



From incorporation to emplacement in the cultural sociology of immigration

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Abstract

Cultural sociology can be useful for uncovering factors facilitating and hindering immigrant incorporation. The process of incorporation blends different logics and pressures, where the work of incorporation is divided between immigrants who pursue incorporation, and social groups (from nations, to communities, and from classrooms to corporations) that facilitate, hinder, and shape trajectories of inclusion. Cultural sociology has much to contribute to our understanding of the relation between immigrants and the role of others in the process of incorporation. In this essay, I first summarize underlying ideas in the cultural sociology of immigration and immigrant incorporation. I argue that incorporation entails two types of agency on the part of immigrants: *mastery* and *change-making*. I then bring three books, Elizabeth Becker's (*Mosques in the metropolis: incivility, caste, and contention in Europe*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2021), Nancy Foner's (*One quarter of the nation: immigration and the transformation of America*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2022), and Heba Gowayed's (*Refuge: how the state shapes human potential*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2022), into conversation with cultural theory, reflecting on how the theory challenges the books, and also how the books challenge the theory. I conclude with a proposal for a new approach to thinking about processes of incorporation as consisting of *emplacement* and *acceptance*. Adopting this approach contributes to cultural theory by eliminating the need for an outgroup in the construction of the social solidarity.

Keywords Civil sphere theory · Immigrant incorporation · Emplacement · Agency

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Introduction

Every instance of migration is a treasure trove for cultural sociologists. Movement between geographic and cultural worlds produces powerful stories, experiences, and emotions and results in alternative, partial, and broken timelines and networks in contrast to lives lived close to their place of origin. But to speak of migration is not just to take account of individual biographies. Individual migrations can come together to fundamentally shape and reshape the most mundane aspects of everyday life even among those who are not on the move themselves. The character and content of communities, and even the values and priorities binding or dividing neighborhoods and nations reflect the movement of people.

Migration and its impacts are the stuff of sociology and have been since the earliest days of the discipline. In this essay, I am grateful for the opportunity to reflect on three excellent recent books taking up key elements of migration and its impact: the experience of forced migration; the challenges immigrants face being accepted as they are; and the impact that immigrants and immigration have on receiving communities and nations. Each of these books—Elizabeth Becker’s *Mosques in the Metropolis* (Chicago 2021), Nancy Foner’s *One Quarter of the Nation* (Princeton 2022), and Heba Gowayed’s *Refuge* (Princeton 2022)—provide rich detail about aspects of immigrant incorporation and belonging that are particularly relevant to cultural sociologists. Each also highlights the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion related to the modes of immigrant incorporation described in cultural sociology’s civil sphere theory. But these texts also mount a challenge, both to the existing state of migration studies in sociology and to core assumptions about immigrant incorporation and the grounds for civil solidarity in general.

In this essay, I first summarize underlying ideas in the cultural sociology of immigration and immigrant incorporation. I then bring the books into conversation with cultural sociology and civil sphere theory. I conclude with a proposal for a new approach to thinking about civil sphere processes of incorporation and offer some thoughts on new frontiers for the cultural sociology of immigration and incorporation.

Civil sphere theory: modes of incorporation, types of agency, and mainstream shifts

Civil sphere theory (CST) is well-suited to considerations of immigrant incorporation because processes of inclusion and exclusion are the core engine of the theory. The underlying assumption of cultural sociology’s civil sphere theory is that societies include a civil sphere (Alexander 2006)—a symbolic collectivity built on symbolic distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’ that have no necessary relationship to ethnic and immigrant groups, although, in practice, the boundaries of the civil sphere are often based on visible and invisible minority characteristics



such as national origin, religion, class, gender, ethnicity, and race that are either privileged or disparaged as a result of ‘primordial’ tendencies to see one’s own people and practices as superior (Alexander 2001). Symbolic distinctions might also be based on social norms such as manners of speaking, ways of dressing, and modes of interaction and self-presentation (Voyer and Lund 2020). According to the theory, the boundaries of the civil sphere are continuously challenged and negotiated. These dynamic processes result in civil repair when individuals, social movements, and political and civic organizations establish more inclusive symbolic boundaries (see Alexander 2006). Alexander (2001) identifies three established and conflicting “modes of incorporation” underlying these dynamic processes and shaping the nature and outcomes of immigrant incorporation and other processes of social integration. The first of these modes of incorporation is assimilation, in which incorporation is achieved when immigrants and other marginalized groups and individuals abandon any public trappings of their membership in marginalized groups in order to merge with the mainstream. The second mode is hyphenated incorporation, in which membership in the civil sphere is understood as including people from multiple groups, for example, different national origins and citizenship statuses—but those group memberships exist alongside and are orthogonal to inclusion in the civil sphere. The third mode is the multicultural mode of incorporation. While other modes of incorporation involve recasting stigmatized groups as the same in terms of collective values that are unrelated to subgroup memberships, the multicultural mode of incorporation recognizes and accepts subgroup differences as important elements of the civil sphere and “variations of the sacred qualities of civility” (Alexander 2006, p. 452).

From this theoretical perspective, we can see immigrant incorporation as the process through which foreign-born people and their children come to be seen and to see themselves as ‘normal’ members of society (Alexander 2001; Voyer 2013a; Voyer et al. 2022). On the more macro and national levels, dynamics of incorporation unfold through the negotiation of and struggles about the important characteristics and boundaries of the nation (who “we” are and those who are not “us”) via the action of politicians and political parties (Alexander 2010), civil society organizations including immigrant organizations (Jaworsky 2016; Voyer 2013b), and representation in the arts (Schall 2019) and the media (Ostertag and Ortiz 2013). On the one hand, these entities are responsive to and reflect national norms in terms of how “we” should be represented and if/how immigrants are considered part of that “we”. From a CST perspective, then, we can speak about a failure of immigrant incorporation as something that would be evident in the persistent symbolic exclusion of immigrants and their descendants, who would continue to be seen and see themselves as outsiders who are not included or fully included. On the other hand, these entities have significant power to contribute to the construction of the boundary of the civil sphere by establishing and performing more or less inclusive representations of “us” and the democratic values of the country (Alexander 2010). When it comes to understanding immigrant incorporation, CST has been primarily used to theorize immigrant incorporation and civil repair at the more macro level of public discourse and national belonging (see for example Schall 2019). However, civil



sphere theory is not inherently methodologically nationalistic. It can and has been applied at any level of analysis, and has been used to consider dynamics of inclusion and exclusions through the construction and enactment of both local and transnational “boundaries of belonging” (Jaworsky 2016; Lund and Voyer 2019).

CST can be used to uncover the symbolic, political, economic, and other social realities both facilitating and hindering immigrant incorporation. The process of incorporation blends different logics and pressures, where the work of incorporation is divided between immigrants who pursue incorporation, and social groups (from nations, to communities, and from classrooms to corporations) that manage their self-conceptions and practices to facilitate and shape trajectories of inclusion. How can we characterize this incorporated “normalness”? From whose perspective is it determined, and how is it accomplished? These are crucial questions for the continued theoretical development of CST and application of the theory in empirical investigations—particularly, but not exclusively, when it comes to studies of immigrant incorporation.

Studying immigrants and the ways they imagine and pursue incorporation into the mainstream sheds light on civil sphere processes including the dominant modes of incorporation, primordial boundaries, and the sites where civil repair is being pursued. More specifically, I theorize that immigrants shape their own incorporation by drawing on two types of agency vis-à-vis the civil sphere. I call these types of agency *mastery* and *change-making*. Mastery is when people pursue incorporation by learning relevant general social norms and practices, identifying and entering established networks, organizations, and institutions, and minimizing their visibility as ‘outsiders’. When it comes to mastery, the immigrants and their descendants exercise their agency by increasing their knowledge, skills, and connections to “pass” in the mainstream. Change-making, on the other hand, involves introducing new norms and practices to the civil sphere, developing new networks and alternative pathways to social inclusion and participation, and changing the mainstream by offering a new image of what a ‘normal’ and ‘capable’ person is. In the case of change-making, immigrants use their agency to expand the symbolic boundary of the civil sphere. Mastery and change-making are both sources of *agency*, and individuals can combine them creatively.

These concepts of mastery and change-making can be empirically useful in characterizing the broader cultural and social contexts of immigrant incorporation. We would expect to see complex and contextual combinations of mastery and change-making among immigrants as they pursue inclusion. The balance of mastery and change-making one observes in these combinations does not merely reflect the skill and preferred strategies of the individuals pursuing their own integration; they also reflect the possibilities for inclusion based on formal and informal limitations in the context of immigrant incorporation. When it comes to observing the boundaries of the civil sphere in a particular case, examining the balance of mastery and change-making in the strategies of those seeking inclusion provides insight into the dominant modes of incorporation at play. This speaks to the research value of observing immigrants as an alternative to the more typical CST investigations focused on media representations, political discourse, etc. For example, hyphenation, with its more neutral treatment of difference vis-à-vis the boundary of the civil sphere,



would be expected to support both mastery and change-making in balance. However, in a more hostile and or assimilationist context, we would expect to see incorporation pursued more through mastery than change-making, and we would also expect the practices of society to be more durable and impervious to influence from immigrants. Meanwhile, when the multicultural mode of incorporation is more prevalent and the terms of inclusivity are particularly broad and open, we would expect to see more evidence of change-making in the pursuit of incorporation (see Fig. 1).

Focusing on mastery and change-making highlights the impact that immigrants have on the civil sphere and society itself. Immigration can reshape group boundaries and practices, and recast the collective meanings and sentiments associated with the “mainstream” (Voyer 2013a). In other words, the symbolic boundary of the civil sphere is crucial to the trajectory of immigrant incorporation, but research tends to focus on how immigrants are cast in relation to the boundary instead of how the boundary itself is recast in light of immigration. This imbalance contributes, as Schinkel (2018) notes, to the background reification and invisibility of the mainstream. A growing literature based on the fundamental insight that immigrant

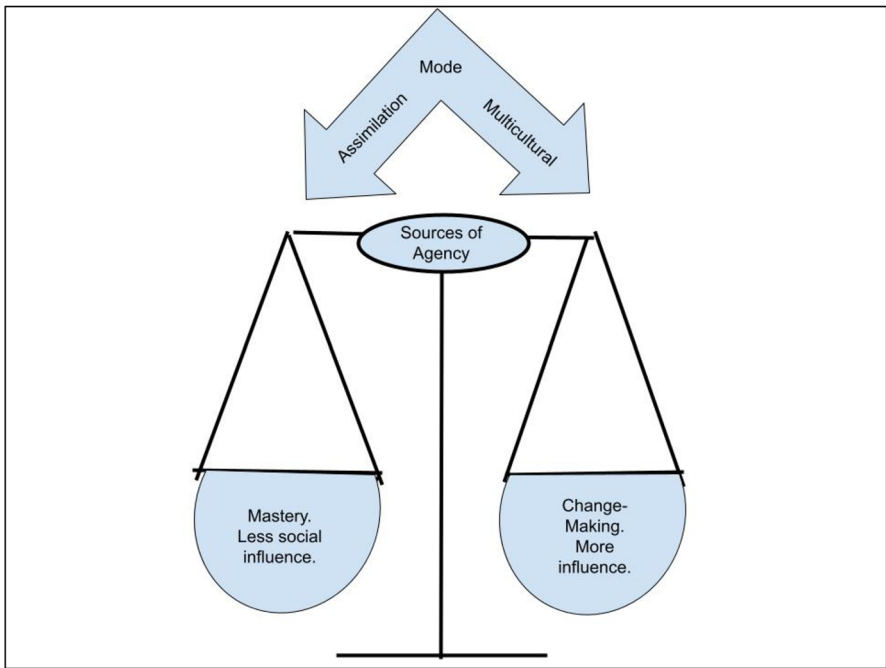


Fig. 1 Modes of Incorporation and Sources of Agency. The scales tilt based on the prevalent mode of incorporation. Hyphenation is represented by a balance of mastery and change-making. In more assimilationist contexts, we would expect mastery to be the prevalent source of agency for immigrants pursuing incorporation is mastery, and we would also expect that immigrants have less influence on the social and mainstream of society. In more multicultural contexts, we would expect change-making to be the prevalent source of agency for immigrants, and we would expect that immigrants have a greater impact on the mainstream



incorporation is a two-way and relational process documents “mainstream shifts” wrought by immigration (Jimenez and Horowitz 2013; Jimenez 2017; Voyer et al. 2022). Research on mainstream shifts provides direct evidence of the “remaking of the American mainstream” (Alba and Nee 2009), and the nature of these mainstream shifts sheds light on a society’s modes of incorporation while also uncovering modes of effective mobilization of agentic resources available to immigrants and their descendants and identifying the social, political, and institutional factors facilitating the agentic power of immigrants.

Three books and the model

Each of the books I read for this essay shed light on aspects of civil sphere theory and the model of immigrant incorporation presented here, in some cases highlighting their applicability, but in others pointing out their limitations.

Change-making and multicultural incorporation of post-1965 immigrants

As a work offering significant evidence of multicultural incorporation, Foner’s *One Quarter of the Nation* puts forth support of a simple, yet perhaps controversial, premise: the United States has been fundamentally reshaped, and mostly for the better, by post-1965 immigration. Foner describes mainstream shifts associated with the multicultural incorporation of immigrants in the United States. The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act was designed to increase immigration while maintaining the country’s white European ethnic majority. These two goals were intended to be achieved by eliminating constraining national origins quotas and emphasizing family reunification as a pathway to US residence and citizenship. The reforms did increase immigration, but not in favor of Europeans. Instead, the reforms led to a dramatic increase in non-European immigration—an unprecedented migration of people from Africa, Asia, and the Americas. The admission of refugees, regular migration of short-term workers, and a substantial population of undocumented immigrants further contributed to the size and ethnic, religious, educational, and occupational diversity of the United States post-1965 immigrant population, and, correspondingly, the population of the nation overall.

Although sociologists tend to focus on how immigrants adapt and adjust post-migration, Foner’s goal is to show the mainstream shifts wrought by immigration. The book presents change-making *par excellence*. Each chapter provides a detailed discussion of the change-making efforts of particular individuals and the corresponding impacts in a different sphere of American culture, politics, and economy. Foner discusses the changing “racial order” consisting of the ethnic diversity of the nation as well as prevalent racial and ethnic categories and their social meaning. When it comes to economic impacts, there is no corner of the United States untouched by immigration, and Foner recounts in detail the revitalizing impact of post-1965 migration on rural areas, suburbs, and cities alike. Immigrants have transformed the workforce by filling the needs for both high- and low-skilled labor,



sustaining beleaguered and establishing new industries, and contributing to a healthy housing market. As the children of post-1965 immigrants have come of age, they also contributed to the development of a broader, more multicultural American cultural canon and changed the foodways and soundscapes of the country. Foner presents overwhelming evidence to eliminate any doubt readers may harbor about the transformation of the United States through change-making and mainstream shifts associated with multicultural incorporation.

However, Foner's appreciation for the new America created by post-1965 immigration is tempered somewhat in the discussion of politics, and it is here that the precarity associated with the persistence of assimilationist and primordial tendencies in the civil sphere despite the material incorporation of immigrants in American life is evident. Foner notes that the ethnic succession of immigrants and their descendants rising as a political force has a crucial impact, but the politicization of immigration itself seems to loom even larger in the contemporary United States, most recently as a key feature of the conservative nationalist politics crucial to the presidential election of Donald Trump. The situation is similar in many other countries. Immigrant and ethnic groups are treated as more or less cohesive voting blocs by political parties seeking to secure votes, and since immigrants tend to favor Democrats, they have brought about a transformation in the regional and demographic strongholds and identities of political parties. In the United States, these conditions contribute to the rise of the overwhelmingly white, anti-immigrant, rural identity politics of the contemporary Republican Party, on the one hand, and the diverse, urban, and suburban politics of the Democratic party, on the other. While Foner expects that the United States will continue to welcome and incorporate new immigrants despite anti-immigrant political mobilizations grounded in assimilationist and closed conceptions of the boundaries of the civil sphere, the reader is left with questions about whether the ability to claim a victory for multicultural incorporation through immigrant change-making is best examined at the level of the nation-state itself. Immigrant incorporation is ultimately a local project, and in the United States anti-immigrant sentiment tends to be concentrated in particular geographic areas and segments of the population. What does this variation mean in practice for immigrants, their agency vis-à-vis the civil sphere, and the possibilities of civil inclusion?

One can also ask how well insights from the book extend beyond the national context of the United States. Foner tells the story of immigrants remaking the American mainstream, a story that is unique when compared with other countries that have experienced substantial immigration since the 1960s. Like other former "settler colonies" with an identity as a "country of immigrants", the United States has long had a relatively open citizenship regime, particularly for the descendent of immigrants, and of course, the civil rights movement in the United States led to anti-discrimination policies that benefited many immigrants. But this openness is not, or at least not exclusively, a matter of policy. It is also related to the symbolic boundaries of the "we" of society. Foner draws a key contrast between immigrant incorporation in settler societies and assimilationist tendencies that are more characteristic of countries, such as Germany and France, where ethnonationalism is a common justification for the nation-state. Even if those countries may provide more services to immigrants and a more easily navigable path to permanent residence and/or



citizenship, symbolic inclusion of immigrants and their descendants is not so easily obtained. Furthermore, while in the United States, there is a separation of church and state, in many Western European countries there tends to be a close relationship between religion and the state. Even in ostensibly secular European societies, there is often a state church (see for example Nilsson and Trulsson 2019), leading to challenges in accepting and integrating other faiths, most notably Islam. Some European nations attempt to bring Islam into the government through the organization of formal religious councils, but, while this provides access to some governmental support, it can also lead to heavy-handed state oversight and involvement and regulation. Foner notes that these differences have a substantial impact on the trajectory of immigrant incorporation.

Hyphenated incorporation and agentic balance in Berlin and London

That incorporation is situated in particular geographic space, occurring outside of the United States and other “settler societies,” and in the context of the persistence of symbolic boundaries between “outsider” religions and other cultural practices are complexities ripe for the cultural sociological analysis offered in Becker’s *Mosques in the Metropolis*. Becker describes what, in terms of civil sphere theory, we could refer to as the hyphenated incorporation of Muslim immigrants and their children in the urban spaces of Berlin and London. In so doing, she highlights the ongoing civil exclusion of Islam associated with more assimilationist modes of immigrant incorporation in Europe. While it may be true, as Foner writes, “If more salsa than ketchup is sold in the United States, the Turkish doner kebab has become the most popular fast food in Germany, and ‘going out for a curry’ at a South Asian restaurant is now a regular part of English social and cultural life” (2022, p. 155), this does not mean that Islam and the people who practice it are themselves settled and welcomed. What is overshadowed in Foner’s macro-level account and long historical lens is the geographically situated struggle for recognition, which is experienced both collectively and individually. Becker’s ethnography of two Mosque communities, a largely Turkish community in Berlin and a largely South Asian one in London, shows that practicing Muslims and their mosques are often cast outside of the symbolic boundaries of belonging in European nation-states, citizenship status notwithstanding. To be a non-secular Muslim is to be an outsider whatever one’s formal citizenship and however much curry and kebab are on the menu.

Becker characterizes the outsider status of the mosque as civil exclusion unfolding against the backdrop of the myth of European civility and the corresponding “cultural conventions, everyday performances, aesthetic codes, and foundation narrative” (Becker 2021, p. 14) supporting that mythology. In other words, immigrant incorporation is not just a practical project achieved through inclusion as observed through the gains in representation described by Foner, it is also a moral project that includes, on the one hand, categorization processes and cultural stereotyping that contrast the purity of Europe with the polluting danger of others who threaten European values and lifeways. To be classified as an observant Muslim in Europe is to be seen as non-European and potentially dangerous. On the other hand, the



corresponding moral project of immigrant integration is the work that Muslim immigrants and their descendants do to establish themselves as part of Europe, or at least part of the European cities where they live. Consistent with the hyphenated mode of incorporation I see as dominant in the contexts described by Becker, both mastery and change-making are in evidence. The reader can observe change-making in the work that Becker's research participants do to redefine the terms of civility to include Islam. But Becker also describes her subjects' often contentious efforts to reshape the mosque by creating alternative visions of what it means to be Muslim and to enact Muslim values as a "civic religion" (Becker 2021, p. 65) within the European context, which qualifies as mastery in the terms of the theory laid out here. Becker sees these combined capabilities, blending both mastery and change-making, as moral agency: "The enactment of moral agency in the European mosque entails the capacity to exert power in and from the margins: power to cultivate Islamic virtues and power to refute or flat out refuse, disempowering discourses, policies, and sociopolitical positing" (Becker 2021, p. 55).

Becker sensitively depicts the work of members of the two mosques as they carve out a space for pious Muslim civility, civic mosque community, and the ability to be both Muslim and German/British without irony or conflict. But Becker does not focus on these struggles at the level of the nation and national discourses, she grounds them primarily in the metropolis. According to Becker, the city is a particular place where belonging can take root locally. This is due to the critical mass of "strangers" in the city and the fact that the public and private are physically proximate but socially distanced in urban settings. As a result, within the city, immigrants and other displaced people can create a local community that binds strangers together and allows them to maintain their attachment to other times and places. Developing a sense of belonging and being recognized as a "Berliner", a "Londoner" or a "New Yorker" is possible, and might even act as a springboard for incorporation at the level of the nation. In terms of the application of CST to considerations of immigrant incorporation, Becker's work demonstrates the value of grounded, local research in which people pursue civil repair through the exercise of mastery and change-making.

However, Becker emphasizes the struggles of immigrants and their children seeking recognition in the society of reception. As such this work is temporally and theoretically removed from the first requisite element of migration: emigration. Emigration requires a departure, sometimes involuntary displacement, followed by immigration and settlement elsewhere, and this settlement may be temporary or with an uncertain time horizon. When considering the proximity to these elements of migration, Foner takes a long view as early post-1965 migrants have already spent many decades in the United States. Becker's ethnography focuses to a large extent on the children or immigrants or those who immigrated as children. As such, in Becker's book, one can see evidence of tensions between immigrant generations—a first generation looking to carve out a closed space in the impersonal metropolis where they can maintain their faith and way of life, and a second generation hoping to carry what they believe is the best of their heritage and their parents' faith into lives they hope to live through being included in the mainstream of the country of settlement. In other words, the place and time where one is now is what matters



in these accounts, and the struggle for inclusion in that place and time is the one that takes center stage. This is the case in Becker's account, in Foner's account, and indeed, in the theory laid out above.

However, there is a limitation arising from the temporal and geographic restrictions placed on this approach to immigrant incorporation: the theoretical significance of the act of migration is lost. Emigration and immigration are both aspects of migration, a process that includes an often (and in times of global political and environmental instability, increasingly) reluctant turn away from an entirely different life, different networks of relationships, and horizons of possibility. For most migrants, the experience of migration makes the physical world smaller—bridging geographic space and allowing two different grounded realities to take up residence in the same person. But migration also usually entails a severe constriction and collapsing of the social world—the loss of close community with shared history, interruption of extended family networks, and introduction of a lack of fit between one's way of being and the ways of being that make sense in one's surroundings. Understanding sources of immigrant agency in the pursuit of incorporation must take account of the socio-cultural context created by emigration, and Gowayed provides a way to do this.

Beyond incorporation in trajectories of refugee emplacement

Gowayed's *Refuge* takes a more holistic view that accounts for the fraught process of emigration and immigration as experienced by refugees. In contrast to Foner's optimistic account of multicultural America, and Becker's view of the pursuit of belonging, Gowayed focuses on the everyday experiences of people who came recently to the United States, Canada, and Germany as refugees. She describes the difficult experiences prompting their flight from their homes, talks about their hopes for the future, and their everyday challenges and small victories recovering from the trauma of displacement and working toward getting settled. In contrast to concerns about representation and being seen as "normal" or "civil", Gowayed's research participants are focused on building new lives, making ends meet, and finding meaningful work, including acquiring the necessary skills and credentials to do so. In pursuit of these goals, immigrants' agency can be severely constrained. The assimilationist contexts immigrants encounter in Germany and the United States leave Gowayed's research subjects struggling to become the masters of their own circumstances, while the Canadian context offers a greater balance between mastery and change-making.

Gowayed demonstrates that incorporation and the sources of available agency are fundamentally shaped by the actions of the state and other social institutions, which alleviate or compound immigrants' hope and suffering through processes or failures of recognition (see also Lamont 2018; Lamont et al. 2014; Voyer and Barker 2023). In a departure from civil sphere theory's emphasis on incorporation processes leading to a more multicultural redefinition of who "we" are or to more hyphenated or assimilationist terms of civil inclusion, Gowayed takes a "human-centric" (2022, p. 12) approach eschewing constructions of the collectivity to instead look at how refugees experience their new context and whether they receive the support they need to



achieve economic, social and emotional stability and well-being. Questions of worthiness, belonging, and fit are of no concern. Gowayed instead asks whether the prior experiences, abilities, work and educational credentials of immigrants are recognized; whether immigrants are supported in maintaining trans-national connections and preserving family ties through both the ability to contribute to the well-being of family abroad and reunifying with family in the new country; and whether the State and social institutions make adequate investments in helping immigrant newcomers acquire the language training, information, bridge financing, and employment support they need to become economically self-sufficient and to build secure, comfortable lives.

This does not mean that the terms of civil inclusion are irrelevant in Gowayed's account. On the contrary, comparing the experiences of refugees in the national contexts of Germany, Canada, and the United States, Gowayed observes that Canada's supportive multicultural model invests in the well-being of refugees, including support in language acquisition, but also recognition of her research participants' prior skills and credentials. Multicultural incorporation in Canada made it possible for the research participants to be employed in the fields they worked in before emigration. Germany's credentialized work sector, which is linked to vocational training through schooling, on the other hand, made it virtually impossible for the research participants to find work in their areas of expertise, essentially keeping them feeling unsettled and locked in a system of welfare dependency, albeit with generous welfare benefits. Meanwhile, the United States largely lacked investment and did very little to assist the research participants with having their credentials recognized. As a result, they struggled to find work and, even when they did, it tended to be precarious work leaving them in challenging economic situations and experiencing ongoing precarity.

Rethinking modes of incorporation

Of the books discussed in this essay, *Refuge* was least sympathetic to a CST analysis. Experiences such as those described by Gowayed fundamentally shape immigrant incorporation. Much of the existing research on immigrant incorporation is focused on what must happen for immigrants to be incorporated, and looking for the signs that this incorporation has happened or is being pursued, but Gowayed's work prompts us to ask whether we should reconsider the terms of inclusion written into our theories. Does or should inclusion in the civil sphere depend upon the demonstration or assignment of worthiness? Gowayed sees the project of immigrant incorporation as a different type of moral project. When taking in immigrants and refugees, a country is accepting the moral and practical responsibility to work toward eliminating human suffering, including an obligation to facilitate and accept newcomers, including recognizing and supporting other practices and ways of life *at home*. This moral project calls for support of the lifeways of all people where we are. In this view immigrants are people who, perhaps not by their own choice, have landed, and, whatever their relation



or commitment to the civil “we” (after all, if a refugee has a chance to go home safely, they may take it—whether the opportunity arises tomorrow or in 20 years), they are part of “us”.

Is there space in CST to respond to Gowayed’s challenge? Incorporation in civil sphere theory hinges on the establishment of a moral, boundary based on the conception of civil “we-ness” in contrast to uncivil “others”. To take Gowayed seriously requires that we ask if it is possible to move beyond this conceptualization of the boundaries of civility and rebuild civil sphere theory on the idea of “we-ness” defined along more radical and minimalist grounds. We are all here, together, breathing the same air, on the same planet, encountering one another as we move through our communities and these lives, after all. Must we decide who “we” are in the abstract, and then base recognition of others on the terms of that decision? Perhaps a more inductive approach could serve as the basis of social solidarity. If we look around the room, the city, the nation, and the planet and accept that “we” are simply whoever is present, have we any need to dwell on constructing and defending a conception of our own civility? With such a model, the challenge then shifts from CST’s focus on the boundaries of civil solidarity (the things that we will accept as being characteristics of “us”) to how we can best enact solidarity across time and space. Is it possible to theorize the civil sphere without the dynamic processes of exclusion and inclusion at the core of the theory? This, I argue, is both a model and an approach to the work of immigrant incorporation worth developing, and I take a first attempt at modeling this in the remainder of this essay.

How might we imagine the cultural sociology of immigrant incorporation in these terms? First, it seems to me that this should be conceived as a two-part model, consisting of emplacement and acceptance (see Fig. 2). Each aspect of this model will be discussed below.

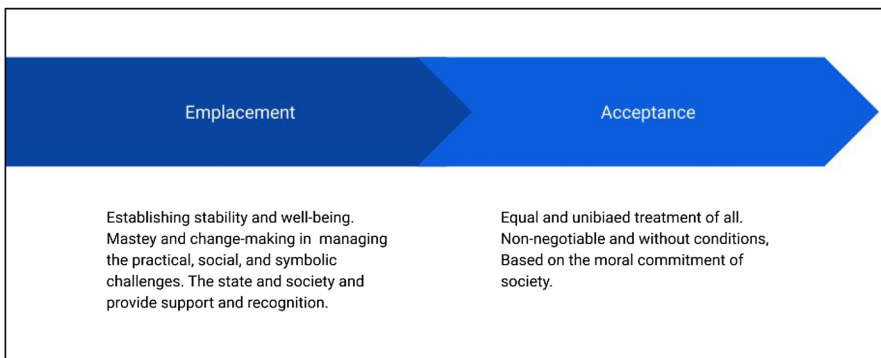


Fig. 2 Incorporation through Emplacement and Acceptance. The focus is on establishing stability and well-being post-migration. Immigrant agency is directed at the pursuit of their own well-being. State and society facilitate this process. Acceptance of immigrants is non-negotiable as a result of moral commitment to the well-being of all and the absence of boundaries of worth or belonging



Emplacement

Coupled with the displacement of emigration, migrating from one country, culture, and society to another is an act of displacement that initiates a struggle for *emplacement*, the multidimensional process of getting established and settled post-migration (Çağlar 2016; Çağlar and Glick Schiller 2018). While the concept of emplacement is increasingly used in anthropology and migration studies (see, for example, Çağlar and Glick Schiller 2018; Ferreri 2020; Petričević 2022), this concept has not yet been widely adopted in sociology, including applications of civil sphere theory to incorporation processes. Emplacement refers to the process of getting settled. The concept includes the agency of immigrant newcomers, the relevance of state policy and social organization, and the fact that, ultimately, immigrants experience belonging within local geographic and social contexts. According to Çağlar and Glick Schiller,

on the one hand, the continuing restructuring of place within multiscale networks of power and, on the other, a person's efforts, within the barriers and opportunities that contingencies of local place-making offer, to build a life within networks of local, national, supranational, and global interconnections... Emplacement must be understood within specific geographic and temporal spaces and power fields... (2018, pp. 20–21)

Emplacement is shaped by the state, for example, by providing support and recognition of the existing human capital of immigrants, as Gowayed describes. Both mastery and change-making are sources of agency in the emplacement process. Theoretically speaking, in its development and application, the concept of emplacement has not been applied to studies of non-instrumental and symbolic connections with the broader social world, even if such things are a key element of feeling “at home.” Although it may seem that this aspect of incorporation is mostly relevant for refugees like the individuals in Gowayed's study, research shows that many immigrants, including more elite “ex-pats” and labor migrants, experience challenges associated with emplacement (see van Bochove and Engbersen 2015).

Challenges of emplacement, therefore, include practical challenges such as becoming competent in a new language and culture, social challenges including establishing new and maintaining existing familial and social networks, political challenges such as policies that facilitate or obstruct pathways to establishing and accessing legal rights, and symbolic challenges including and dealing with culture shock (Plöger and Kubiak 2019; Ridgway and Kirk 2021).

Bringing this concept into CST conceptions of incorporation helps situate incorporation in time and space, highlighting the broader impacts of the negotiation of the boundaries of the civil sphere through many aspects of immigrant incorporation—from the nature of work credentialism shaping immigrants' ability to be seen as “skilled” workers, to the link between citizenship regimes and the boundaries of the civil sphere shaping the determination of “good” vs. “bad” immigrants. Adopting emplacement as a lens will integrate the cultural environment of immigrant settlement with more political and materialistic perspectives. Different modes of incorporation (and different forms of immigrant agency) are the background context for



all aspects of emplacement. In this way, emplacement demonstrates the functional contradictions and harmonies arising as the various priorities and policies, economic, and contextual factors come together in a single locus—individuals seeking a sense of home and belonging.

Acceptance

In this model, the second step refers to the more outward-looking aspect of inclusion: acceptance (see Fig. 2). According to Alba and Foner,

Full membership means having the same educational and work opportunities as long-term native-born citizens, and the same chances to better their own and their children's lot. It also means having a sense of dignity and belonging that comes with acceptance... (Alba and Foner 2015, p. 1)

Maintaining a role for acceptance alongside emplacement puts me out of step with the typical use of the concept of emplacement, which is intended to bypass the distinction between “immigrants” and “established” people:

The concept of emplacement both invokes a sense of place-making and allows us to focus on a set of experiences shared by people who are generally differentiated by scholars and policymakers as either migrant or native... non-migrants as well as migrants must seek emplacement... (Çağlar and Glick Schiller 2018, pp. 20–21).

However, I believe this theoretical move of arguing that emplacement is a sufficient overarching concept for all is out of step with the broader social and collective contexts of immigrant incorporation. Immigrant newcomers arrive in communities, localities, and nations already in progress, and self-consciously so. It is just this social world in progress, and what must occur for that social world to adapt to newcomers, that civil sphere theory is so well-suited to understanding.

If acceptance is the second step, it follows that immigrant incorporation is a process that requires action from the mainstream of society. Here I am arguing that a more radical conceptualization of what must occur extends beyond the renegotiation of the terms of civil inclusion and ordinary civil repair in which immigrants and other actors work for this acceptance and social inclusion through the negotiation of the terms of civil solidarity. In the conception of acceptance as the companion of emplacement, there is no “civility test”. Instead, the moral commitment of the mainstream of society is to the well-being of all, and it is difficult to imagine a scenario in which it would be possible to argue that any segment of society does not fit in or qualify for inclusion. Under these circumstances, it is also difficult to imagine what else could be asked of immigrants than their efforts at emplacement. Acceptance is non-negotiable, and if that is true, the analytical lens of CST shifts from emphasizing the strategies for the pursuit of civil repair, to seeing the negotiation of the civil boundary and the need to establish civil worthiness as obstacles to be overcome and challenges to successful emplacement.



This may be a radical proposal, but I believe civil sphere theory could be reformulated in such a manner that theory maintains its utility to empirical investigation while strengthening its contribution as a normative project, in particular the persistent and sticky puzzle of the required outgroup or “other” necessary in the construction of the civil boundary, a challenge that has been noted by others. For example, in her criticism of CST, Hammer (2020, p. 103) argues that the baseline exclusion at the heart of CST can never support a truly solidaristic, democratic, and egalitarian project because

The same social processes that create codes for civility, freedom, the sacred, and the sane also invent the colonial subject as its opposite. For this reason, the civil sphere can only ever partly include colonial outgroups: Full inclusion would require a reckoning with the process of its own making. If outgroups fail to live up to desirable standards, it not only cements their exclusion but also reaffirms the perfected idea of what the inside claims to be and thereby reifies the meaning of the civil.

Adopting emplacement and acceptance as the key elements of incorporation and studying exclusionary boundaries of the civil sphere as dysfunctional elements that must be overcome instead of processes holding the key to incorporation does not change the practical applications of the theory, but it does set the theory on a different normative path—one that presumes the primacy of baseline human solidarity.

Conclusion

Becker, Gowayed, and Foner all demonstrate the continued significance of migration—both for our sociological understandings and for the nature of social life itself. How do we conceive of place, home, and belonging in a world on the move in which cultural distances compete with geography-proximities resulting from the rapid movement of people, around the globe? While people and social scientists tend to think within the boundaries of the nation-state and the civic virtues ascribed to it, it is not hard to see that these ideas about our particular civic characters are constructions that can be used to harm and injure just as easily as they used to expand the solidaristic circle.

What moral projects should we concern ourselves with in these dystopian times? Foner’s work advocates for acceptance: acceptance of the fact that immigrants inevitably reshape the communities where they settle, and acceptance of the fact that this inevitable change often for the better. Becker demonstrates the challenges that arise when immigrants are not accepted without a civility test, and it is difficult to imagine that the surveillance of mosque communities and pressures to construct a “civil Islam” actually support immigrant emplacement or contribute to acceptance on the part of the mainstream. Gowayed, however, concludes that the Canadian multicultural model of immigrant reception, while not perfect, supports the emplacement of refugees, leading them to identify with their new nation, generally feel accepted, and be optimistic about their futures there. The moral commitment required was to believe in the fundamental equal worth of others, and the



choice to abandon symbolic distinctions between those who are part of us and those who are not when enacting our commitments to one another. The task before cultural sociologists of migration is identifying how the work of emplacement and acceptance can best be undertaken, and how the universal solidaristic circle can best be realized.

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