

Chapter 1

Introduction

Abstract The general themes of the book are outlined in the introductory chapter. It includes its motivation, central theoretical innovations as well as empirical findings, and key arguments.

The chapter starts with a reflection on the study of immigrant integration as one of sociology's oldest fields of inquiry. The classic accounts conceived of immigrant integration as a linear process, inevitably leading to the complete assimilation of the immigrant group. This conception has been disputed both on scientific as well as normative grounds, leading to the development of new theoretical models of immigrant integration, which forego deterministic assumptions on the course of the process and normative claims. All these models, however, have concentrated solely on the interrelation between immigrants and the receiving society, disregarding immigrants' ties, loyalties, and involvement across borders that link receiving and sending country. The investigation into these border-crossing activities is at the core of transnational studies, a perspective on migration that emerged in the early 1990s. Despite their interest in the same phenomenon—international migration—transnational studies and studies on immigrant integration have neglected to develop a close dialogue and, at times, have even appeared antagonistic. This lack of dialogue may be the prime reason why important questions—What consequences do transnational activities have on integration? Is transnational involvement a distinct form of integration? Is it an alternative to assimilation? Does it hinder or facilitate assimilation?—are far from being answered. I argue that bringing together these two strands of research will provide us with a better understanding of how immigrant integration proceeds.

Keywords Immigration · Integration · Incorporation · Assimilation · Transnationalism · Transnational activities · Germany

The study of migration and immigrant integration is one of sociology's oldest fields of inquiry. The famous work of William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki (1919)—*The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*—on the struggles Polish immigrants faced throughout the migration process is almost 100 years old. Today, research on immigrant integration is one of the core fields of social science research. Within this field of inquiry, we find a multitude of different theoretical and methodological approaches that, in spite of their differences, all try to find answers to the same basic questions: Why do people leave their place of birth and migrate to another? And

what happens once they have arrived at their destination? The latter question deals with issues regarding integration of immigrants into the receiving country. And this is also what this work is about.

Initially, the process of immigrant integration was seen in terms of race relation cycles (Bogardus 1930; Park 1950; Park et al. 1967 [1925]) and was assumed to inevitably lead to the complete assimilation of immigrants. This understanding of immigrant integration proved to be problematic. In its early formulation integration into the receiving country's society was equated with the immigrant becoming an indistinguishable member of it by complete and unidirectional adaptation, i.e. assimilation. Not only was this conception attacked on normative grounds—it seemed incompatible with the claims of democratic and pluralistic societies (Kallen 1915)—but it also proved to be empirically incorrect. Complete assimilation of immigrants into the receiving society is by no means a necessary outcome. Stable forms of ethnic stratification that extend across generations are not uncommon. This was soon realized by scholars of immigrant integration (Gordon 1964; Glazer and Moynihan 1970). Moreover, receiving societies are themselves heterogeneous entities. If we ask questions about the relation of immigrants and the receiving society, it thus appears sensible to specify what segments of the receiving society we are referring to. These insights prompted the development of new theoretical models that try to better explain immigrant integration and incorporate theoretically what appeared as empirical anomalies (Portes and Zhou 1993). Today, we have refined models at hand that do without a linear and deterministic conception of stages of the integration process and forgo too homogenous notions of the receiving society (Alba and Nee 2003; Esser 2006b; Esser 2008; Portes and Zhou 1993).

All the above mentioned research has, however, only focused on the interrelation between immigrants and the receiving society. It concentrates on the receiving context, the nation-state, and has almost completely disregarded immigrants' ties, loyalties, and involvement across national borders that connect country of origin and receiving country. This is surprising for two reasons. First, if we concentrate solely on what happens in the receiving context, we are likely to oversee important aspects of the migration processes that are apt to also influence immigrant integration. Second, William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki's "*The Polish Peasant*" (1919) already dealt with immigrants' continuous border-crossing involvement. The empirical data they analyzed consists of exchanges of letters between Polish immigrants and their relatives in Poland. A case in point of transnational involvement.

These border-crossing activities are what transnational studies focus on. By now, it has been almost 20 years since the concept of transnationalism was made popular in the social sciences, most notably through the work of a group of US American anthropologists: Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Christina Szanton-Blanc (Basch et al. 1994). The (re)discovery of immigrants' border-crossing involvement with the first full book on transnational migration, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Post-Colonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (Basch et al. 1994), sparked a debate that occupied social scientists studying migration and integration for some time.

Since then, the concept of transnationalism has been considerably revised. At the onset of what is now referred to as transnational studies, transnationalism seemed to encompass everything—it was seen as a new phenomenon as well as a new perspective, questioning existing knowledge on migration and integration. Some were convinced of having discovered entirely new forms of migration and congruously proposed new terms (e.g. transmigrants) (Basch et al. 1994; Faist 2000; Pries 1998). Sharp distinctions were drawn between past and present migration, calling on scholars to abandon previous theoretical conceptions of migration and integration (Glick Schiller 1997), as they appeared to be inadequate in the face of this new phenomenon. These enthusiastic and sometimes perhaps unwillingly exaggerated accounts of transnationalism have been met with criticism, questioning the concept's relevance and novelty (Waldinger 2008a; Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004; Lucassen 2006; Esser 2004; Mahler 1998; Waldinger et al. 2008; Waldinger 2008b). With ample help of historians, social scientists soon came to realize that transnationalism is anything but new (Joppke and Morawska 2003; Lucassen 2006; Barkan 2006). This eventually led to a refinement and a delimitation of transnationalism in a more realistic way (see e.g. Levitt and Jaworsky 2007; Kivisto and Faist 2010). For the work at hand, I propose using transnational activities or transnational involvement as the core concepts which describe actions and involvements that cross national borders (see Chap. 3 and Chap. 6 for details).

In this sense, the concept of transnationalism calls our attention to a specific aspect of migration and integration which has always been a ubiquitous, although disregarded, part of international migration (Waldinger 2008a, p. 24), namely the (potential) simultaneous embeddedness in more than one society (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007). It is an analytical tool, a perspective that enables us to include aspects of migration into our inquiries, to which conventional theories of migration and integration have been blind.

Despite the fact that transnational studies are now firmly established as a field of inquiry within the social sciences—and far beyond the study of migration and integration (e.g. Beck 2007; Mau 2010)—many of the questions that initially spurred the debate between advocates and critics of this perspective have not been answered (Kalter 2011). For instance, there is exceptionally little quantitative data that allows us to infer how common transnational involvement is among contemporary immigrants—the research available so far suggests that it is not a mass phenomenon (Portes et al. 2002; Guarnizo et al. 2003; O'Flaherty et al. 2007). What is more, reliable data on the scope of transnational involvement among immigrants in Europe is still missing completely (see Schunck 2011 for an exception). This is an unfortunate situation, considering that Europe is among the key receiving areas in worldwide migration (OECD 2008). Most importantly, the question of the relation of migrant integration into the receiving society and border-crossing involvement has not gotten the attention it deserves—both with regard to theoretical as well as empirical work. Even if we consider existing theoretical reflections on immigrants' transnational involvement, the gap between theory and empirical knowledge remains wide. The way I see it, the core questions enumerated by Kivisto and Faist (2010,

pp. 129–130)—what implications does transnational involvement have on integration? Is it a distinct form of integration? Is it an alternative to assimilation? Does transnational involvement hinder or facilitate integration into the receiving society?—are far from being answered.

In part, the reason why these questions remain unanswered may be due to the fact that research on immigrant integration and research on transnational migration do not appear to have established a dialogue. Despite promising attempts to close this gap (e.g. Portes et al. 2002; Guarnizo et al. 2003), these two strands of research do not seem to be at ease with each other. Differences in perspective—the former concentrates on the receiving country, while the latter understands simultaneous inclusion into sending and receiving context as constitutive—are met with differences in methodology and even epistemology (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007; Pries 2005; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002, 2003). Transnational studies try to leave behind what they call “methodological nationalism” (ibid.), are mostly conceptual, and—with few exceptions—qualitative. Studies on immigrant integration, on the other hand, appear to be deeply rooted in the selfsame methodological nationalism and have a strong quantitative tradition. Does this make them incompatible? Of course not. On the contrary, they complement each other. If we conceptualize transnationalism in migration as consisting of actions that link country of origin and receiving country and thus describe processes of simultaneous embeddedness, it is well compatible with the intergenerational model of integration developed by Esser (2004, 2008), which conceptualizes integration in terms of inclusion into and exclusion from reference groups. If we think these two perspectives together, new insights can be gained and we might arrive at a better understanding of how immigrant integration proceeds.

It should now be clear what this work is about: an attempt of bringing these two perspectives together. More specifically, at first I provide an assessment of the extent to which immigrants in Germany engage in transnational activities. Although Germany is among Europe’s most important receiving countries and its share of foreign born persons in the population matches that of the US (OECD 2008), we have no reliable information on the extent of transnational involvement among the immigrant population in Germany. Second, and this is the theoretical innovation, I propose a theoretical model that relates transnational involvement to immigrant integration. And third, I deliver an empirical test of this model. The relation between transnational involvement and integration into the receiving society is likely to be a dynamic, bidirectional process. An immigrant’s position within the receiving society and her or his interrelation with specific segments of this society, i.e. her or his integration, is likely to bring about specific opportunities and motivations for transnational involvement. Vice versa, transnational involvement is likely to influence individual decisions that shape integration outcomes. And this is a process that unfolds over time. So the only viable way to investigate how transnational involvement and immigrant integration relate is longitudinal. Moreover, I argue that (quantitative) social sciences are eventually interested in answering questions of causality. For this reason, longitudinal data analyses and their methodological justification make for an important element of the work’s empirical part.

At this point, some limiting and qualificatory remarks on the scope and the focus of this work as well as on the choice of data for the empirical analysis seem

appropriate. I do not attempt to deliver a general theory of migration, integration, and transnationalism. The theoretical model is innovative in the sense that it brings together research on immigrant integration and transnational involvement. Still, the model proposed here builds on basic premises of research on immigrant integration (Esser 2006a, 2008) and attempts to enrich this framework with a transnational perspective. As such, from the perspective of transnational studies, the work at hand may appear to be still rooted within the aforementioned methodological nationalism. It is true that the focus is on immigrant integration into the receiving society. The point of reference when it comes to the question “integration into what?” still remains the receiving society. Even though transnational involvement spans across borders, its extent and form varies with the sending *and* receiving context (Portes 2003, p. 879, 887). It is thus a reasonable starting point to investigate the relation between immigrant integration and immigrants’ transnational involvement by exploring how the immigrants’ position in the receiving society structures opportunities and motives for transnational involvement. Since the immigrants’ position in the receiving society can be described with regard to the concept of integration, the link between immigrant integration and transnational involvement is evident here, too. I argue that this perspective is still valid even in the face of transnational involvement. Immigrants’ life chances are still largely determined by the conditions in the receiving country—at least if they stay for a considerable while. With this focus, I will miss some aspects of transnational involvement, I have to focus on immigrants’ border-crossing while they are in the receiving country, and I have to disregard what happens in the country of origin. To some extent, this is also due to practical reasons. Up to now, quantitative data that link receiving and origin context is not available. The data I mostly use in this work—the German Socio-Economic Panel—are, nevertheless, well suited to analyze the relation between integration and transnational involvement. I hope to show that the selected approach is beneficial to the study of immigrant integration *and* transnational involvement. Eventually, it will be up to the reader to decide whether or not my line of argument is convincing.

This work begins with a review of theoretical models of immigrant integration in Chap. 2. It starts by discussing the work of the Chicago School and ends with contemporary models of immigrant integration, such as the modes of incorporation model (Portes and Rumbaut 1996) and the model of intergenerational integration (Esser 2006a, 2008). The 3rd chapter is devoted to theoretical and empirical studies on immigrants’ transnational involvement. The first part of the chapter reviews theoretical conceptions of transnationalism, while the second part concentrates on studies which empirically investigate immigrants’ transnational involvement and its relation to immigrant integration. The 4th chapter presents this work’s theoretical model. In this chapter, I develop hypotheses on how immigrant integration is related to transnational involvement and how transnational involvement influences the course of immigrant integration. The 5th chapter then discusses methodological aspects of longitudinal data analysis, in particular the (im)possibility to estimate causal effects, and statistical methods used to test the hypotheses and introduces the reader to the data, the German Socio-Economic Panel. The 6th chapter depicts Germany’s immigration experience and describes the immigrants’ state of integration into the

German society. This is followed by Chap. 7, which discusses the results of the statistical analyses on the relation between immigrant integration and transnational involvement. Subsequently, Chap. 8 presents the results of the analyses on the reverse relation, i.e. how transnational involvement influences courses of immigrant integration. The last chapter (9), sums up and critically discusses this study's main findings, relates them to findings from other receiving countries, and lays out routes for further research.

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