to an earlier book by the same author, called *Philosophies of Integration. Immigration and the Idea of Citizenship in France and Britain* (Favell 1998) and, in the orbit of that book, a paper significantly titled "Integration Nations: The Nation-State and Research on Immigrants in Western Europe" (Favell 2003). There is, thus, in twenty years, a move from the plural of "integration nations" to the singular of *the "integration nation"*. Indeed, where the 1998 book presents a stark contrast between two nation-states, France and Britain, in terms of their integration policies, the current book eschews homogenizing "nations", and rather traces the *international* workings of a certain idea, and a set of practices, of the nation, which involves varying integration demands that, despite variation, converge in shaping some modernist version of a progressive, liberal, capitalist nation. We are, of course, in the realm of mythologies here, as Adrian recognized then and now. Yet the new book marks a move away from the traces of an earlier methodological nationalism, even though it was already expressed in terms of a transnationalism.

The move from "nations" to "nation" is ultimately a move away from the figure of the nation as such. What prompted that move? Obviously, the recognition of the importance of internationalism, but it was a specific kind of internationalism, namely that put forward by de- and anticolonial theorists. And so the current book wastes no time in centering "colonial power". With some degree of confidence, then, we can assume that *coloniality* has been recognized by Adrian – but obviously by the post-, anti- and decolonial scholars he builds on, and among those he mentions are Bhabra, Fanon,

Mbembe and Spivak – to be the questionable thing that this book addresses as a response or as an answer speaking to a situation to be salvaged.

The entry of the concept of coloniality, and of all the ways in which *raciality* is involved in and entangled with it, in more mainstream social scientific work on migration, as well as the rise of calls to “decolonize”, has been one of the most notable developments of the period spanning the appearance of the two books I have contrasted here. To some extent, this has meant a breach in a particular way of organizing scientific hegemony, allowing the always already existing voices of many previously marginalized to be heard more broadly. The rising awareness of coloniality/raciality as the questionable “thing” underpinning the present has, however, generated a number of answers that are, first and foremost, indicative of the fact that an awareness, in and of itself, does not mark a change. Adrian, however, calls for something more, for *decolonization*. As a third iteration in this response, let me question what he means by that, and, more generally, what we would want it to mean if we would agree to live without the violence of “migration” and “integration”, and what, if anything, it might salvage.

What to decolonize? And what to salvage?

To decolonize – what? To decolonize migration studies (Collins 2022)? To decolonize migration? Both? Migration *as* decolonization (Achieme 2019)? Here, Adrian centers on decolonizing integration, and he thereby salvages the concept of integration for the analysis of non-national modalities of integration. That is one way to go, but one may wonder whether it is not still a form of what Adrian calls “political demography”. Perhaps there are benign forms of political demography, as there are, according to many, “good” forms of governmentality. Decolonizing immigrant integration, however, still operates within the set of concepts, practices and struggles within which the very idea that one can be a “migrant” makes sense. What if a decolonization of *that* were to occur?

A well-known paper by Tuck and Yang (the citing of which never escapes being subsumed under its substance) is called “Decolonization is not a metaphor” (Tuck and Yang 2012). Taking that idea seriously, as an admonition, so to speak, means that, whatever we will be left with after decolonizing migration, *it will not be “migration”*. Taking decolonization seriously cannot mean we continue to do what we do using different categories. That is certainly not what Adrian suggests here, but he never quite escapes from the threat of such a practice reasserting itself, because he never really escapes the idea *that there are migrants*. Specifically, that migrants are people that are, or have been, on the move, mobile.

Any “science” of migration must, however, start by breaking with the epistemological obstacle presented by the idea of “mobility”. We know that many

who move are not marked as migrants, and that many are who are not “mobile” in the ways relevant here. Yet migration studies remains stuck in what is ultimately both a ridiculously simple common sense and a highly cultivated and complex modality of state-thought: the idea that migration involves people traveling from one country to another, that, for many, “migration” is simply *a case of unfortunate travel*. In work that Rogier van Reekum and I are currently doing (2019, 2022), we develop the idea that a migrant is someone coded as a person *who might not have been here*. Without the coding, which only really takes off after the demise of empire in the twentieth century (when this kind of *question* imposes itself), there are and can be no migrants. What is this coding? It is to imagine, and make a record of, what the nation would be if the people marked as migrants – those who might not have been here – did not exist. “Migration” entails a double national accounting. And as such, it is also to record *what it costs* the nation now that these migrants *are* here. In other words: *migration is a modality of debt*. In Europe and North America, “migration” is the set of practices current and/or former colonizing nations deploy in order to keep score of the differential degrees of indebtedness that are structured by race. Migration is debt, it names the accounting practices that express the existence of some people – those who might not have been here – as appendix of and cost to the nation.

Under these circumstances, what to decolonize? What remains after decolonization? What is this “what” of, before, and after decolonization? In the case of “migration”, would decolonization not simply – complexly – mean the destruction and disappearance of the very conditions under which it would be possible to say (and to see): “look, a migrant!”? If migration requires the coding, marking, tracking, tracing, and accounting of people as “migrants”, then “migration studies” – continuously incited by and folding back into the common sense/state-thought of the migrant as country-hopper – plays its role in all of this. “Migration studies”, whatever foothold it otherwise has in the academic field, replete with its own violence of gendered and raced hierarchies, and its own rewards, awards, status, wining and dining, is *part of* the phenomenon of migration, as the visualization and statistical enumeration and calculation of migration is co-constitutive of it. To decolonize migration (studies), and to not have it be a metaphor, cannot but mean *the dismantlement of migration studies*.

Adrian rightly notes (2022, 137) that concepts such as “superdiversity” are euphemisms reproducing the logics of what they portend to replace. They thereby reproduce academic careers seeking redemption from the nagging realization that all things are rotten in the state of migration studies/political demography/racial science. Ostracizing by euphemism is a well-known strategy for routines of practice describing themselves as “scientific”. In migration studies, changing labels can even ensure new flows of funding and new

excitement among policy makers navigating the field of “public opinion”, stretched out as it is between white rage and liberal humanitarian sentimentality (not precluding their coincidence). The emperor changes wardrobe from time to time, but all the emperor really has is naked violence.

There is, thus, nothing to salvage when it comes to integration, because it explicitly or implicitly rests on the violent set of practices called “migration”, and there is nothing to salvage in migration. Let us also not forget that, just as racism is always also, and functionally speaking primarily, a way to control white people, migration is always a technology that governs native populations, i.e. populations that get to recognize themselves as “native” in and through the observation of people, living among them, as “migrants”, as people who might not have been there (“here”), whose presence is under embargo, and precisely this conditionality is what “integration” names. And this is regardless of whether those observed as migrants have travelled further or more, and even regardless of where these “migrants” were born. What many “critical” or, even worse, “reflexive” migration scholars forget is the degree to which the political question to live at all with the kinds of violence that “migration” entails is bound up with the need to destroy common modes of life in order to secure “populations” for labour-deployment. That is to say that benevolent concerns over “exclusion” forego the fact that this violence is not extraneous to the current order. There is no “exclusion” to fight or to mitigate, in order to amend the faults of liberalism and undo it of its contradictions. “That things “go on” is the catastrophe” (Benjamin 1982, 592).

These are the kind of commitments (in agreement or not) that are always already at stake, these are questions always already answered by those willing to deliberate, to critique, to analyse (reflexively or not) something that is accepted as “migration”. For sure, those who call themselves migration scholars, like the rest of us, have to eat, but why eat like a parasite? Why the imposition of, and on, those indebted as “migrants” (Schinkel 2019)? Luckily, universities are in need of decolonization more broadly, and the option to find ways to live together with less violence is on the table for all of us. At the level of human need, nobody is waiting for the contradictions of migration studies to be solved within its liberal parameters; there is a waiting for this thing to be over, and for a new life to take hold.

Why are these our questions?

Right at the end of *The Integration Nation*, the stakes are raised, or so it seems:

Behind the political demography, then, there is an ecological question at stake. Partly, there is the key point that the artificial separation of the human from the natural world has created unnatural modes of living that are no longer responsive to the communication of the environment. We are trapped in the Anthropocene. We may be coming to a late recognition that there are other beings

that the human race has subjugated, even when it claims to integrate its own.
(Favell 2022, 184)

This image of global human exclusion (“the artificial separation”) is animated by an image of global inclusion but we must slow down this movement and question its assumptions. There appears to be a quasi-utopian hope of a release from internal struggle and an assent into a globally integrated humanity as a consequence of the ecocide that we have brought about. But this “we”, before ever arriving, seems to reintroduce the questionable thing to which Adrian’s book speaks, i.e. coloniality/raciality. Over fifty years ago, the question “But who, we?” was not asked for the first time when it was asked in a text entitled “The Ends of Man” (Derrida 1972 [1968]: 164). We – who? – must continue to ask it, to ask this question that opens up, for us (for whom?), the questionable thing that underwrites our writing all along. If I seek to pry open once again what Adrian configured, perhaps, as a sublation, or at least as an ending of his book that transcends its immediate subject matter, it is because the only thing to salvage here – if only by way of *invention* – would be a question-ability. The move from what Adrian calls “political demography” to “the Anthropocene”, in which “the human race” is enmeshed, seems to me to rush off too hastily, to stumble, once more, over the questionable thing, over the complex entanglements of coloniality and raciality. I am entirely sympathetic to the desire to rush off, off of the problem fields of migration and integration, which only ever affirm, if only as heeding the call to answer, the questionable thing. But making haste in this way only ever returns us to the center of these problem fields, squarely within the entanglements of coloniality and raciality. The gesture performed here is one of too much generosity, of too much inclusion, too much “integration”, some – Adrian – might say. For the famed “Anthropocene” is all-too inclusive and conveniently so. Precisely at the moment when a centuries long crime of planetary plunder becomes widely recognized *by the very ones that have enacted it* (many others have known for centuries), an all-inclusive gesture is performed by way of which the abstraction “anthropos”, humanity, appears as culprit and, thereby, also necessarily as potential saviour. Operative here is what Adrian calls “a simple kind of humanism” (Favell 2022, 184), which, though it may be simple, is hardly innocent. The move from the human zoo of political demography to the bestiary of the Anthropocene seems to jump, all too hastily, over the question *who* this “anthropos” is and has been. Has this not primarily been what Sylvia Wynter (2003) calls “Man2”, i.e. “modern man”, the kind of man Adrian rightly circumscribes as the idea(l) underwriting all efforts at “integrating” those coded as migrants? There is occasion to be more specific, to name a “Capitalocene” (Moore 2015), perhaps, or to point at the limited number of companies responsible for the huge rise in carbon and

methane emissions since 1850 (Bonneuil & Fressoz 2015). These are (also) strategic questions, and strategy is precisely the point here. As Kathryn Yusoff writes about the Anthropocene, “this planetary analytic has failed to do the work to properly identify its *own* histories of colonial earth-writing” (Yusoff 2018, 2). Indeed, as Malcom Ferdinand (2019) has persuasively demonstrated, the planetary disaster that, for strategic reasons, is sometimes known by the euphemism “Anthropocene”, is the result of a colonial expansion of the model of the plantation on a planetary scale.

Adrian knows all this, as becomes clear in a question he asks (and that he answers by asking it):

“But perhaps a new planetary integration (...) might imply the extinction of the kind of humanity that has made such a disintegrated planet possible in the first place?” (Favell 2022, 184)

I only have questions in response. First and foremost: why is this the question to come up against? What conditioned the fact that these are our alternatives? The questionable thing, the entanglement of coloniality and raciality, returns to organize the field of possible questions, and many of us have, as yet, a hard time finding the right questions, the questions that get us on our way to destroy what needs to be destroyed, in order to build common forms of life no longer hindered by the imposition of all that is “migration”. At the very least, Adrian’s book is another reminder that we will continue to have to question our question-ability. We have to ask: “Why are these the questions we ... ”

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