VOICING A SYSTEMIC MARGIN:
MIGRANT INTEGRATION AND ONLINE ADVOCACY IN FRANCE

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ABSTRACT

Derek Trey Jackson: Voicing a Systemic Margin - online activism and migrant integration in France
(Under the direction of Rahsaan Maxwell)

This study aims to investigate how the concept 'integration' is perceived by migrant activists online. I ask migrant activists in France, a case of exceptional integration controversy, how they conceptualize and present integration discourse online through social media channels, transnational networks that often amplify ideological extremes. How do these activists define integration? What are their projected solutions to difficulties with integration? Equally, are these online self-representations strategic?

Methods consist of written interviews with a panel of six migrant activists in France, operating across social media. Data from interviews is juxtaposed against the observation of public postings. They suggest that social media activism engages reactively and emotionally with a transnational community on political topics. Discussions engage social, cultural, and economic integration dimensions. Within them, integration is framed as both 'acceptance' and 'access', expressing a specific need for the sharing of useful information and resources for migrants, who are often uninformed.

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INTRODUCTION

Only one interlocutor, Jean-Pierre, directly and clearly answered the question "How do you define 'migrant integration?'" responding: "[Integration is] the ways that migrants adapt to a new society." (Written Interview with Jean-Pierre, 15ᵗʰ March 2018) The plurality of this comment is notable. There are 'ways' by which migrant acclimate, then succeed in a host country - dimensions of integration - and there are pluralistic methods in helping such integration come to pass. This brief case study was imagined as a means of better understanding how migrants themselves conceptualize 'integration'. To limit the scope of such an endeavor, it homes in on migrant activists in online communities in France, where rapidly developing political discourse carries some intention for international outreach. This particular subset of migrants can in no manner be representative of the whole population, but they do represent the interests of migrant populations through the formulation of a trans-/international political discourse. Evaluating the importance of various dimensions of integration for migrant activists might serve to map areas of specific need for the greater community or, at minimum, illuminate how some migrants interpret the political and socio-cultural phenomena that impact their lives so drastically.

We begin by demarcating the dimensions of integration and how they function relative to one another, then discuss how and why online migrant activists in France are an interesting subgroup to interview. The case study extracts interview quotations from written engagement and organizes them thematically, outlining which themes are most important to defining integration as a concept and highlighting the focuses of migrant activists in their own pursuit of successful integration in France, their host country.

SECTION 1: DEFINING INTEGRATION

This analysis hopes to discern some aspect of a migrant's understanding of integration, how they envision the process, and what they seek from their integration into society. To best evaluate the importance of various dimensions of integration to migrant activist interlocutors, we must first define them. David Miller (2016), in his philosophy of immigration, indicates three specific categories of integration. 'Social' integration is that which describes behavioral patterns and interpersonal, intergroup communications. In this sense, he views social integration as a measure of social distance (i.e. spatial integration or desegregation of communities), formal desegregation of social units, and informal desegregation of the same. He cites Elizabeth Anderson's *Imperative of Integration*, indicating the mandate for communities to allow social mixing: "…It is not sufficient for full integration for people to occupy the same physical space if within that space they divide into separate social units." (p. 132) Miller's 'civic' integration stretches far beyond the political sphere: "I mean by this people coming to share a set of principles and norms that guide their social and political life." (p. 133) This broad category covers social behavioral rules, civic duties, the meanings of commonly understood civic ideologies like 'democracy' or 'equal rights', along with social cues and norms of conflict negotiation - a broad category, indeed. He describes his final 'cultural' integration category as nebulous. "People are culturally integrated when they share a common culture, which might mean having the same values and experiences or, on the other hand, having a common cultural identity." (p. 133) For Miller, this includes phenomenon like nationalism, or even geographical identifications like being from the same city: "Being and Oldhamer," he quips.

Section 1.1: Social Boundaries of Integration

The dimensions of migrant integration might also be further understood through the classification of the social boundaries that integration seeks to cross, blur, or dissolve entirely. Richard Alba (2005) establishes these categories for divisions along the lines of citizenship, religion, language, and race. According to Alba, citizenship still "governs access to fundamental rights in a society," despite narrowing differences between rights of citizens and non-citizens in the West today.[1] (p. 27) It serves as a base for thorough integration, allowing specific freedoms and participations: freedom of movement, within and outside of the country; political participation and eventual representation; protection from the threat of deportation; and the "ability to assist relatives" in their immigration efforts. Freedoms like these certainly inspire a "sense of membership" and, according to Alba, the "willingness to make claims asserting rights." In the simplest sense, citizenship is the eventual integration step that allows a migrant to connect meaningfully with the state and exact some influence. Wherein citizenship is a clearly 'bright,' unambiguous boundary to integration in many immigrant societies,[2] with clearly established mechanisms for attainment through naturalization and birthright, many migrants and their children still experience challenges in the requisite proof of their belonging. He presents the French birthright system as an example of these challenges, where some migrants do not realize that they are citizens of France, and others find themselves alien to a country they have always considered their own.[3]

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[1] This is particularly evident the framing of human rights law inside the European Union and internationally. In theory, human rights are transcendent of citizenship. In practice, as with most things, complications abound.

[2] Alba (2005) also generates two categories of social boundary and indicates an ideal trajectory for progress. 'Bright' boundaries are those which involve 'unambiguous' distinctions: "individuals know at all times which side of the boundary they are on." (p. 22) 'Blurry' boundaries involve "zones of self-presentation and social representation that allow for ambiguous locations with respect to the boundary." (p. 22) The category, and thereby nature, of a boundary predicates the mechanisms by which a member of the ethnic minority might achieve parity with the ethnic majority. Blurred boundaries are easier to navigate.

[3] France has "a more qualified form of birthright citizenship for the second generation." (p. 27) The qualifications stem from a set of policy shifts following the decolonization of Algeria, then another shift in the '90s as the burgeoning second and third generation of resident immigrant families pushed against the citizenship boundary. The most

Race was a 'bright' boundary for integration, one clearly visible and laden with ascription of meaning (at least for individuals with certain - darker - phenotypes). Alba deemed such a boundary potentially un-crossable, where those who stood on one side of the boundary would always view the other through the prism of race; the meanings ascribed to that prism, for Alba, were relative. In France, he highlights the lack of data for relevant studies. Alba asserts that France (and Germany) so fervently "rejects the concept of race as inappropriate to [society]" that such categories are left off census data. Issues of racism, which undoubtedly still exist, are therefore immune to effective research. Alba does mention visible differences as a "basis for discrimination," but he fails to illustrate how race is integrally linked with other socio-cultural boundaries, and therefore economic boundaries. (p. 39) In France, this linkage clearly manifests among migrants from the Middle East and North Africa, whose race ascribes religious ideology and whose religious ideologies are bounded by rampant overgeneralization, polarization, and heightened politicization.

Alba demarcates religion as its own site for boundary formation - if not the "key institutional site for the demarcation of native-immigrant boundaries" in Europe. (p. 30) In his analysis, he points out that practices of Islam (as the primary example of an 'othered' religion in France) is not discouraged or penalized. Rather, because of the French government's enforced neutrality on matters of religion - *laïcité*, to be discussed at length in a following section - the "frequent subtle institutionalization of Christianity" produces the bright boundary. A religious mainstream has been formed over a long history of Christianity in Europe. That mainstream is embedded in civic culture: public holidays, the church tax system, institutional dress codes, state-maintained religious edifices and public monuments. The boundary is then formed between this mainstream culture, which

significant consequence of these shifts has been confusion over birthright citizenship policies, especially in second- and third-generation migrants from Algeria. (Alba 2005, p. 28) Regulations for the naturalization of non-EU citizens apart from Algeria are far clearer, regardless of birth country. A residence permit must be obtained, followed by five years of residence without infraction. After this period, and a language exam, you may submit an application for citizenship.

gained institutional support long before the 1905 religious neutrality law, and any new religion which does not easily conform to the templates laid out by Catholic Christianity. Very little new institutional support is available for these.

Linguistic differences, and resulting challenges, present as the last of Alba's 'bright' boundaries. As with many of the other categories, this boundary is acutely interrelated with a migrant's ability to ascertain citizenship, to acquire a job, or to engage socially with native neighbors. Linguistic challenges are some of the first faced by migrants in a new country and, despite some efforts in immigrant societies like France to accommodate immigrant languages in public space and schools, the barrier to social and cultural integration is substantial for first-generation migrants. Alba does clarify that this boundary is primarily relevant for first-generation migrants, as second- and third-generation migrants are educated through public school systems and typically achieve proficiency in native language. (p. 36)

Section 1.2: Dimensions of Integration and Interdependency

I find Millers categories to be both too broad and too ill-defined for the purpose of this analysis. Richard Alba's 'barriers' might be a great place to begin and develop a sense of integration outcomes, but they fail to be cumulative. I propose the following categories for the purpose of evaluating migrant perspectives on integration:

i. Civic integration, by which migrants are informed about and actively engage with their new government and political communities.
ii. Cultural integration, by which migrants share in the cultural practices of their host country.
iii. Social integration, by which migrants engage actively and knowledgeably with members of their various communities: neighborhoods, churches, schools, workplaces.
iv. Economic integration, by which migrants achieve equal economic opportunity to native citizens of a host country.

These categories attempt to encapsulate the many means and paths to successful migrant integration, but they do not mean to firmly divide. Rahsaan Maxwell (2010), in his comparison of "migrant minority and native metropolitan French [election] turnout rates," asserts that political participation (in the form of voter turnout) among non-European-origin migrants is tied intimately with economic geography - many migrants live in disadvantaged neighborhoods and have relatively low incomes. Controlling for these neighborhoods, a clear correlation demonstrates not just the participation discrepancy, but also a reciprocal relationship between barriers like citizenship and economic oppression/prosperity, yet another interpretation of what it means to be well integrated into society. Political participation is dependent on geography and income. Geography is dependent on income and cultural understanding/acceptance. Income is dependent on geography. In this sense, civic, social, cultural, and economic integration act as interrelated, often interdependent, processes; one cannot be fully achieved without progress in another. And being that these dimensions rarely act independently of one another, they may also not correlate positively. Safi (2008) outlines a three-part *segmented assimilation theory* wherein migrants my 'successfully' integrate into society, but not in all dimensions equally, or even advantageously.[4]

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[4] Safi's (2008) *segmented assimilation theory* depicts a wide multitude of integration means and outcomes. Segmented assimilation "allows for reconciling integration theory with culturalist […] and structuralist" critiques by explaining "why and in what way the 'new immigrants' and their descendants adopt different integration itineraries than those of earlier waves." (Safi 2008, p. 10) Safi outlines a three-part model, three trajectories of integration with both socio-cultural and economic implications. The first model follows 'classic' notions of assimilation quite cleanly. It involves gradual but definite upward social mobility after the entrance of the migrant into pre-developed middle-class structures of a hypothetical western society. The second model stands opposing, predicting a semi-permanent downward spiral in social mobility, into an underclass. Safi describes this trajectory as the equivalence of a successful cultural assimilation uncoupled with the affiliated socio-economic assimilation. The phenomenon is marked by "clearly negative" differences between the socio-economic situation of an immigrant population and that of the host country, illustrated by lasting inferiorization - like that of the African American population in the United States. (p. 12) The third and final model imparted through segmented assimilation theory involves a less direct temporal element, where economic integration is successful in most counts for an immigrant population, but 'acculturation' (in the sense of cultural assimilation) is either delayed or wholly failed. The cultural pluralism implied in this model - or maybe, in a contested way, multiculturalism - "is understood to preserve the immigrant's cultural characteristics without these characteristics contradicting the society's central culture and without that preservation" causing hindrances or further challenges to the socio-economic integration process. (p. 12)

Migrants from outside Europe might find an additional identity-level component at each integration category through a sense of being 'European'. EU politics, culture, and social innovation are mechanisms outside the nation state through which migrants might find a sense of belonging. Facing the challenges of cultural, political, and economic integration in its own ranks, the European Union undoubtedly leads the world in its rejection of difference for progress' sake. *United in diversity* was adopted as the motto of the Union in the year 2000, promoting a brand of multiculturalism (different, perhaps, from the eventual emergence of a pan-European identity) in continued efforts to integrate diverse states under the new polity. Europe, as a whole, stood at the forefront of human rights progress, even when faced with new and significant influxes of migrants from outside Schengen in the early 2010s. The migrant 'crisis', it was deemed, and it led to recourse for renewed dialogue on migration and the integration of outsiders into European nations. How will the Union handle the responsibility of aiding those beyond its borders, and those who wish to cross them? How will the EU convince member states to share equally in the burden of refugees and asylum seekers? Will the states abide? The discourse has been heated and varies in perspective among member countries.

Before turning to our case study and evaluating these understandings of integration, I hope to present why France was chosen to tackle these issues, particularly in 'integration's conceptualization. To manage this, we must first discuss why France has such difficulty with concepts like cultural plurality, by defining a few terms - or political and social phenomenon, rather - that provide the foundations for French discourse on integration.

SECTION 2: THE REPUBLIC

Donning a civic culture resistant to change and migrancy, tensions around the integration of migrants in France have been spotlighted in journalistic and academic writing during these first decades of this century. I chose to focus this case study on the perspectives of migrant activists in France, specifically, for many of the same reasons that France falls within this spotlight. Foremost, France has a very specific and defined civic culture, detached from notions of multiculturalism and rooted in a history of valorizing civic identity above all others - *républicanisme*. Integration policy in France is stoic and demarcated by a long tradition of this Republicanism. The Republican integration model "stands as a polar case among the different […] integration models." (Algan, Landais, & Senik, 2012) Rooted in the nationalist passions of the French Revolution and the evolution of the Third Republic, France's secular tradition, *laïcité*, greatly restricts public expression of religious or cultural identity, apart from that shared by all Frenchmen. Bowen would assert that integration practices and the law of religious neutrality, *laïcité*, are both simple facets designed to uphold these Republican ideals. He describes Republicanism thus:

> "Living together in a society requires agreement on basic values. […] To do so means adhering to a certain brand of political philosophy, one that emphasizes general interests and shared values over individual interest and pluralism. […] It requires the state to construct institutions and policies designed to integrate newborns and newcomers into French society by teaching them certain ways of acting and thinking." (Bowen, 2008, p. 11)

This philosophy gives a very specific role to the state, one which involves integrating, not just migrants, but every young mind who hopes to be French. Historically, the school was the site of this integration. They "play the role of public socializing agent," (Bowen, 2008, p. 12) historically

responsible for producing national citizens against the best efforts of the church and rural life, neither central to widely held ideals of French metropolitan nationalism.

International focus on integration in France has also come from headline-worthy issues of discrimination that have arisen from French integration policy in practice. The critical juncture occurred in 2004, when the National Assembly and the Senate, almost unanimously, voted to ban headscarves in public schools.

> "French public figures seemed to blame the headscarves for a surprising range of France's problems, including anti-Semitism, Islamic fundamentalism, growing ghettoization in the poor suburbs, and the breakdown of order in the classroom. A vote against headscarves would, we heard, support women battling for freedom in Afghanistan, schoolteachers trying to teach history in Lyon, and all those who wished to reinforce the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity." (Bowen, 2008, p. 1)

In no way, quite obviously, would the banning of headscarves address any of these issues, yet the vote was hardly politically contentious. It wasn't that Muslim women could not practice Islam, but rather that they could not do so publicly. The law upheld equality, being that no Muslim girl would be treated differently because of her attire. Without much wonder, we can see how markers of difference in public schools were a source of anxiety for French political figures, who held dear the inertia associated with cultural shifts. In France, multiculturalism is so impermissible, so disdained, because nationalism and civic duty are linked to the notion of being *culturally* French - this is not an ethnic distinction, but one of Republican centrality and cultural, homogenous cohesion.

As a third determinate, the uniqueness of French history with immigration has not precluded its ties into issues of the greater European community. The refugee surge across the EU in 2015 exacerbated an already contentious issue of migrants in France, where in an effort to escape the Syrian civil war, many migrants from throughout the Middle East made the journey across the Mediterranean to mainland Europe. Though France saw its number of asylum applicants rise,

Germany bore the brunt of accepted asylum receipts from Syria and proximate countries. (Eurostat, 2016) The number of applicants is certainly not as relevant as the sheer number of sudden migrants camped at the entrance to the Chunnel near Calais. Nicknamed "The Jungle", this refugee camp, until it was closed in late 2016, was home to nearly ten thousand refugees who hoped to cross the channel to Britain. The camp was the face of migrancy in the media for its duration, a dank place of poverty, and certainly painted the migrant crisis as something wholly irreconcilable with the French self-image. (Cooper, Moseley, Akkad, & Kingsley, 2016)

It would be naïve to leave the recent rise of European far-right politics - whereas France has been a hub for this development, intimately tied to islamophobia. Though the *Front National*, France's far-right party, holds less sway at the federal level, leaders have won control of several municipalities in southern and north-eastern France. Rather than listing out platform points, integration-related policies of the Front National are best illustrated through the replacement of cultural programs in such small towns. In Hayange, a commune in Grand Est, there was once a large classical music festival, a theater festival, and a *Semaine de la paix* (a week of events, mostly engaging school children, which celebrated citizenship and tolerance). Now, there is now only a few holiday parades, a tea dance for the elderly, and a heavily publicized (and FN-funded) pork festival. (Almeida, 2017, p. 8-10) In most advertising, the festival is presented as a celebration of patriotism and regional/national identity. Identity politics undoubtedly plays a role here, however, in how during the opening speech of the first pork fest in 2014, a notoriously anti-Muslim speaker equated the history of eating pork with that of the Republic, blatantly insinuating that those who practiced dietary restrictions like Jews and Muslims were not truly Republican. The fest has since become a common gathering festival for the anti-Muslim platform groups *Risposte Laïque* and *Résistance Républicaine*. The xenophobic nature of these policy changes is blatant.

Finally, France's long history with immigration - consequence of its colonial heritage - makes plainly visible the different stages of integration for migrants from countries outside the European Union. Language, citizenship, and some socio-cultural barriers to integration, are solved by nature (or institution) in the second and third generation. With these progressions, we are able to see perspectives on integration from migrants with vastly different experiences, and potentially highlight a trajectory of understanding.

The use of France as a case study for defining 'integration' is, therefore, rooted in the diversity of its experience with the subject. France is a fully-invested European nation, far from immune to relevant pan-European issues like refugees and the far-right. There exists a tightly woven understanding of what it means to be 'French', paired with a commonly held understanding of integration civically, often at the expense of culture. Equally, controversies over headlines - headscarves, 'burkinis', and spotlighted refugee camps at the heat of the crisis - created a prolific and international discourse on integration in France. Discourse within migrant activism seems to focus on these issues.

SECTION 3: ONLINE ACTIVISMS

Here, I hope to justify another nexus of the case study: the element of online activism. For simplicity's sake, one could isolate and interview a small panel of immigrants, generally, discussing their experiences with and definitions of integration. I opted, instead, to focus on a small group of social media and blog activists in France - still immigrants, but actively engaging with political issues, vocally, on a global stage. This is the reasoning.

Engaging with migrant-rights activists has two clear advantages. At the outset, interlocutors are more likely to have background knowledge on the topic at hand and are more likely to draw from more than just personal experience. These individuals can sometimes place their own life experiences (and those of people they know) in a greater socio-political context. This is beneficial for this specific research project and its purpose in defining the established term, 'integration'. Equally, we can presume that some of these self-identified activists have assembled an ideological platform; they have opinions on relevant topics and are unafraid to express them publically. It is easy to recognize how activists, especially in such small numbers, would not adequately portray an immigrant population's level of understanding. In no manner will this specific case study produce data that is generalizable to a population, but it will illustrate some of many frames of understanding and some definitions of integration that are promoted online to a global audience. It might, in turn, give perspective on how some immigrants wish their experience of integration to be perceived.

The 'online' aspect of this study is perhaps most interesting, as it explores how definitions of 'integration' may have recently departed from the academic assortment of understandings. Mihaela

Nidelcu's 'Netizenship' (2012) posits a new form of "horizontal [political] participation and active citizenship" for migrants online. Information and communication technologies (ICTs - including Web and app-based social media and their hardware/software platforms) allow for civic, political, and social mobilization unavailable before the Internet, also permitting more rapid information distribution and agency in information gathering for migrants. It accomplishes this through a form of time-space compression, (p. 2) where social and cultural conversations can be shared, and even synchronized, over expansive periods of time and great geographical distance. She also asserts that the Internet "allows the emergence of a collective 'voice' able to defend the interests of the minority migrant populations in host societies." (p. 18) This feature is most relevant. Though migrant activists cannot accurately represent the interests of an entire minority population, engagements through social media and trends in these engagements are, sans survey, one of the closes approximations we can make. Equally, in an ever-digitizing world, trends on social media often front major social movements and socio-cultural shifts (particularly in a younger generation). The Internet also enables a new "public diplomacy" among minority groups, sometimes of differing social or cultural backgrounds - an effective lobby for minority rights. (p. 18) Migrant understandings on social media might participate in this cross-cultural discourse. Such topics of transnationalism, 'de-territorialization', and certainly of discourse are far beyond the scope of this case study but interacting with these online migrant activists might provide some insight into future research in these fields and add nuance (and specificity) to discussions about integration.

There are, of course, many disadvantages to conducting this research online - particularly on social media. The obvious challenge is separating individuals from their often highly-catered Internet persona or choosing (as I have) to not break down these discrepancies at all. All data - anecdotes, examples, figures and their motives - is questionable in integrity, but valid in perspective. Clearly, then, the purpose of this exercise must be to determine how migrant activists want their

understandings of and experiences with integration to be represented online - not to define

'integration' in broad strokes, but rather in accordance with how migrant activists envision the

theory and reality of migrant integration in specific contexts.

SECTION 4: METHODS

Given the complex nature of migrant integration in Europe, especially in France, a narrow, case-specific study seemed a useful method to generate anecdotal data, data which could be used to complicate our present understanding of activism in marginalized migrant communities and its perspectives. Methodology was two-part: migrant activists were contacted through the social media channels where they operated and written interviews were conducted by email. Additionally, social media postings for the year previous to interviews were examined for data relevant to the topic 'integration'.

Section 4.1: Recruitment

Interlocutors for this study were selected on the relative basis of their political engagement via social media, their geographical location, and their self-ascribed affiliation with a migrant community from a country outside the European Union. In accordance with the goals of the case study, all contacted activists were residents of France and, reasonably, also engaged with experiences of integration in the country. Identifying subjects for the study was a process spanning a few months, wherein I searched through social media networks online. These networks included Twitter, Facebook, Blogger, Tumblr, Instagram, Reddit, and additional private blogs hosted by a variety of services. Typically, private blogs were located through search feeds or through their affiliation with a previously scouted social media account. Curating users who seemed a clear fit for the study were identified through this search. I initially identified seventeen interlocutors who qualified and who might have been interested.

Interlocutors, hereafter *users*, were required to meet a specific set of criteria. They were each self-identified first-, second-, or third-generation migrants to France from *outside* the EU. Users would 'self-identify' either through brief bios on social media pages, the listing of their previous and current residence (as in Facebook), or through assertions made in postings. During the initial interview, one user disqualified by outing himself as a fake profile, wherein the public image of the user fit within study parameters, but the user himself was not a first-, second-, or third-generation migrant, only strongly sympathizing with their circumstances. Barring further deception on the part of a user, profiles like these were not included in the study.

Each user was also required to have an impression- or follower-based engagement measure above a reasonable threshold on their respective social media platform. In practice, I discerned a 'reasonable threshold' as an account that clearly engaged large groups of individuals on social media, either through publically evident impressions (likes, re-blogs, comments, or other click-based interactions) or through a follower-/friend-count. Equally, engaged users were asked how they evaluated their own engagement online in terms of outreach:

> (4) In your opinion, how many people are impacted by your social media presence?
> (5) In your opinion, who reads/views/watches your postings? Who would you like to read/view/watch your postings?

One initially engaged user disqualified for the study by indicating that their follower base moved over from a previous account and had not been actively engaged with the postings of this new user account. Users who were not actively engaged in social media activism were not considered for involvement in the study.

Subjects were required to be third country nationals, not because integration debates fail to include migrants from the southern and eastern peripheries of the EU, but because the inclusion of intra-European migration broadens the case study beyond the scope of the French migrant

integration debate and would necessitate the inclusion of member states who have notorious controversy surrounding intra-European migrants. Barriers like race and religion are much more prominent for migrants from outside the EU. From the pool of seventeen, ten users were selected for the study. Six eventually participated fully by following through with the interviews. Four of the six users engaged with both an initial interview and a follow-up interview around a month later. All users provided emails through which interviews were conducted.

Section 4.2: Interviews

Interviews including a series of questions aimed at identifying precisely how the user conceptualizes the term 'integration' and how much of that understanding is promoted through online postings. All questions were free response and no guidelines were offered in how users should go about answering them. The following non-demographic (non-qualifying) questions were included in each initial questionnaire:

(1) Do you consider yourself an activist?
(2) How long have you been active on [social media platform]?
(3) For what purpose do you use [social media platform]?
(4) How many people do you think are impacted by your social media presence?
(5) In your opinion, who reads/views/watches your postings? Who would you like to read/view/watch your postings?
(6) Does your [social media platform] have a theme? Do you post about specific topics?
(7) How do you define 'migrant integration'?
(8) Is migrant integration important? Is migrant integration important in France? Why?
(9) Do you read news? Where do you acquire the information you post on social media?

Users were permitted to abstain from answering any question. In the initial survey, eighty percent of questions were answered among the six participants. Four participants answered questions in the follow-up questionnaire. This questionnaire included the following questions:

(1) Has your social media presence changed since the previous questionnaire?
(2) Has the importance of migrant integration changed since the previous questionnaire?
(3) How would you define 'migrant integration'?
(4) How would you assess the issue of migrant integration in France?

In two circumstances, conversations extended beyond the confines of the questionnaire. These conversations probed more deeply into related topics and, on one occasion, fully digressed into discussions of online media and videography, among other things.

In conjunction with interviews and direct engagement, I also searched through public postings made by users in the six months preceding the interviews. Observations of social media postings and blogs served, firstly, to provide context to information collected through the interview process. User's commentary on social media usage can be supplemented and exemplified by posts promoted over social media during the specified time frame. Data from the interviews can be falsified, counterbalanced, or substantiated by interlocutor behavior, marking differences between what the interlocutor says and does, but also what they hope to say and what they conceivably do online. One question this study hopes to answer involves distinctions between an activist's personal beliefs and the persona they generate online. Data collection from social media postings helps to illustrate some of these discrepancies, intentional or otherwise.

In the following analysis, it is important to note that all usernames, organization titles, and all other identifying information has been falsified to protect the identity of users and minimize impact on their reputation. All users were presented with a document of risks and consented to the use of their anecdotes, but not their identities, in the publication of this study.

SECTION 5: ANALYSIS

We now search for themes of common understanding in an effort to 1) approach a working definition of 'integration' from the perspective of users and 2) identify which dimensions of integration are most salient in their conceptualization. All interviews were transcribed and coded by theme. In this assortment, I hoped to find a pattern of perception beyond the classical definition of integration - a homogenous assimilation, on all fronts, into a host society. And also, I hoped to find nuance, potentially presenting as an understanding of the interrelatedness of all aspects of integration. Three themes emerged.

Section 5.1: Acceptance

> "… just being who you are, and other people accept that. They let you practice what religion you want [to] practice and accept you. So much is about identity, [at least] on Tumblr."
> (Written Interview with Hana, 20th February 2018)

The first theme that arose concerned cultural and, in turn, racial acceptance. Hana was the first user to mention 'acceptance' as part of her conceptualization of 'integration'. She is a blogger and a French national of Jordanian origin. She is Muslim and wears hijab, many photos of which are posted on her Tumblr blog. Unlike some of the other respondents, Hana has no problem showing her face to the Internet. Her blog is full of memes, primarily: viral images that circulate on the Internet, usually consisting of an image with bold text overlaid. Most memes take some angle on humor. Hers make mockery of far-right ideology, tracing back to when she started meme-making in 2007. When asked why migrant integration is important in France, Hana retorted: "Because I am

French and I want everyone to see me as French. […] They just need to meet me, but… that never happens." (Written Interview with Hana, 20th February 2018)

One meme on Hana's blog juxtaposed a blue burkini (a full-body swimsuit covering for Muslim women to bathe outdoors) against a similarly-colored wetsuit with head covering for men, noting in the text that only one of the outfits would be outlawed in France. (blog posting, originally posted August 2016) Other memes depict Marine Le Pen at a podium, watermarked by one or more quotations, ostensibly from a speech she made: "Immigration is an organized replacement of our population. This threatens our very survival." (blog posting, originally posted January 2017) Hana captioned the image: "*belliciste*", meaning "warmonger". This Le Pen meme, at the time of observation, had garnered 2,814 notes - meaning, it had been liked or reblogged 2,814 times, in circulation through the Tumblr platform. Many such images are copied off the platform and end up in other places on the Internet.

Almost all of Hana's postings reflect her concept of integration: a fight for recognition of and acceptance of cultural practices, resistance against framing migrants as other - invaders, problem-makers, criminals, or terrorists - and the desire to mix socially with French natives, but primarily for the alleviation of the aforementioned problems. Each of these concepts fit neatly within the frameworks of cultural and social integration and allude to the codependency of these processes. To integrate socially, one must not be shunned because of your cultural practices. To familiarize and educate a majority population on one's cultural practice, one has to engage socially.

Fatima is a Youtuber. Her channel contains a healthy mix of videos, mostly of Fatima speaking at the camera. Some videos are music reviews, others are tangents about her daily experiences, and still others are impassioned rants about racist incidents she experienced, followed by digressions on politics in France. She is followed by just over three thousand users. And she also wishes to be accepted. In a video posted in June 2016, Fatima details her first trip back to visit

family in Morocco. Her parents were born there, but she is a French national. She notes that the trip was odd. She didn't understand or get along with many of her cousins, and she didn't know any of the basics: introductions, table manners, social cues, like when to speak or when to excuse oneself. She then digresses, asserting that she doesn't fit in anywhere she goes. "I don't have [many friends] at school. I never meet new people, and things are worsening for us." Here, she refers to the upcoming elections. She drops the name 'Le Pen' at multiple points in the video, almost offhand, but with perceptible anxiety. "I don't have a country," she laments. (Youtube Video, 23ʳᵈ June 2016) For Fatima, integration is social. She seeks a feeling of belonging at school and within a community.

Fatima's qualms with her position as a second-generation migrant have little to do with citizenship or economic disadvantage. They focus on her social position in society, how she doesn't 'feel' as if she belongs somewhere, as if she's accepted. Again, this line of thinking forefronts cultural and social integration categories as those which need to be addressed. She offers no solution.

Section 5.2: Access

> "[In my field] my friends are freelancers. […] A few of them work with each other, for their uncle's company. […] There are jobs for us [in graphic design], but they aren't French jobs. […] I moved here to work in France, but I don't know where to [get started]." (Written Interview with Hamid, 12ᵗʰ March 2018)

A second theme revolves around access, specifically addressing a need for information about services and opportunities available for members of migrant communities. A few users commented on how their social media channels are primarily used to impart whatever resources they can find to a similarly struggling migrant network, or a friend group. Hamid moved to a town outside Marseille from Senegal in 2013, then to Nice in 2015. He expresses his luck at having secured a job in France with a friend he met over social media, having worked in graphic design for over eight years in Dakar. He works as a freelancer on the side.

"Twitter is good for sharing articles and jobs with friends. They aren't on my mailing list, so they don't get them if I don't post. […] [Getting jobs] is different here, and freelancing is challenging when you can't network." (Written Interview with Hamid, 13th March 2018)

Hamid insinuates that he can make his own economic opportunity if informed to the same degree as native French citizens: "There is nowhere to go for advice." There's undoubtedly a class-based paradigm at play here. Many native French citizens are likely uninformed about job opportunities, conferences, and networking opportunities in their respective fields, but Hamid feels specifically excluded: "My friend Jean is from here in Nice and he's always doing something/getting emails from strangers about work." (Written Interview with Hamid, 13th March 2018)

The most interesting section of Fatima's videos falls toward the end where, often, she briefly discusses mental health and provides a helpline number. She struggles with mental health issues and asserts that people (especially people "like her") don't know where to find the help they need. In one video, she promotes a guide published by Psycom and provides a link, a document which lists free mental health services available in Paris and surrounding communities. When asked for what purpose she uses Youtube, Fatima expresses her desire to help others: "I use [Youtube] to reach out to others like me. I get messages thanking me for saying the things I say and offering [information about health services]." (Written Interview with Fatima, 4th March 2018)

No one mentioned the need for information about civic engagement or opportunites for political participation, curious in an interview so overtly intended to concern politics, but each of these mentions expresses clear agency deprived of resources. Economic integration (in the form of freelance job acquisition) can occur if migrants are provided the right networking opportunities or placed on the necessary mailing lists. Social integration issues, like where to find mental healthcare, or potentially other bureaucratic how-to's, can be a primary function of integration activism online.

Both Hamid and Fatima, to some degree, use their social media to distribute relevant information and resources to the conversations they are having online. They wish to inform, and to be informed.

Section 5.3: Motives in Activism

The third theme is more ambiguous. It pertains to both *when* posts become political, what tone they take, and delves into the motives behind online activism in favor of progressive migrant integration. Firstly, none of these accounts engage solely in politicking online. Some users follow other topical themes, sometimes primary, and only discuss integration-related politics when relevant world-events trend on social media. Jean-Pierre is a perfect example of this. A third-generation migrant of Algerian descent, and UK-educated, Jean-Pierre works for an NGO based out of Paris. His Twitter feed is two-part: he promotes research materials from his migrant rights focused NGO alongside general political critique on many topics. "My social media accounts are used the way most people use social media, I imagine. I share articles and commentary on those articles within my circles and hope to educate and influence others." (Written Interview with Jean-Pierre, 15th March 2018) In a follow-up message, I asked Jean-Pierre what motivated him, apart from the research interests of his organization, to post about migrant integration issues online.

> "I play the social media game by posting about what is relevant at the time. News agencies do the same. […] You post things and tag things that get traffic for the account, then you throw in a little of your own stuff. […] I write about integration when it is in the news."
> (Written Interview with Jean-Pierre, 19th March 2018)

His postings reflect this. During the French presidential campaigns, leading up to the 2017 elections, his postings were predominantly policy oriented (and clearly critical of Le Pen). Before that, posts tended to concern the stories of migrants, led by one of the research projects at his organization. In

the past few months, Jean-Pierre has been predominantly posting about human rights in Israel/Palestine. The discourse-led digressions are evident.

Hana, in discussing her memes and image-focused blog, talks about "fueling the fire" of social change with stimulating (and sometimes inflaming) material. Hamid recalled "posting a lot about [politics]" during the elections last year, with Le Pen and much overt islamophobia prominent in the media. Postings are reactive, and often emotionally charged, either from personal experiences in the day-to-day or from occurrences in the news. These posts are intentionally timed, either for the maximizing of traffic (and reach) or the maximizing of influence or garnered empathy.

Target audiences vary among the users. Jean-Pierre identifies the Twitter community, largely, as his target crowd of engagement. Fatima wishes to reach people like her, or who can identify with her. Hamid wants to reach his friend circle, and people in his field of work more generally. Sara hopes to go viral across the Internet - or Tumblr, at least - in an effort to garner support for migrants in France and Muslim women more widely. Each and all use a mix of English (as a lingua franca) and French in their online engagements, which seemed common among many users. Regardless of audience, there appears to be a common goal among users: informing others. Whether this information concerns resources available, cultural enlightenment, or simply a digest or opinion of current events, all users seek to share information relevant to the bettering of migrant rights.

Section 5.4: Summary

The theme of 'acceptance', or (alternatively) the seeking out of a feeling of 'belonging', marks integration as a less quantifiable experience of being French and being accepted as such. In a sense, this theme lends itself to the ideals of *républicanisme*, prefacing the establishment of a pseudo-emotional civic identity above other results of a successful integration, like economic prosperity. On

the contrary, these themes of belonging, being that they are presented on social media in hopes of engaging the empathy of a wide audience, are assuredly better for catalyzing emotional responses and potentially mobilizing political change on the foundation of those emotions. The motives here are unclear, and multipart because of the medium of communication. The theme of 'access' supposes that successful integration can occur, not through policy change per say, but by actively informing migrants of opportunities available to them and trusting that, through their own agency, they self-integrate across all categories.

Defining 'integration', then, is not so easy from these interviews. Clearly, cultural identity, social integration, and economic opportunity take precedence over civic integration and political participation. Conversations seem to indicate a desire for the recognition of migrant agency and the provision of the information necessary for self-help. This emphasis on resources and concentration on social and cultural acceptance might also suggest that, for these migrants, civic integration (or French identity) lacks import relative to feelings of economic instability or social ostracization.

SECTION 6: FINAL COMMENTS

The results of these interviews, both in participation and content, were somewhat disappointing. No generalizable results were expected, yet not even a coherent definition of 'integration' was reached. We do find that a feeling of belonging is central, either garnered through social inclusion or through the socio-cultural benefits of economic integration and prosperity. And we do also find that information is lacking for migrants - they do not always have access to the networks and resources necessary to exercise their agency. Social, cultural, and economic integration dimensions carried the most weight in migrant activist's own conceptualizations of successful integration in France.

More broadly, I hope this discussion illuminated some unique motives and trends in online discourse about migrant rights and integration practices. Certainly, voices like these are some that spread worldwide through media and have disproportionate impact on global perceptions of integration in Europe, especially among specific social media using populations, and especially considering the prominence of the French situation over the last decade. Further study of these voices might eventually give way to solutions to integration problems, and certainly demonstrate the wide breadth of understandings and needs within integrating migrant communities.

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