Global Exchange on Migration & Diversity

What are the main concepts and approaches within integration policy?

This briefing clarifies what 'integration' denotes when applied to all members of a culturally diverse society or just its immigrants and ethnic minorities. It examines different policy approaches to integration and outlines a plausible way to think about such integration.

The concept

We talk and think about integrating ideas, systems, markets, teams and departments. In doing so, we are referring to combining two or more separate things and we do the same when we discuss integrating a culturally diverse society, ethnic minorities and immigrants. This is because we are usually discussing combining people in two different ways:

- When discussing integrating a culturally diverse society, we aim to combine its members so that they feel like a 'collectivity' or a group as this is logically necessary if they are to take collective action, collectively binding decisions and conceive a common good.[1]
- When discussing integrating immigrants and ethnic minorities into labour markets, residential areas, and education systems, we are referring to them combining with others in these markets, residential areas and education systems.

These ways of thinking and talking about integration are related, in that if minorities are discriminated against in labour markets and excluded from better residential areas and school systems they may not feel part of the above 'collectivity'. Social policy can help to address such factors that *discourage* the members of a society from feeling like a 'collectivity' but to *encourage* them to feel like one the following approaches are often considered:

1. See the related but different way that Bhikhu Parekh uses these examples in *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, Macmillan, 2000, p.196.

Approaches to integration

Each approach has different presuppositions about who needs to be integrated, what a society will become once its members are integrated and how they can be integrated.

- *Assimilation:* This approach presupposes only minorities need to integrate and become part of a culturally and ethnically uniform 'nation'. Few culturally and ethnically different immigrants are given citizenship and those who have been are encouraged to become as indistinguishable from members of the nation as possible. Such an approach was used in Australia, Britain and Canada until the 1960s.
- *Liberal Individualism:* Liberals are more tolerant of difference as it follows unavoidably from individual liberty. They do not focus only on ethnic minorities and suggest all individuals in a culturally diverse society can feel like they comprise a political community who share the benefits and burdens of their collective life. The last UK Labour government seemingly endorsed such an approach by introducing citizenship education not only for immigrants but for all children and it advocated a bill of rights and responsibilities too as did some in the Coalition.
- *Multiculturalism:* Unlike liberals, multiculturalists note that people are not solely individuals. The languages people speak and the traditions of thought they are influenced by unavoidably assume and relate them to others. People see themselves as part of

religious, cultural and other communities and multiculturalists seek a society whose members do not see it as solely white and Christian as minorities are then bound to be seen as outsiders and treated as such too. Instead a society must be seen as multiracial, multicultural and multi-faith and should value its members' differences as sources of intercultural learning. Thus the state can be used to declare a society as 'multicultural' as Canada did in 1971, 82 and 88. Public services can promote race equality, deliver services in different languages, multicultural education can be taught in schools and dialogue can be encouraged within and among communities.

- *Community Cohesion:* This approach encourages interaction and contact between local groups. If its measures work they will help the culturally diverse members of a *locality* to feel like a group but not necessarily the members of a *society* to feel like one. This approach was thus accompanied by liberal individualist and multiculturalist policies. Hence the last UK Labour government pursued both a policy of community cohesion and citizenship education for children and immigrants to promote the idea that all individual citizens comprise a political community that is culturally and religiously diverse and that government welcomed this fact too.[2]

Different versions of these approaches exist that I do not have the space to consider.[3] I also need not say much else about community cohesion as it relies on other approaches to integrate a culturally diverse society. But assimilation entails a hierarchy in which some citizens conform to others even though each is meant to be equal and few endorse it. Liberal individualism is often discussed as it captures why *individual* differences are *inevitable* but not why they are *valuable* and says little about *communal* differences. The multicultural approach addresses these liberal inadequacies and, as I have shown elsewhere, its ideas remain popular even if the term 'multiculturalism' does not.[4] But we can only decide between these approaches by comparing each ones presuppositions about who can and needs to be integrated, what a society will become once its members are integrated and how they can be integrated. This helps to show which approach is most logically defensible, morally desirable and practical.[5]

Thinking plausibly about integration

Regardless of which approach to integrating the members of a culturally diverse society we choose we must appreciate how each one shapes the way that we seek to integrate minorities and immigrants in such a society. Hence, an assimilationist might favour educating all minority children about 'British' norms of behaviour and standards of decency. A liberal individualist might note how this stifles individuality. But a multiculturalist might ask why children are not being taught to think about and question different norms of behaviour and standards of decency from different groups. Similarly, a liberal might suggest that we focus on particular individuals excluded from the labour market. But a multiculturalist might note that focusing on particular *individuals* logically precludes focusing on the stereotypes about entire *groups* that help to exclude many from such markets. The way in which we think about integrating a culturally diverse society is logically prior to how we think minorities and immigrants should be included in it and shapes the latter too. Thus a plausible 'model' of integration requires clarity about how the most logically defensible, morally desirable and practical approach to integrating a culturally diverse society shapes the inclusion of immigrants and minorities in that society.

2. V. Uberoi and T.Modood, 'Has Multiculturalism In Britain Retreated?' *Soundings*, 53:1, 2013, p.135.

3. See scholarly discussions about interculturalism as an example.

4. Ibid, p.137.

5 See Modood, T, *Multiculturalism*, Polity, 2013, p.146-155.

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