

FROM INTEGRATION TO ALIENATION

Promises of Inclusion, Practices of Exclusion

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ABSTRACT

This thesis critically interrogates the concept of integration, revealing it not as a neutral or inclusive process, but as a deeply politicized and exclusionary practice. Through a Critical Discourse Analysis of *Mein Leben in Österreich: Chancen und Regeln*—the official brochure used in Austria’s integration courses—it illustrates how integration narratives reproduce societal hierarchies and sustain national imaginaries rooted in colonial legacies. By examining the brochure as a concrete site where these dynamics are enacted, the thesis shows how refugees are positioned as permanent outsiders: invited to mimic an idealized national identity, yet perpetually excluded through subtle mechanisms of language, representation, and state discipline. Integration thus emerges not as a pathway to belonging, but as a form of governance shaped by surveillance, conditionality, and what Berlant terms “cruel optimism. Grounded in critical theories and critical migration studies, this thesis argues that integration functions less as a vehicle for inclusion and more as a technology of governance, managing difference while reinforcing national boundaries under the guise of belonging.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, **Abdo Abu Assaf**, candidate for the MA degree in International Relations declare herewith that the present thesis titled “From Integration to Alienation: Promises of Inclusion, Practices of Exclusion” is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright.

I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Vienna, 20 May 2025

Abdo Abu Assaf

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INTRODUCTION

Refugees and migrants' integration remains a central focus of migration studies, reflecting ongoing concerns about how newcomers are received, positioned, and governed within host societies (Schinkel 2018; Donà, n.d.; Phillimore 2024; McPherson 2010; Saharso 2019). In Europe, both migration and integration studies have gained prominence in recent decades and become widely institutionalized (Favell 2022; Pisarevskaya et al. 2020; Morawska 2017). This growing attention mirrors broader societal debates about national identity, social cohesion, and the boundaries of belonging. Despite the prominence of integration in both academic and policy debates, the concept itself remains deeply elusive and contested (Schinkel 2018; Rytter 2019; Hadj Abdou 2019). While often presented as a neutral or technical process of inclusion, integration policies in Europe have increasingly taken on a prescriptive character, defining not only what newcomers must do to "integrate", but also what it means to be part of the national community (Olwig and Paerregaard 2011, 3; Spencer and Charsley 2021, 3).

This shift raises critical questions about power, identity, and belonging. In Austria, for example, mandatory state-sponsored integration courses for refugees outline fixed notions of values, behavior, and social norms, positioning the refugee as a subject in need of guidance and transformation. Yet little attention is paid to how such discourses construct hierarchies between citizens and non-citizens, or how they reproduce assumptions about cultural superiority. This thesis responds to that gap by examining how integration is framed in the official integration narrative and what this framing reveals about the imagined boundaries of the nation.

In Austria, the topic of integration is highly politicized and contentious, often gaining prominence during election cycles (see 'Was Ihnen im Wahlkampf wichtig ist: Migration, Asyl, Integration und Arbeit, n.d.). A key component of the country's integration framework is the mandatory *Werte und Orientierungskurse* (Values and Orientation Courses), which are

officially presented as tools for fostering social cohesion and equipping refugees with the knowledge needed to participate in Austrian society ('Österreichischer Integrationsfonds ÖIF', n.d.). This research provides both a theoretical and empirical analysis of integration and is guided by the central research question: **How is the concept of integration represented and communicated in Austria's integration policies, and what are the potential implications of these representations for refugees' experiences?**

By analyzing the language, assumptions, and values embedded in the official integration materials of Austria's integration courses, particularly the state-issued brochure *Mein Leben in Österreich: Chancen und Regeln*², this research explores how the Austrian state communicates expectations to refugees and delineates the contours of belonging. The aim is not only to uncover how the refugee is imagined and addressed but also to understand how such discourse reflects and reinforces particular narratives of Austrian identity, modernity, and moral superiority.

Austria's integration framework does not operate in isolation; it reflects broader patterns in how states manage migration through discourse and policy. From an International Relations (IR) perspective, integration is not simply a domestic matter but part of a wider apparatus of migration governance that regulates who belongs and on what terms (Haddad 2003; Collrin and Bauder 2025; Hansen 2014; Hoffmann, n.d.). In the Austrian case, integration is constructed as a question of state sovereignty and national security ('Nationaler Aktionsplan Integration - Bundeskanzleramt Österreich', n.d.), with access to belonging conditioned on conformity to dominant cultural norms. Critical Migration Studies challenge conventional approaches to immigrant integration, critiquing its role in reinforcing power structures and exclusion, and advocating for more nuanced, critical perspectives on migration and belonging (Schinkel 2018; Rytter 2019; Abdou 2019). Austria's integration brochure institutionalizes a particular vision

² My life in Austria, opportunities and rules

of "Austrian society" and "successful integration", reinforcing boundaries between insiders and outsiders. A postcolonial perspective further illuminates how these policies echoes colonial logics, positioning refugees as subjects to be "transformed" and "reeducated" in order to gain acceptance. This study contests the view of integration as mere adaptation, instead interrogating the very premise of integration and the standpoint from which it becomes thinkable as a policy objective. It approaches integration as a mechanism of governance and control that shapes both refugee experiences and the boundaries of national identity.

This study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine the official Austrian integration brochure. Rather than treating integration as a neutral policy goal, it interrogates the very discursive foundations that make integration both intelligible and desirable as a state project. CDA enables a close reading of how language constructs social realities, revealing how power operates through assumptions about refugees' behavior, values, and place in society. By analyzing both explicit messages and underlying norms, this approach uncovers how integration discourse delineates who belongs, under what conditions, and on whose terms. It further draws on postcolonial critique to show how Austria's integration framework echoes colonial logics, positioning refugees as racialized subjects to be molded into acceptable members of the nation. In doing so, the research shifts focus from policy outcomes to integration as a mode of governance, one that reinforces national identity, power hierarchies, and the cultural politics of belonging.

My research begins by exploring the evolving role of integration within migration governance, tracing its rise as a central concept and its extension beyond external borders. It then analyzes how integration is framed in both academic discourse and the political sphere in Austria, highlighting its widespread acceptance as a neutral, evaluative framework for refugees' inclusion. I will then engage with critical and post-colonial scholarship that challenges this assumption, highlighting how integration policies construct national identity, reinforce power

hierarchies, and shape notions of belonging. Building on these critiques, I will explore alternative approaches that rethink integration beyond its conventional policy-driven framework, accounting for its contested and political nature. Additionally, my contribution will expand the critique of the concept of integration by focusing not only on the conceptualization of integration and its policies, but also on their tangible effects on refugees. I will examine how these policies contribute to the alienation of refugees, reinforcing their marginalization and perpetuating their position as outsiders within Austrian society.

Finally, I will analyze the Austrian integration brochure within this broader discussion, assessing how this cultural artifact reflects and reproduces the exclusionary dynamics of integration discourse. In doing so, I will illustrate how refugees are positioned as permanent outsiders and subjects of conditional belonging, rather than as full members of the national community, thereby reinforcing rather than dismantling existing societal hierarchies.

1. BORDERS, CRISIS, AND THE POLITICS OF INTEGRATION

The so-called 2015 refugee crisis marked a turning point in the European political landscape, propelling the issue of refugee integration into the forefront of national and international policy debates (Hagelund 2020; Saatçioğlu 2020; Carrera et al. 2015). As large numbers of refugees, particularly from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, sought asylum in Europe, the question of how to manage their inclusion into host societies gained urgency (Hynie 2018; Hernes 2018). This shift was not merely a humanitarian concern, but also one deeply tied to broader political and social questions about national identity, belonging, sovereignty, and security.

In recent years, two contrasting views of refugees has emerged: one which frames them as a security threat to societal stability, cultural identity, and economic security (see Huysmans 1995), often amplified by right-wing leaders who exploit fears of demographic change, economic strain, and the erosion of national values (Botelho, Bogdan, and Power 2022, 1). In contrast, the additive narrative sees migrants as enriching host countries. However, the rise of right-wing authoritarianism has shifted focus, intensifying concerns about societal fragmentation and "the great replacement" (Botelho, Bogdan, and Power 2022, 1). Within these narratives, refugees are securitized and framed as threats to Europe's security, culture, and social fabric (Gray and Franck 2019, 276).

Culture, gaining prominence, has increasingly replaced race as a key marker of difference in migration discourses (E. Balibar 2009; Soysal 1995; Theo Goldberg 2006; Ahmed 2000; Yuval-Davis, Kannabirān, and Vieten 2006). Rather than relying solely on biological distinctions, migrants and refugees are framed as threats based on perceived cultural inferiority and incompatibilities, with their practices, attitudes, and values becoming the primary basis for exclusion and securitization (Ibrahim 2005, 165). Therefore, despite predictions in the 1990s

and 2000s about the decline of nation-states and the rise of a borderless world due to globalization, national identity, citizenship, and the state remain central to society (Koch and Paasi 2016, 1). These structures persist through various forms of nationalism.

For example, Tyerman and van Isacker (2024) analyze UK bordering through the lens of monstrosity, linking contemporary border practices to colonial-era demonizations of racialized people. They identify four mechanisms of migrant monsterisation: animalisation, zombification, criminalisation, and barbarisation. Barbarisation, they argue, frames migrants as "hordes" threatening to destroy Western civilisation's core aspects, casting them as "uncivilised and unassimilable" (Tyerman and Van Isacker 2024, 10). This rhetoric is central to the racialisation of migrants and contributes to border policies of deterrence and "hostile environments", embodying a new form of state power (Tyerman and Van Isacker 2024). In this context, integration policies operate not just as a practical response to migration, but as a central mechanism by the state for defining the contours of national communities.

Bridget Anderson (2013b) argues that immigration control is not just about regulating who enters a country but is fundamentally about defining and maintaining social hierarchies within the nation. Through the concept of the *community of value*, she shows how migration governance is deeply intertwined with race, class, and labor control (2013b, 2). According to Anderson, immigration policies do not merely manage movement; they construct distinctions between "good citizens", "failed citizens", and "non-citizens", reinforcing broader systems of inclusion and exclusion. From an IR perspective, this transformation is significant because it places the politics of belonging at the heart of state sovereignty, identity, and security debates.

Nation-state borders should be seen in this context as artefacts of European colonial governance, which established and enforced a global racial hierarchy with whiteness at its top. As Tyerman and van Isacker (2024, 4) argue, race and racial difference did not pre-exist the colonial encounter but were constructed through it. Rather than reflecting natural categories of

people based on biological or cultural difference, racialization functioned as a sociopolitical process to “discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans” by interpreting bodies through the lens of colonial ideology (2024, 4). Moreover, Brito (2024, 8) argues that post-colonial scholars should view the migrant crisis as part of Europe’s long history of empire and colonialism, not as an exceptional moment. This challenges the EU's narrative of an "invasion" by migrants from the Global South, obscuring Europe's role in creating the conditions for migration. Post-colonial scholarship should also link Europe’s militarized borders to racial and colonial dynamics, where migrants are seen as "racial others", and the violence they face enforces racial hierarchies, portraying non-white bodies as less deserving of protection (Bruto 2024, 8).

Consequently, borders and b/ordering extend beyond the external or physical; they are deeply embedded in social, political, and racial structures that dictate who is deemed part of Europe’s "shared humanity" and who is not (É. Balibar 2002). This notion of shared humanity often ignores the colonial racial hierarchies that shape belonging and exclusion, as these boundaries operate not only territorially but also through social imaginaries. Understanding these layered dynamics of exclusion is crucial to grasping how the concept of integration, and its challenges, takes shape in contemporary migration contexts.

2. INTEGRATION, BELONGING, AND THE POLITICS OF EXCLUSION

2.1 Conceptualizing Integration: Perspectives and Debates

The concept of integration is elusive, rarely defined, and often contested. Ager and Strang (2008: 167) highlight how integration is a “word used by many but understood differently by most”. Entzinger and Biezeveld also note that while integration is often used as a term, it is “rarely defined as a concept” (2003, 6). Furthermore, Spencer (2022, 219) emphasizes that “a fundamental problem in the study of “integration” has been a failure to separate the empirical *is* from the normative *ought*—that is, to study what is happening in society separately from implicit assumptions about a desired end goal”. Consequently, Hadj Abdou (2019, 4) argues that the concept of “integration” is politically effective *because* of its vagueness and flexibility. Its broad definition allows it to be adapted to various political agendas, making it a useful tool for justifying policies across different contexts without facing significant opposition. While the meaning of the concept is highly contested, Favell (2001, 3) argues that the term has been used to characterize “progressive-minded, tolerant, and inclusive approaches to dealing with ethnic minorities”.

Ager and Strang's (2008, 170) framework, for example, conceptualizes integration as a multi-dimensional process involving social connections, education, employment, housing, health, rights, and language. They emphasize that integration is a two-way process, where both migrants and the host society contribute to the integration process, with supportive policies and community networks playing a crucial role. Integration, therefore, implies both societal transformation and continuity, with the nation-state playing a central role in shaping policies and institutional structures to achieve this goal (Favell 2022, 2-3). Within these narratives, integration is often assumed to be an inherently positive and neutral process, depicted as

straightforward and universally beneficial. Integration is therefore commonly presented as a fundamental objective in refugee resettlement policies and is a recurring subject in public discourse.

While integration is often seen as a neutral tool for assisting migrants' and refugees' adaptation and assessing their progress, integration policies often overlook the assumptions shaping the concept and the power imbalances within the process. These frameworks assume a level playing field, ignoring the colonial, racial, and cultural biases that shape both the process of integration and the way refugees are expected to conform to the "values" of the host society. Therefore, the normative frameworks guiding the integration policies go largely unchallenged, reinforcing predefined preferred outcomes and neglecting the deeper structural and ideological forces at play. This oversight perpetuates a limited and reductive understanding of integration, hindering the development of more inclusive, nuanced, and equitable approaches. Randy K. Lippert and Miikka Pyykkönen (2012, 1) note how the extensive body of scholarly literature on integration has predominantly focused on state policies, practices and the influence of receiving societies on the "successful" incorporation of immigrants, specific aspects of immigrant experiences, or barriers to integration (Reitz, 2003; Sayad, 1999).

In Europe, much of the contemporary research has examined migrants' integration into national labor markets and education systems (Zanten 1997; Pitkänen 2002; Ahmad, 2005; Bisin et al. 2011). This framing often renders the concept of integration as neutral and technocratic, obscuring its deeply political nature. By focusing predominantly on policies, practices, and measurable outcomes like labor market participation or educational attainment, this framing depoliticizes integration, reducing it to a set of "success" or "failure" metrics while sidelining questions of power, inequality, and historical context. Such an approach can inadvertently reinforce the dominant narratives of receiving societies, portraying integration as

a one-sided process, even when claiming otherwise, in which refugees bear the sole responsibility for their “successful” incorporation.

2.2 Integrating the 'Other': The Austrian Model of Refugee Integration

While this study is not primarily concerned with the history or technicalities of integration, as it focuses on the underlying standpoints that make talking about integration possible, it is useful to briefly summarize the development of integration in Austria to provide some contextual outline. Austria’s approach to integration has undergone significant changes since the post-World War II era (Josipovic and Reeger 2020, 15). Initially, the country had no formal integration policies, as migration was largely seen as a temporary phenomenon tied to labor needs. The recruitment of “guest workers” (*Gastarbeiter*) in the 1960s and 1970s was accompanied by an expectation that migrants would eventually return to their home countries, leading to minimal focus on long-term integration (Permoser and Rosenberger 2012, 41).

The 1990s marked a turning point due to increasing immigration, particularly from the Balkans, and the growing visibility of migrants in Austrian society. Integration began to gain political attention, often framed as a necessity to ensure social cohesion. However, it was primarily approached as the responsibility of migrants, emphasizing language acquisition and cultural adaptation (Josipovic and Reeger 2020, 15). In the 2000s, integration became highly politicized, influenced by rising far right, anti-immigration sentiments, and the perception of migration as a challenge to Austrian culture and identity (Duncan 2010). The Integration Agreement (*Integrationsvereinbarung*), introduced in 2003, made German language acquisition mandatory for non-EU migrants seeking long-term residency (Permoser and Rosenberger 2012, 47). This agreement has since been expanded to include mandatory “Values

and Orientation Courses” (*Werte- und Orientierungskurse*), which explicitly link integration to understanding and adopting Austrian “values”.

Today, integration in Austria remains a highly politicized and contested issue, often gaining heightened visibility during election campaigns. In the lead-up to the Austrian National Election in September 2024, an ORF report surveyed the positions of the nine parties running nationwide on migration and integration (‘Was Ihnen im Wahlkampf wichtig ist: Migration, Asyl, Integration und Arbeit’, n.d.). Each party was asked to rate the importance of these issues in their platforms on a scale from zero (not important) to ten (very important). The conservative and right-wing parties rated them at 10, the Social Democrats at 8, the Greens and liberal NEOS at 9, and the Communists also at 9. These scores underscore how central, and contested, migration and integration have become across Austria’s political spectrum. Mainstream political actors and media outlets frequently instrumentalize integration debates to advance partisan agendas, often resorting to the stigmatization of refugees, migrants, and Austrians with so-called “migration backgrounds”. While political parties frame integration in different ways, the concept itself is rarely questioned, serving instead as a common, if malleable, reference point across ideological divides.

The progressives, for example, often frame integration through the lens of progressive values, particularly feminist and queer rights, arguing that ethnic migrants come from societies that are incompatible with these principles and must therefore be re-educated to align with Austrian norms, a narrative reflected in the liberal *NEOS* politician Yannick Shetty’s remark that he “would not walk around Favoriten³ with a rainbow flag” (‘Würde in Favoriten Nicht Mit Regenbogenfahne Herumlaufen – DiePresse.Com’, n.d.). The conservatives and far right, on the other hand, focuses on cultural, religious, and identity-based differences, portraying migration and lack of integration as a threat to Austria’s national identity and social cohesion,

³ Favoriten is Vienna’s most diverse district.

as seen by the conservatives' push for a "*Leitkultur*" or a guiding culture that frames "Austrian values" as non-negotiable ('Intensive Debatte Um Mehr Pflichten Für Flüchtlinge Und Migranten - Inland - derStandard.at › Inland', n.d.). Additionally, there is a growing narrative that portrays antisemitism as an issue largely imported by Muslim refugees (see 'Perspektiven Integration: Österreichischer Integrationsfonds ÖIF', n.d.), reinforcing the notion that integration is primarily about correcting perceived deficits in migrant communities. However, the racialized and exclusionary nature of these debates, along with the ways they position migrants as perpetual outsiders in need of transformation, is rarely scrutinized.

Integration in Austria can thus be understood as a site of moral panic, where migrants and refugees are framed as threats to national identity and social cohesion. The concept of moral panic, as introduced by Stanley Cohen in *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972), refers to an exaggerated and widespread societal fear over a perceived threat to social norms and values, often fueled by media, political actors, or interest groups. Cohen outlines key stages of moral panic: the identification of a threat, media amplification, public anxiety, institutional response, and either dissipation or enduring social impact. Such panics frequently target specific groups as scapegoats, holding them responsible for broader social anxieties or perceived decline. Building on this, Stuart Hall and colleagues (1978) argue that the media plays a central role in amplifying these moral panics, constructing public fear and legitimizing more punitive policies, particularly against marginalized communities.

While migration-related moral panics have been explored in the literature (see Eversman and Bird 2017; Sedláková 2017), the discourse surrounding integration as a moral panic has received less attention. The refugee integration discourse in Austria can be viewed through the lens of a moral panic, as it often amplifies exaggerated fears about cultural threats and social cohesion. Refugees are frequently portrayed as a threat to national identity and values, with media and political rhetoric exacerbating these fears and creating disproportionate

concern that does not align with the actual risks. This is highlighted, for example, by a study analyzing Austrian media coverage of integration from 2014 to 2024, which found that 44.7% of articles were negative, while only 0.3% were positive ('Migration Und Integration in Den Österreichischen Medien: Grundtenor Der Berichterstattung Kritisch', n.d.). Using AI, the study examined 37,400 articles from seven major newspapers (Der Standard, Die Presse, Kronen Zeitung, Kleine Zeitung, Kurier, Heute, and oe24), averaging 10 articles per day. Therefore, the intensification of integration policies can be understood in this context, where integration is framed as crucial for safeguarding national identity. This political narrative, bolstered by exaggerated media coverage, portrays refugees as "folk devils", driving the push for increasingly stringent integration measures.

2.3 Racializing the Discourse: Language and Power in Integration

The arbitrary and inconsistent use of terms such as migrants, refugees, immigrants, and individuals with a migration background throughout the statements, policies, and scholarly studies surrounding integration creates ambiguity in public discourse (Borrelli and Ruedin 2024; Parry-Jones 2024). Although these terms may be intuitively understood, they are frequently applied without clear definition, often with the underlying assumption that the subject is non-white (Yuval-Davis 2011). This is evident as the discourse of integration focuses exclusively on the integration of third-country nationals, immigrants from outside the EU, despite the fact that the majority of all foreign residents in Austria come from other EU countries, particularly from Germany and Romania ('Ausländer Österreich Staatsangehörigkeiten 2025', n.d.).

Furthermore, the label "Austrian with a migration background" is used to distinguish individuals perceived as foreign, even when their familial ties to Austria span multiple generations ('Migrationshintergrund', n.d.). This reflects broader societal processes of racialization, which is reflected in integration policies, where certain groups are marked as

"Other", highlighting how identity and belonging are produced and politicized. This is illustrated in the EU's *Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027*, which states:

"The challenge of integration and inclusion is particularly relevant for migrants, not only newcomers but sometimes also for third-country nationals who might have naturalized and are EU citizens. This is why the scope of this action plan covers both migrants and EU citizens with a migrant background" ('Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion - European Commission', n.d.).

This statement highlights the problematic and intentional fluidity with which terms like "refugees", "migrants", and "migrant background" are used, further blurring the distinction between "native" citizens, non-citizens, and naturalized citizens. It reinforces the notion that the label "migrant" can extend beyond newcomers to include individuals who have been citizens for years, perpetuating the idea of "otherness" even within established national frameworks. In the German-speaking context the term *Ausländer* (foreigner or outsider) remains prevalent, often used to broadly categorize anyone who is perceived as not belonging to the national ethnic majority, regardless of their legal status or length of residence. This term is widely employed across various sectors of society, including journalism and demographic statistics. For example, an article from the weekly left-leaning Viennese newspaper *Falter*, titled "Wie gut funktioniert die Integration von Ausländern?" (How effective is the integration of foreigners?), illustrates how the term is used in a way that seems to treat it as a benign concept (see 'Wie gut funktioniert die Integration von Ausländern?' 2019). Notably, integration itself is not questioned, but rather presented as expected, self-evident, and a universally accepted good, an unquestionable necessity.

The use of the term is also often used in demographic statistics, where Germans are the largest "*Ausländer*" group in Austria ('Ausländer Österreich Staatsangehörigkeiten 2025', n.d.). However, outside of these statistical measures, the term *Ausländer*, particularly when used derogatorily, almost never applies to Germans, EU nationals, or even white migrants,

refugees, or expats (from example from the U.S. or Australia). This is because the term is widely associated with individuals who are perceived as non-white. Amnesty International Germany even included the term in their discrimination glossary, noting that "*Ausländer*" is intended to refer to individuals without German citizenship ('Glossar für diskriminierungssensible Sprache', n.d.). However, Amnesty argues that its incorrect use as a synonym for immigrants is discriminatory, as most immigrants and their descendants are no longer considered foreigners but Germans. They conclude that the term "*Ausländer*" inherently locates people *outside* of society, reinforcing their exclusion. This label carries significant social and cultural implications, as it continues to signify "otherness" and reinforces a sense of exclusion. The use of such terms not only blurs the distinctions between different migrant groups but also perpetuates an underlying hierarchy, where individuals are framed as outsiders in need of integration, regardless of their actual legal status or lived experiences.

A striking example of the racialized boundaries of belonging was highlighted by former German Chancellor Angela Merkel during a public discussion, where she reflected on the persistent demand for proof of integration among Black Germans. In a clip shared by her government spokesperson, Merkel stated: "My great-grandfather was Polish. I am now the fourth generation. Of course, no one asks me whether I still somehow need to integrate" ("Wo Kommst Du Eigentlich Her?" | Ze.Tt', n.d.). Merkel continued: "Does someone in Germany who is Black always have to prove that they are integrated? Or are they, by definition, not integrated because they belong to a minority based on skin color?" She noted that Black Germans, despite raising their children in Germany, speaking German, building careers, and having successful children, are still met with the recurring question, "Where are you actually from?" This example illustrates how integration is not only a bureaucratic or social process but also a racialized and enduring condition of conditional belonging.

While this issue of categorization and its implications for identity and belonging will be central to my argument as I explore how these labels influence the integration process and the experiences of those individuals deemed as cultural outsiders, I will not attempt to offer a definitive definition, legal or otherwise, of terms such as "refugees", "migrants", or "migrant background", as this is not the central concern of my study. The focus here is on the concept of integration itself, and by extension, on those who are included within this discourse. The use of such terms, and the implications they carry, will be examined in relation to how they shape the integration process and the experiences of individuals categorized as cultural outsiders, without delving into their precise definitions. The emphasis is on how these labels operate within the broader social, political, and cultural frameworks that influence both policy and lived realities.

2.4 Depoliticizing Integration: The Illusion of Neutrality

Scholars attempt to understand the concept better, measure its outcomes better, and base their policy recommendations accordingly. Ager and Strang (2008) identify four themes central to "successful" integration: access and achievement in employment, housing, education, and health; perceptions and practices of citizenship and rights; social connections within and between community groups; and structural barriers such as language, culture, and the local environment. Similar evaluative frameworks, such as integration indices, exist across disciplines and countries and often focus on formal rights, duties, and outcomes (e.g., employment, education, language competence, cultural belonging, social capital, rights and citizenship).

These benchmarks are frequently presented as objective diagnostic tools, designed to measure migrant integration and identify necessary policy changes. Research on indicators of successful integration, (see McGinnity et al. 2020; Zincone, Caponio, and Carastro 2006), is often reflected in national policies. In Austria, for example, the Austrian Integration Fund

(ÖIF), a government-affiliated institution, oversees migrant and refugee integration ('Österreichischer Integrationsfonds ÖIF', n.d.). It administers the integration courses and their learning materials (which will be analyzed later), language programs, and job market initiatives while conducting research on migration. The ÖIF also monitors integration by collecting data, evaluating progress in areas such as language acquisition, employment, and social participation, and assessing the effectiveness of its programs. Additionally, it collaborates with the government to ensure policy compliance.

These frameworks, while initially focused on the general principles of integration, are also applied across economic, social, and cultural dimensions. For instance, some studies investigate how personal, cultural, and experiential factors shape refugees' settlement experiences, particularly within the context of super-diversity and migration politics (Phillimore 2011). Similarly, research comparing refugee experiences across EU countries highlights that refugees view integration as both functional and social, emphasizing the need for policies that acknowledge this complexity and treat refugees as active social participants (Korac 2003). This broader evaluative framework is also illustrated in various studies, from the economic integration of refugees in developing countries (KUHLMAN 1991) to the integration of refugees in areas of a host society (Glorius, Bürer, and Schneider 2021). Some studies also explore the role of social connections in shaping the mental health and well-being of isolated refugee men from Iran and Afghanistan (Strang and Quinn 2021) and examine the effects of integration policies on refugees' employment and earnings (Foged, Hasager, and Peri 2024).

While these diverse applications underscore the complex and multifaceted nature of refugee integration, they also reveal a broader tendency in academic and policy discussions to treat the concept as self-evident, often presenting it as neutral and objective. This tendency is not just normalized, it is encouraged. For example, the Austrian Integration Fund offers a Research Award to recognize academic contributions to the study of migration and refugee

integration ('Forschungspreis Integration: Österreichischer Integrationsfonds ÖIF', n.d.). This award specifically encourages research on integration that addresses issues such as "Working and learning German", "Strengthening women and girls with a migration background", and "Antisemitism in the migration context", focusing on migrant participation in labor markets, education, and societal adaptation, as well as forms of discrimination, particularly those that arise from migrants themselves rather than society at large.

However, this framing does more than emphasize specific, interventionist aspects of integration; it serves to provide a scientific legitimization of pre-existing societal narratives. Such research not only reinforces the portrayal of migrants as incomplete, deficient members of society in need of re-education, while encouraging further studies aimed at facilitating this re-education, but also perpetuates harmful stereotypes under the veneer of academic objectivity. The concern here is not necessarily with the veracity of these narratives or benchmarks but with the underlying standpoint from which this framing is constructed, and the extent to which it challenges or consolidates exclusionary and homogenizing ideologies.

2.5 Unpacking the Concept: Challenging Core Assumptions

The concept of integration has also been widely critiqued in academic discourse. Favell observes that while integration is often portrayed as a progressive and inclusive approach to managing diversity, it primarily functions as a mechanism for reinforcing the nation-state system (2022). He argues that rather than facilitating individual well-being and mobility, integration policies are fundamentally designed to uphold borders and maintain social and political order (Favell 2022).

Accordingly, integration policy is framed as something the *state* actively implements from the top down. Favell argues that this state-driven approach positions integration as both a societal goal and a government-led process, reinforcing a nation-state-centered view that

excludes the possibility of societal integration occurring independently of state intervention (2003, 3). Moreover, Janine Dahinden (2016, 2207) critiques this institutionalization of migration and integration research, noting that the field is often shaped by a nation-state and ethnicity-centered perspective. She argues that the research has become entangled with a historical nation-state migration apparatus, contributing to the normalization of specific categories and discourses (Dahinden 2016, 2209).

Within this view, Mikkel Rytter (2019, 678) suggests that social scientists should stop using the concept of integration altogether, as he believes it problematizes the relationship between immigrants and the indigenous majority. These views note how the concept's normative biases and conceptual ambiguity contribute to migrant-blaming narratives and reinforce distorted ideas of nation-states and homogeneous majority populations (Spencer and Charsley 2021, 2). The perceived neutrality and normative aspects of the concept are also subject to criticism. Olwig and Paerregard (2011) assert that integration "is not a neutral concept denoting the joining together of different population groups". Rather, they argue, it is "ideologically loaded" concept (Olwig and Paerregaard 2011).

William Schinkel (2018) presents one of the most compelling critiques of the concept and its underlying assumptions. Schinkel argues that the entire framework of assumptions, selections, categorization, conceptualizations, and practices that underpin the analysis and measurement of immigrant integration functions as a mechanism that inevitably produces and reinforces hierarchized differences (2018, 6). He critiques the entire toxic public discourse surrounding migration and immigrant integration in Western Europe, which, he argues, is steeped in racism and shaped by the notion of a "failed multiculturalism" (2018, 1). Schinkel also argues that this narrative enables the problematization of migrants and their descendants while neglecting relational aspects of migration. Moreover, he claims that social scientific research on immigrant integration reinforces this problematization by providing a "factual

architecture" for these narratives, tying itself to racist discourses and limiting alternative approaches (2018, 2). Migration research thus primarily functions to legitimize and reinforce the mechanisms of governing populations (Boersma 2019, 5).

The consonant practice of assessing immigrant integration in Western Europe involves monitoring and routine scanning for perceived "problems" through quantitative measures. These assessments evaluate factors such as crime rates among certain ethnic groups, pride in the receiving society or home country, and adherence to "modern" beliefs. Such measurements render the integration of populations classified as "immigrants" calculable within the framework of the receiving society, a process that involves a particular way of *seeing* (Boersma and Schinkel 2018, 309).

Schinkel also criticizes the individualized and racialized application of "integration" in Western European migration discourse. Originally a sociological concept referring to the cohesion of a social whole, he argues that integration has been reduced to a measure of how well migrants or their descendants fit into society, framed as an *individual* responsibility rather than a relational or systemic process (Schinkel 2018, 3). This shift, according to Schinkel, lacks theoretical grounding and perpetuates racial hierarchies by aggregating individual data into ethnic groups, attributing collective responsibility for "lack of integration" to entire communities (for example discussing the lack of integration of the Turkish community in Germany).

Moreover, the application of immigrant integration at the individual level serves to preserve and protect a preconceived notion of a "pure" society (Schinkel 2018). Meaning, when issues such as anti-Semitism, unemployment, incarceration, or homophobia arise, they are not recognized as societal problems. Instead, they are attributed to individuals who are perceived as existing "outside society" and in need of integration. This dynamic sustains the illusion of a pristine, problem-free "society" and positioning the subjects of integration as perpetually

"arriving" and never fully belonging (Boersma and Schinkel 2018). Schinkel argues that the rhetoric of "bringing people into society" sustains the notion of "immigrant integration", portraying immigrants in Western Europe as perpetually in the process of arriving (Schinkel 2018, 5). This assumption extends to the children of immigrants, effectively labeling them as immigrants and rendering them "mobile", as though they are still on their way to becoming part of society (Schinkel 2018, 5). Schinkel concludes that immigrant integration is not a neutral concept but one rooted in *social hygiene*, aimed at purifying society (Schinkel 2018, 5).

Crucially, he also notes that white citizens are exempt from this integration discourse through what he calls *dispensation of integration*, as they are seen as inherently part of "society", reinforcing racial hierarchies and coding "society" as white (Schinkel 2018, 4). Consequently, integration is regarded as a mechanism for social maintenance, perpetuating the dynamics of exclusion and dominance under the pretense of neutrality and scientific legitimacy.

This process gives rise to a racialized divide, exempting white citizens from scrutiny while perpetually positioning migrants and their descendants as outsiders in need of integration. For example, the aforementioned EU's Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027 formulation and framing of integration as a concern to EU citizens with "migrant backgrounds" illustrates that the decisive difference is, as Schinkel puts it, not the difference between the "well integrated" and the "less integrated"; but it is the difference between those for whom integration is not an issue at all, and those for whom it is (2018, 5). Such narratives not only reflect distinctions between "native citizens", "migrants", and "citizen with migrant backgrounds" but they often produce them (Anderson 2013a). This dynamic illustrates how seemingly well-intentioned efforts to address societal "challenges" can be co-opted to assert control, produce political, social, and cultural imaginaries, and shape public perception. Political discourse around integration often claims to bridge the gap between "society" and "immigrants", yet it reinforces this divide by portraying ethnic groups as distinct from the

broader societal context (Schinkel 2018). This rhetoric not only assumes the existence of a preconceived “society”, but also constantly shapes and reproduces the claimed “society” through these narratives. By constructing an idealized "better self", the model citizen, and contrasting it with the "failed other", it frames integration as a one-sided process where immigrants must conform to a singular idealized identity. This dynamic justifies exclusion while shaping public perception, reinforcing societal norms and privileging cultural conformity over true diversity.

This focus on integration through cultural conformity highlights how the dominant narrative shapes the perception of society as a fixed entity. It frames integration as a process of aligning refugees with a predefined national identity, reinforcing the idea of a homogeneous culture. As a result, culture becomes a central aspect of the integration logic. For example, Mourão Permoser and Rosenberger analyze Austria's immigrant integration policies, noting that integration is a widely debated but ambiguous concept, typically interpreted as either equal rights or the adoption of majority values (2012). Using Johan Wets' framework, they categorize integration into three dimensions: social (interaction between migrants and natives), cultural (shared norms and values), and structural (socio-economic inclusion). The authors find that Austrian integration policies focus heavily on cultural integration, emphasizing language acquisition and civic education for third-country nationals, in line with restrictive immigration and citizenship practices (2012).

This framing positions integration, whether viewed from a progressive or conservative perspective, as an issue of tolerance. If integration is seen as a two-sided process, it is claimed that both sides must tolerate each other for it to work. Therefore, lack of integration is often framed as a problem of intolerance, mostly blamed on refugees for not adapting fast or well enough. This dynamic ignores and transforms structural issues, power imbalances, and political

differences into cultural matters to be "overcome" by teaching values and norms through the so-called integration course.

This framing also reduces complex social and political challenges to cultural deficits that need to be "overcome". When these deficits are not addressed, the refugee is either blamed for not trying hard enough, or it is used by right-wing groups to argue for the fundamental incompatibilities between refugees and "European cultures" or "values". This dynamic risks, essentially, perpetuating the marginalization of refugees rather than fostering genuine social inclusion.

2.6 Reforming Integration: From Critique to Policy Change

Despite its numerous criticisms, the enduring presence of the concept in academia and its continued popularity among policymakers is noteworthy. In response to some of these critiques, Spencer and Charsley (2021) propose reframing five core issues related to the concept of integration, advocating for shifts in how it is studied and understood rather than its complete abandonment. They begin by asserting the need to minimize normativity in integration research, emphasizing the importance of analyzing actual processes instead of prescribing desired outcomes (2021, 5). They also highlight the necessity of avoiding the objectification of migrants by reframing integration as a broader societal process, rather than treating migrants as separate subjects (2021, 6).

Additionally, they argue that society's traditional portrayal as a stable, homogeneous entity must be challenged, advocating instead for a view of society as fluid, diverse, and shaped by mobility (2021, 6). To address the limitations of methodological nationalism, they call for an acknowledgment of transnational connections and the permeability of nation-state borders. Finally, they contend that the focus of integration research should be expanded beyond migrant-

related factors, incorporating the systemic and intersecting influences of non-migrant populations and broader structural dynamics (2021, 6).

Reframing the concept of integration or addressing these five core issues offers a potential path forward but raises an important question: to what extent are states willing to adopt such reforms? As has been demonstrated, the current framework of integration aligns closely with state interests, enabling the regulation of populations and the preservation of existing power dynamics. By determining who belongs and who does not, it allows states to control migrants' participation in society and shape national identity. This invites critical reflection: would states embrace reforms that might constrain their capacity to govern, or does the strategic value of the integration framework make substantial change unlikely?

At this juncture, we cannot easily predict or assume whether governments will genuinely seek or even desire to implement such reforms. What is clear, however, is that the persistence of the current integration framework has profound consequences for refugees themselves. Far from fostering belonging, the concept often exacerbates their marginalization, reinforcing divisions and shaping their experiences in ways that hinder their full participation in society.

3. THE ALIENATING EFFECTS OF INTEGRATION

3.1 Learning the Rules, Feeling the Distance

While Spencer and Charsley (2021) propose potential solutions, the application of the concept of integration in public policies across Western Europe, and particularly in Austria, raises critical questions about its inherently normative and paradoxical nature. These critiques of the concept of integration effectively exposes this structural ambivalence, arguing that integration policies and benchmarks, rather than granting full societal membership, reinforce migrants' status as perpetual outsiders. They also fall short of addressing the lived experiences of refugees, who engage with these processes in deeply personal and often painful ways. Crucially, integration presupposes being perceived as an outsider in the first place. Yet, even when migrants meet all criteria, including naturalization, they remain subject to continuous evaluation. This persistent discourse frames integration as an endless process, keeping migrants in perpetual transition without full acceptance. As a result, integration functions less as a path to inclusion and more as a mechanism of exclusion.

Building on Schinkel's (2018) critique, I argue that integration not only operates as a discourse of exclusion but also functions as a site of subject formation through internalized surveillance and emotional dissonance. My critique interrogates not only the normative content of integration benchmarks but also the epistemic standpoint from which they are constructed and the emotional burdens they impose.

In Austria, racial and ethnic minorities include not only recent immigrants and refugees but also long-standing residents and citizens. However, within integration discourse, these individuals are often framed not as integral members of society but as perpetual subjects of integration, repeatedly singled out. This is evident, for example, in reports from the Austrian Integration Fund's *Statistical Yearbook: Migration & Integration*, which states that over 27

percent of Austria's population *has a migration background* ('Statistisches Jahrbuch Migration & Integration', n.d.). While such reports may be presented as neutral facts or even as indicators of successful integration, they ultimately serve to highlight, measure, and monitor Austrians perceived as different—almost the same, yet not quite.

This phenomenon raises the question of whether this distinction stems from a perception that these individuals do not fully embody the cultural and ethnic essence of what it means to be "Austrian", even for those who have obtained Austrian citizenship through naturalization or were born to Austrian citizens with a "migration background". This raises a fundamental question: does the very concept of integration become meaningless if achieving it does not result in full acceptance through "dispensation of integration", as is the case for their white counterparts? Rather than ensuring genuine inclusion, integration appears to impose a conditional status of being a "well-integrated immigrant", a label that can be revoked or questioned at any time, perpetuating control and exclusion rather than fostering a sense of belonging. Framing immigrants as separate from "society" perpetuates the notion of integration as a *journey* that is never fully complete. This perspective, rooted in the social imaginary of "society", suggests that one can exist within society without truly belonging until deviations from societal norms are measured and erased (Boersma and Schinkel 2018, 232).

However, by focusing these measurements solely on migrant groups from diverse ethnic backgrounds, difference is continually reproduced and attributed to them. This process reinforces their perpetual deferral, depicting them as not yet fully "here", even as they reside within society, positioning them as objects of policy, management, and research (Boersma and Schinkel 2018, 232). Moreover, these monitoring practices shape a specific way of seeing immigrants, contributing to a societal gaze that enforces existing power asymmetries between citizens and immigrants (Boersma and Schinkel 2018, 322). Ultimately, Boersma and Schinkel

argue that the hope for arrival for immigrants represents a form of "cruel optimism", where the ideal of integration remains elusive (2018, 322).

3.2 Feeling Out of Place: Between Hope, Performance, and Control

Cruel optimism, as coined by Lauren Berlant, refers to a relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility (Berlant 2011). It is a condition where something a person desires is actually an obstacle to their flourishing (Berlant 2011). She argues that people form attachments to fantasies of the "good life" that are no longer sustainable, and that these attachments remain optimistic, even if they lead to self-destruction. The idea of cruel optimism is explored through the lens of the present, structured by "crisis ordinariness", where individuals adjust to pressures and struggles that undermine their idealized expectations of life (Berlant 2011, 4).

Berlant suggests that by recognizing the limitations of these fantasies, we can find alternative ways of living. Within the integration discourse, optimism plays a central role in shaping the relationship between "society" and "immigrants", framing integration as a political project with the best intentions aimed at bringing others into the fold (Boersma and Schinkel 2018, 322). However, this optimism is rooted in a presumption of a lack of connection, closeness, and inclusion, positioning society as a space of sameness rather than difference. Consequently, there is no "neutral" way to see immigrants within a framework that pits society against immigrants in need of integration (Boersma and Schinkel 2018, 323). This process perpetuates a distance that is always deferred, as the ideal of integration can never truly be reached.

The act of measuring immigrants' deviations from societal norms then reinforces a sense of difference, continuously positioning them as "not-yet" belonging, despite their physical

presence in society. These measurements transform immigrants into objects of policy, management, and research, reinforcing their otherness. Berlant suggests that recognizing cruel optimism can be disheartening, as it strips hope from these relationships, rendering the possibility of true belonging unattainable (Berlant 2011). In this sense, the relentless pressure, both internal and external, to "integrate" into "Austrian society" renders integration an impossible pursuit, as its very logic ensures it can never be fully attained. Yet, an immigrant who devotes their life to proving their integration ultimately confronts the disillusionment of a discourse that withholds full membership to "society". Only then do they realize that their longing for acceptance was the very force that deepened their alienation.

The immigrant, like the colonial subject in Homi Bhabha's theory of mimicry, is expected to adopt the dominant society's norms, but full acceptance is always withheld. Mimicry, according to Bhabha (1984, 127), produces a figure that is "almost the same, but not quite", one that is both tolerated and kept at a distance, always marked by a lingering difference. Mimicry for Bhabha is the desire from the dominant force for a "reformed, recognizable Other" that is constructed to be incomplete or partial (1984, 126). Integration functions in much the same way, presenting itself as a path to inclusion while ensuring that true belonging remains just out of reach. The closer one comes to the ideal of the "integrated immigrant", the more apparent it becomes that full membership in society is an illusion, a promise never meant to be fulfilled. This paradox reveals the cruelty of integration as a political and cultural project: it demands continuous self-surveillance, adaptation, and negotiation, yet always measures the immigrant against an impossible standard. The more one conforms, the more visible one's difference becomes, as integration itself reproduces the very gap it claims to close.

Integration policies are constructed to operate in ways that make those deemed outsiders internalize societal norms and expectations. Once subjected to the visibility of these policies, through integration benchmarks, courses, or measurement of integration outcomes, they

become aware of the standards they are expected to meet. This awareness can lead individuals to regulate their own behavior, adjusting to what is perceived as acceptable or expected within the dominant society. Over time, they may internalize this gaze, perceiving themselves not only as the subject of integration but as active participants in conforming to its requirements. In doing so, they reinforce the very power structures that define who belongs and who does not. This constant evaluation and shaping of behavior through benchmarks becomes a powerful mechanism, subtly guiding individuals toward conformity. It functions like a form of Panopticon, where individuals are perpetually observed and, in turn, begin to regulate and control their own actions, ensuring compliance with dominant social norms.

As Foucault argues, when individuals are placed under surveillance or subject to external constraints, they begin to internalize these power dynamics and act in ways that align with them, effectively becoming the enforcers of their own subjection (1995, 202). This process of self-monitoring and self-regulation transforms integration into an ongoing, internalized practice of self-discipline, where the individual, knowingly or unknowingly, upholds the societal norms that determine their acceptance and belonging. Foucault argues that this process leads to a shift in how individuals perceive themselves and their place within society. They come to see themselves as both the object and the subject of power, constantly evaluating and adjusting their behavior to fit the expectations set for them.

3.3 Marked and Managed: How Refugees Are Seen and Shaped

When situated within Governmentality studies, which seek to challenge the "naturalness" and "self-evident" character of governance (see Dean 2014), integration policies, best exemplified in the mandatory integration courses, serve as a prime example of how governmental technologies permeate civil society and everyday life. Governmentality, as conceptualized by Foucault, refers to the art of governing not just through laws or coercion, but

through shaping how people think, behave, and see themselves (Foucault 2002). It reflects prevailing ideas of what a well-governed society should look like and operates largely through expert knowledge, which legitimizes and refines governance practices. Integration policies and the academic scholarship that underpins it illustrate how power/knowledge structures shape governance. Framed as supportive and evaluative measures, such as the orientation courses, these policies enforce specific rationalities about belonging, behavior, and cultural conformity, often under the guise of inclusion. Integration, through this lens, emerges as a tool of governmentality that embeds control within discourses of care, shaping migrants' conduct to align with dominant ideals of societal order while simultaneously reinforcing hierarchical relationships and cultural dominance.

The effects of this process on the subject are profound: individuals become increasingly visible and self-aware, not in a liberating sense, but in a way that makes them complicit in their own subjugation. They actively reproduce the power structures that control them, reinforcing the hierarchical order and perpetuating their own marginalization or exclusion. This leads to a kind of social and psychological fragmentation, where the subject's autonomy is constrained by the very power structures they internalize and enact. In the context of integration, this would mean that migrants or marginalized groups not only conform to external expectations but also come to believe that they must, further entrenching their exclusion and sense of "otherness".

If society is coded as "white" within the integration discourse, as Schinkel (2018) argued, and the refugee (the "*Ausländer*" or "outsider") is coded as non-white, this means that the non-white "outsider" is continuously evaluated through a white gaze within this narrative. "...*I strive for anonymity, for invisibility*" says Frantz Fanon In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967, 116). Fanon's desire for "anonymity" or "invisibility" is a response to the dehumanizing experience of being constantly scrutinized and defined through the racist gaze of the dominant group.

This longing reflects the trauma of being reduced to mere objects of racial stereotypes, unable to fully assert one's identity in a society that perpetually marks one as "other". Fanon's assertion, "*And already I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes*" (1967, 112), underscores the pervasive and objectifying gaze that non-white individuals experience in a society coded as "white". It also illustrates how white perspectives dominate the shaping of reality and legitimacy, with "the only real eyes" symbolizing this power. The white gaze not only evaluates but also imposes a singular standard of truth and humanity, marginalizing and invalidating the perspectives of the oppressed. This dynamic alienates individuals from their own identity, forcing them to view themselves through the lens of the dominant group rather than on their own terms. It captures the psychological violence of racism and the power of the dominant gaze to manipulate and distort the identity of the marginalized.

This underscores the alienation and dehumanization that occurs when the dominant group establishes itself as the standard for humanity, positioning the non-white individual as "others" in need of "integration". Within the integration discourse, this gaze becomes an institutionalized process where refugees are constantly scrutinized, their identity often defined through the lens of the dominant culture, rather than being allowed to define themselves. The refugee, like the colonized subject, is subjected to a gaze that dissects their actions and behaviors, reinforcing their outsider status. Through the gaze of the dominant society, refugees are often reduced to the status of the "Other", a category that helps define societal borders and boundaries.

To further explore how this dynamic operates in practice, I will now examine the integration brochure, the official learning material for the integration courses mandated to refugees in Austria. These courses serve as an artifact designed to socialize refugees into the national narrative, shaping their understanding of what it means to belong to Austrian society. Through a critical discourse analysis of the brochure, I will investigate how language reinforces

the Austrian national identity while also exploring how these frameworks may contribute to the internalization of exclusion and "otherness". By analyzing the language, themes, and underlying assumptions within the materials, the analysis aims to uncover how the process of integration, rather than being neutral or emancipatory, could subtly reinforce the boundaries that marginalize refugees, perpetuating their subjugation within the broader social structure.

4. A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF *MEIN LEBEN IN ÖSTERREICH*

The preceding theoretical and conceptual critiques has demonstrated that integration discourse is not a neutral process of social inclusion, but one that often reproduces power hierarchies, positions refugees as perpetual outsiders, and constructs national identity in opposition to the “Other”. These dynamics are not merely abstract, but they are actively shaped and reinforced through everyday texts and practices. To investigate how such processes unfold at the level of concrete materials, this research examines *Mein Leben in Österreich: Chancen und Regeln*, the official integration brochure distributed by the Ministry for Europe, Integration, and Foreign Affairs (BMEIA) to refugees in Austria as part of the mandatory integration course. Using CDA as a methodological approach, the aim is to examine how the discourse within the brochure reflects and reproduces the broader ideological patterns identified in the earlier critique.

This research will draw on Van Dijk definition of CDA as an analysis that investigates how social power, dominance, and inequality are manifested, reinforced, and contested through language in social and political contexts (2001: 352). CDA here is used as “a way of doing discourse analysis from a critical perspective, which often focuses on theoretical concepts such as power, ideology and domination” (Baker et al., 2008: 273). By applying Norman Fairclough’s CDA (2013), which examines how texts, language use, and communication contribute to the reproduction or transformation of social inequalities by analyzing their linguistic features, intertextuality, and broader socio-political contexts, the study examines how the concept of integration is represented and communicated in Austria’s integration courses. Fairclough’s (2013) framework for text analysis examines how language constructs power and ideology through specific linguistic choices. This includes word choice, sentence structure, and

abstraction, all of which shape agency and responsibility. Additionally, modality and thematic structure influence how meaning is conveyed. By analyzing these elements, we can uncover how texts reinforce authority, frame social roles, and shape reader perceptions, often presenting ideological assumptions as natural or unquestionable.

The analysis mainly focuses on two key sections of the integration brochure—the *Foreword* and the *Introduction* as these contain the most explicit discursive constructions of national identity and belonging. These sections also provide a national historical narrative that situates refugees in relation to Austria's past and future. Through this analysis, the study explores how integration is framed and presented, who is positioned as the "Other", and how power dynamics manifest in these narratives.

This analysis focuses on the linguistic and textual construction of the integration brochure, examining how Austria's integration discourse defines social inclusion and exclusion. Through an in-depth examination of word choice, sentence structure, and rhetorical strategies, it explores how Austrian values are framed in relation to the refugee "Other", how responsibilities are assigned, and how norms for belonging are established. While a comprehensive Critical Discourse Analysis would typically include discursive and social practice analyses, these dimensions have been addressed throughout the research in discussions of institutional narratives, policy frameworks, and the broader socio-political role of integration discourse. By narrowing the focus to the micro level (textual dimension), this analysis allows for a more detailed linguistic examination, revealing how specific linguistic choices work to construct power relations, shape refugee subjectivity, and reinforce or challenge dominant understandings of integration.

CDA examines discourses at the microlevel, focusing on words, phrases, and conceptual metaphors, to reveal the macrolevel processes and practices related to ideologies of power abuse, control, hegemony, dominance, exclusion, injustice, and inequity that shape society

(Tęcza 2018, 13). This approach ensures that the micro-level mechanisms of discourse production are fully explored while maintaining connections to the broader theoretical and political context.

In analyzing the brochure through CDA, words and statements selection follows a systematic approach based on key themes such as “values”, pronouns (“our”, “you/your”), “Austria”, modality, and expectations. The focus is on recurring themes and terms, their positioning within the text, and contrasts such as “we” versus “you” to examine how inclusion and exclusion are discursively constructed. Attention to modality (e.g., “must” “should” “can”) also helps reveal how obligations and expectations are framed. These patterns are then situated within broader discursive and sociocultural contexts to analyze how integration is presented within Austria’s national identity discourse.

4.1 Integration as A Civilizing Mission

The foreword and the introduction of the brochure sets the ideological tone for Austria’s integration courses. Written by Sebastian Kurz, then Minister for Europe, Integration, and Foreign Affairs, and Franz Wolf, then Managing Director of the ÖIF, the foreword presents integration as a necessary condition for social harmony, emphasizing compliance with Austria’s legal and “value” framework. The brochure itself is written primarily with a mix of simplified imperative and declarative sentence types, with imperatives issuing direct expectations or instructions and declaratives presenting statements of fact or information. This is intended to reflect the voice of the state speaking to its newcomers. While the state's voice is assertive, clear, and authoritative, the refugee's voice is largely absent. The refugee is consistently addressed by the state (the instructor) as "you", positioning them as the passive recipient of instructions rather than an active participant in the conversation. Throughout the brochure, the refugee’s values are implied through contrasts with Austrian values, often framing Austrian

norms as the ideal while positioning the refugee's values as the opposite or inferior. Consider the following example:

- *“In Austria... Women and men have the same rights and duties”* (BMEIA 2016, 8)
- *“In Austria it is normal for people from different countries and cultures to live together”* (BMEIA 2016, 9)
- *“Women don't need a man's permission for this or any other decision in life. This is completely normal and self-evident in Austria”* (BMEIA 2016, 54)
- *“Married men are also not the “head of the family””* (BMEIA 2016, 54)
- *“Today, these rights seem completely normal to us. But we must continue to work to ensure that it stays that way. We also expect you to work with us on this”* (BMEIA 2016, 9).

By contrasting Austrian values (portrayed as universal and self-evident) with the refugee's presumed cultural values (assumed as contrasting and inferior), the text suggests that the refugee's background is inherently inferior or in need of reform. This orientalist approach not only disregards the refugees' agency and diversity, but reinforces a binary between the civilized (Austria) and the Other (the refugee), who is implicitly portrayed as belonging to an inferior culture. The gender equality trope is an occurring one throughout the brochure, the examples above present gender equality as a unique Austrian achievement, one that those undergoing integration are presumed not to possess.

The structure of the sentences also implies a civilizational trajectory: rights are presented as the outcome of a progressive, evolutionary process, moving from primitiveness to modernity. Refugees are invited, and required, to embark on this journey, with integration into “society” as its endpoint. This framing echoes the colonial narrative that casts the Other as childlike and primitive being needing to be civilized, as Fanon (1952) has described. In doing so, the brochure not only casts Austria as a benevolent and caviling force with a moral superiority, but also erases the histories of feminist struggle within migrant communities.

The brochure's idealized portrayal of Austrian “society”, exemplified by the gender equality trope, sanitizes complex social issues like the gender pay gap and femicide in Austria (see

‘Ultra-Safe Austria Grapples with Femicides as 31 Women Killed in 2021’). This selective framing creates a stark disconnect between the projected ideal and the country’s ongoing challenges. The brochure's persistent focus on this virtue, among others, serves to purify Austria's image, presenting it as a model of gender equality, untainted by the complexities or contradictions within its own society. At the same time, this framing reveals the orientalist assumptions underpinning it, positioning refugees as coming from cultures where women are inherently oppressed. In this framing, Austrian “society” (white, civilized) assumes the role of savior, rescuing "brown women from brown men", as Spivak famously put it (1988, 297). Austria, therefore, is framed not just as an already pre-defined “society”, but also as a benevolent provider of opportunities through claims such as:

- *“You are in Austria—a country where people of diverse backgrounds live together in safety and freedom”* (BMEIA 2016, 6)
- *“Austria is a country full of opportunities and chances for every individual to lead a successful life”* (BMEIA 2016, 6).
- *"Integration is the prerequisite to reaching the center of Austrian society"* (BMEIA 2016, 8)
- *“Within the framework of our laws and values, you are free to shape your life”* (BMEIA 2016, 6)
- *“Today, these rights seem completely normal to us. But we must continue to work to ensure that it stays that way”* (BMEIA 2016, 9).
- *“Only if people integrate can coexistence function”* (BMEIA 2016, 6)
- *“Only in this way can we maintain our high standard of living in the future”* (BMEIA 2016, 6)

Here, society appears as an entity with an identity, or as Schinkel (2018, 7) describes this theoretical imagination, an “order with a border”. The first sentence of the introduction, *"Integration is the prerequisite to reaching the center of Austrian society"* (BMEIA 2016, 8), enforces a clear boundary between the refugee and the "center" of society, framing the refugee as an outsider on the periphery who must cross a line to enter the societal fold. This declarative sentence not only asserts authority and establishes facts, but also creates a hierarchical dynamic where the refugee must continuously strive to integrate into an already-established order,

implying that the refugees are inherently different or deficient compared to the idealized, already integrated Austrian society.

These sentences construct Austria as a space of safety, freedom, and opportunity, a place where individuals of “diverse backgrounds” can thrive, *if* they integrate. These promises of inclusion and prosperity, however, operate through Berlant’s cruel optimism: an attachment to a vision of the “good life” that is structurally out of reach (2011). Refugees are encouraged to aspire toward a successful life, coexistence, and even access to the “center of Austrian society”, yet these ideals remain conditional on their ability to conform to dominant norms, laws, and values. Freedom is offered, but only “within the framework of our laws and values”, rendering it less a right than a reward for compliance. This conditionality transforms integration into a moral obligation, essential not just for personal success but for safeguarding Austria’s “high standard of living”. The discourse positions refugees simultaneously as aspirants to and potential threats against Austrian ideals, demanding that they embody liberal values while implicitly excluding them from full belonging. In doing so, it conceals structural inequalities behind the optimistic veneer of opportunity and mutual coexistence. The result is a deeply ambivalent invitation, one that asks the refugee to desire and pursue an integration that is always fraught, always deferred, and ultimately governed by the very conditions that render full inclusion impossible.

What makes this optimism especially cruel is that the idealized society held up as the endpoint of integration is itself a fiction, an imaginary Austria that is coherent, liberal, and post-racial. As Bhabha (1984) argues, the process of incorporation through mimicry relies on the creation of a reformed, recognizable, and tolerated *Other*, someone who is “almost the same, but not quite”. Integration, then, does not offer true belonging, but rather a managed inclusion premised on difference. The refugee is not invited to participate as an equal citizen but is instead positioned as someone who must continually prove their worth, their alignment with “our”

values, and their gratitude for inclusion. In this way, integration becomes less about mutual adaptation and more about producing compliant subjects who reflect back Austria's image of itself as modern, egalitarian, and morally superior. The gap between the ideal and its inaccessibility is not a flaw in the concept, it is the concept. The promise of arrival is always just out of reach, sustaining the fantasy of a harmonious national community while keeping the Other in a permanent state of not-quite-there.

This integration is framed as the refugee's sole responsibility through the repeated use of "you", placing the burden on the individual. This aligns with Schinkel's (2018) critique that integration is treated as a personal task rather than a systemic or relational process. It reflects a neoliberal logic where migrants must demonstrate their worth through self-reliance, while structural barriers like discrimination are overlooked.

This framing of integration shifts societal issues, such as gender inequality or homophobia, onto individuals, particularly immigrants, rather than addressing these as systemic problems within society. It does so in defense of what it considers Austrian "values", which are inherently aligned with liberal ideals. The issue with this integration discourse lies not in the moral defense of liberalism or its "values", but in how this defense is culturalized, which depoliticizes the underlying issues (De Leeuw and Van Wichelen 2012, 201). This framing also contributes to the illusion that society itself is a pristine, problem-free space, with any challenges attributed solely to immigrants who are seen as needing to be "integrated" into this idealized version of society. The rhetoric of "bringing people into society" implies that immigrants, even those born in the country, are still in the process of becoming part of society, casting them as perpetually in transition.

This continuous notion of "arrival" portrays immigrants as always on the way to integration, framing the process not just as a social adjustment but as a form of purification, aligning immigrants with the supposed purity of society. Nevertheless, if "society" is not as

flawless as it is claimed to be, then integration is not truly about becoming part of this idealized "society". Rather, it becomes a process of ensuring that Austria does not become something else.

This dynamic is conveyed linguistically through modality and conditionality, where refugees are directed, expected, and compelled to conform, essentially, to preserve Austria's self-portrayal and not challenge its claimed identity. The use of the prepositional phrase "*within the framework of our laws and values, you are free to shape your life*" (BMEIA 2016, 6) exemplifies this asymmetry, freedom is conditional, granted only through compliance, not just to the laws, but also to a set of ambiguous "values". Modality further reinforces this obligation. Consider the following statements:

- "*We expect your active participation in professional and social life*" (BMEIA 2016, 6).
- "*We expect you to participate in the economic, social, political, and cultural processes in Austria*" (BMEIA 2016, 9).
- "*Even in your private life, you should also become part of Austrian society. You can meet people here and build new social contacts*" (BMEIA 2016, 8).
- "*In Austria, we are allowed to criticize and say what we do not like. We should all protect our own rights and the rights of others*" (BMEIA 2016, 9).
- "*We also expect you to work together with us on this*" (BMEIA 2016, 9).
- "*In Austria, we expect that one acquires qualifications for a profession and later finances their life through work*" (BMEIA 2016, 10).
- "*You should understand why these values are important to us*" (BMEIA 2016, 10)
- "*You should also contribute by pursuing a profession as soon as possible*" (BMEIA 2016, 10)
- "*You should acquire the ability to share our values*" (BMEIA 2016, 11)
- "*We expect you to contribute to the joint project of Austria*" (BMEIA 2016, 11).

Modality in these statements shapes how integration is framed as both a moral and social obligation. The repeated use of "*we expect*" indicates a clear imposition of obligation, suggesting that participation in various aspects of Austrian life (professional, social, political, etc) is not just encouraged but expected, highlighting a top-down, authoritative approach. This sets the tone that integration is a process where the refugee must align with predefined societal norms and values. "*Should*" softens this, presenting integration as something desirable, even

morally necessary, but not as strictly enforced as the use of "*expect*". This creates a more flexible space, suggesting a guiding principle rather than a rigid rule. The phrasing conveys an ideal of social integration that still requires effort but without the force of coercion. Meanwhile, "*are allowed to*" introduces a shift toward freedom, suggesting that Austrian society offers more personal liberties, aligning with liberal values, which are presented as a new experience for the refugee – a promise of Berlant's "good life".

Moreover, the use of "*only if*" and "*only in this way*" in the text as restrictive conditional phrases creates a sense of inevitability, presenting integration as a non-negotiable duty rather than a dialogic process. This narrative frames integration not just as a duty rather than a choice, but also as a necessity to protect Austria's "high living standard", implicitly securitizing a protentional lack of integration.

4.2 From "*You*" to "*We*": Constructing Integration and Identity through Language

A key element of the texts is the repeated emphasis on "*our shared values*" (6), reinforced by the exclusive use of the pronoun "we", which presents these "values" as fixed, universal, and essential for peaceful coexistence. This framing not only suggests that Austria's value system is superior and non-negotiable, but also positions refugees, who are being reeducated, as outside of these shared values. They are expected to assimilate rather than engage with or reshape these values. The contrast between the pronouns "our" and "you/your" further accentuates this division: Austria is portrayed as a unified, purified national community, while migrants are depicted as external to it, expected to conform rather than contribute to the shaping of these values. This dynamic is reinforced by the repeated use of "we", which both defines the dominant group and strengthens the expectation that migrants must align with its norms to gain acceptance.

According to Billig (1995, 106), the pronoun “we” is utilized by politicians to rhetorically place themselves at the center of the nation. “We” subtly reinforces national belonging by constructing an implicit in-group, positioning refugees and migrants as perpetual outsiders. In the context of Austria’s integration discourse, the use of “we” naturalizes an exclusionary national identity while requiring migrants to conform rather than participate in shaping it. Billig (1995) introduced the concept of “banal nationalism”, which refers to the everyday, unnoticed ways in which national identity is continuously reinforced in people's lives, making nationalism seem natural and taken for granted (1995). Unlike overt expressions of nationalism, such as flag-waving at political rallies or nationalist speeches, banal nationalism operates subtly through routine symbols, language (such as use of deictic words such as ‘ours’ or ‘us’), and practices that reinforce a sense of national belonging without drawing attention to themselves (Billig 1995, 105-109).

Billig links the use of pronouns, particularly the plural “we”, to the phenomenon of deixis, which politicians use to flag the homeland. By positioning themselves at the center of the nation, politicians address the entire nation and other parties, using deixis to enhance nationalism and evoke a sense of unity. Billig describes this as the “deixis of homeland”, where “we” places the group within their homeland. He also discusses the “syntax of hegemony”, where “we” serves as a rhetorical device to present sectional interests as universal, blending different groups under one collective voice (1995). This use of “we” helps present diverse interests as shared, playing a significant role in evoking nationalism (Billig, 1995). The brochure consistently contrasts “we” with “you”, making it a recurring sentence structure. Consider the following statements from the brochure:

- “*We expect your active participation in professional and social life*” (BMEIA 2016, 6).
- “*You are in Austria—a country where people of diverse backgrounds live together in safety and freedom*” (BMEIA 2016, 6)
- “*It is also important to us that every person in Austria participates in key social processes and takes responsibility for themselves...*” (BMEIA 2016, 6).

- "We expect you to participate in the economic, social, political, and cultural processes in Austria" (BMEIA 2016, 9).
- "Even in your private life, you should also become part of Austrian society. You can meet people here and build new social contacts" (BMEIA 2016, 8).
- "In Austria, we are allowed to criticize and say what we do not like. We should all protect our own rights and the rights of others" (BMEIA 2016, 9)
- "Today, these rights seem completely normal to us. But we must continue to work to ensure that it stays that way" (BMEIA 2016, 9).
- "We also expect you to work together with us on this" (BMEIA 2016, 9)
- "If you address us in German, we see it as a sign of appreciation and are pleased by the trust you place in us" (BMEIA 2016, 10).
- "In Austria, we expect that one acquires qualifications for a profession and later finances their life through work" (BMEIA 2016, 10).
- "We expect you to contribute to the joint project of Austria" (BMEIA 2016, 11).
- "We look forward to your involvement and rely on it" (BMEIA 2016, 11).

Fairclough (1989) argues that the pronouns "we" and "you" carry relational value, reflecting social relationships in discourse. He distinguishes between *inclusive we*, which includes both the speaker and audience, and *exclusive we*, which refers only to the speaker's group, excluding the audience (1989, 112). The use of *inclusive we* can serve as an implicit authority claim, assimilating leaders with "the people" (1989, 112). The pronoun choices in the aforementioned statements construct a discourse of separation and conditional belonging, reinforcing power asymmetries between *we* (representing the established Austrian society) and *you*, the refugee or migrant who must conform. Fairclough's (1989) analysis of *we* as both an inclusive and exclusive pronoun is evident here, as *we* shifts between a benevolent authority and an assimilated collective. The exclusive *we* appears in statements like "*We expect your active participation...*" and "*We expect you to contribute to the joint project of Austria*" (BMEIA 2016, 6-11), positioning *we* as the dominant voice setting the terms of integration. The use of *expect* rather than *invite* or *encourage* further solidifies a hierarchical relationship in which *we* dictates the obligations of *you*, reinforcing an asymmetry of power.

At the same time, *we* is deployed in a way that masks these asymmetries by implying unity and shared responsibility, as in "*We should all protect our own rights and the rights of others*" and "*Today, these rights seem completely normal to us. But we must continue to work*

to ensure that it stays that way” (BMEIA 2016, 9). Here, *we* functions as an inclusive pronoun, assimilating the audience into a supposedly collective struggle for rights. However, this inclusivity is contingent upon *you* fulfilling predefined obligations by participating economically, socially, and culturally, and even shaping one’s private life to align with Austrian norms. The frequent usage of active voice also reinforces authority and directness. Moreover, by emphasizing refugees’ need to “arrive” pre-existing societal structures (economic, social, political), the text portrays integration as journey with an end goal that leads to becoming part of “society”. This perspective implies that the refugee is already established as an outsider and the host society’s systems as flawless and static, leaving no space for critique or reform of these structures.

This strategic oscillation between exclusive and inclusive *we* serves an ideological function, aligning with Fairclough’s (1989) argument that *we* can reduce social divisions by framing national unity as an unproblematic given. The elision of power differentials is particularly evident in statements like “*We expect you to work together with us on this*” (BMEIA 2016, 9) and “*We look forward to your involvement and rely on it*” (BMEIA 2016, 11), which suggest mutual cooperation while still placing the burden of integration solely on *you*. The use of *we* to express authority, unity, and expectation simultaneously reveals the ideological underpinnings of Austrian integration discourse: refugees and migrants are not simply welcomed but are tasked with proving their worth, conforming to an imagined cohesive national identity.

Moreover, the brochure presents integration not just as a set of guidelines but as a measurable framework, with outcomes tied to policy areas like citizenship. Yet beyond formal assessments, it demands internal transformation. Refugees are expected to internalize state-defined “values” and regulate their behavior across all areas of life, including the private sphere.

A seemingly benign line, *“Even in your private life, you should also become part of Austrian society. You can meet people here and build new social contacts”* (BMEIA 2016, 8), reveals the expectation of self-surveillance. The discourse articulated here and throughout the examples exemplifies how governmentality operates through the production of normative subjectivities and the diffusion of power across everyday practices.

Foucault’s (1991) governmentality highlights how modern states govern by encouraging individuals to regulate themselves according to prevailing social norms, often under the guise of freedom and participation. In this context, refugees are not merely instructed but invited, through moral appeals and affective language, to take ownership of their integration. Rather than directly coercing refugees, the brochure works to shape their conduct, identities, and sense of self by promoting an ideal model of the “integrated” individual. It outlines how one should behave, think, and feel in order to belong in Austria, encouraging them to internalize and reproduce specific cultural, social, and moral expectations.

The repeated use of phrases such as *“we expect your active participation”* or *“we rely on your involvement”* signals a shift from state-centered enforcement to the internalization of responsibility by the subject. Integration becomes a technology of the self, where the refugee is called upon to monitor, discipline, and shape their behavior in alignment with an idealized, imagined, Austrian identity. Crucially, this ideal is not confined to legal or institutional compliance but is extended into intimate and affective spheres: *“Even in your private life, you should also become part of Austrian society”* (BMEIA 2016, 9). Here, governmentality works by governing through freedom, appealing to agency, choice, and mutual trust while subtly producing compliant, normalized subjects.

The seemingly inclusive references to diversity and rights *“a country where people of diverse backgrounds live together in safety and freedom”* (BMEIA 2016, 6) mask the conditional nature of belonging: inclusion is contingent on visible efforts to conform, perform

gratitude, and contribute to the national project. In this way, integration discourse operates not only as a communicative tool but as a regime of conduct, shaping how migrants come to see themselves and their place in society. Power is thus exercised not only through domination, but also through the cultivation of subjects who willingly align their conduct with the expectations of the state, subjects who become governable by governing themselves.

CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to examine how the concept of integration is represented and communicated in Austria's integration discourse, and what implications these representations have for refugees' experiences. Through a critical and postcolonial lens, the research has shown that integration, far from being a neutral or technical process, is a deeply political project, one that shapes who is seen as belonging, on what terms, and under what conditions.

The investigation unfolded in three steps. First, I interrogated the very premise of integration and the assumptions that make it possible to speak of integration as a necessary and legitimate policy goal. Drawing on critical migration studies and postcolonial theory, I demonstrated how integration functions as a normative and hierarchical framework. Rather than facilitating inclusion, the concept often reproduces boundaries between “us” and “them”, positioning the refugee as a subject to be reformed in line with dominant societal values. Integration discourse, in this sense, serves to affirm the imagined coherence of the national community by contrasting it with a racialized and deficient “other”.

Second, I considered the implications of this conceptual framing for refugees themselves. Integration policies and discourse, especially when tied to conditionality and state-defined cultural norms, contribute to feelings of alienation, marginalization, and conditional belonging. Refugees are not simply guided into society, they are disciplined into predefined roles, often without space for genuine reciprocity or recognition of their own knowledge, experiences, or identities.

Third, I analyzed the Austrian integration brochure *Mein Leben in Österreich: Chancen und Regeln* using Critical Discourse Analysis. This empirical investigation showed how the state communicates expectations through a moralizing and asymmetrical discourse that draws clear lines between insiders and outsiders. The brochure reaffirms the national, imagined, “we”

while constructing the refugee “you” as culturally other, deficient, and in need of transformation. Through its tone, language, and content, the text makes visible the disciplinary nature of integration and its role in sustaining national hierarchies and imaginaries. By connecting conceptual critique with empirical analysis of state-produced material, the thesis bridges theoretical insights with grounded discourse, offering a concrete illustration of how integration operates as a mode of governance in Austria.

Taken together, these findings suggest that Austria’s integration framework operates less as a bridge toward inclusion and more as a mechanism of governance that regulates access to belonging. By presenting integration as a one-sided process of adaptation, the state both maintains control over the terms of inclusion and reinforces broader narratives of cultural superiority and moral authority. In doing so, it reproduces the very divisions it claims to overcome.

As this thesis has shown, integration is structured around a paradox: I integrate, therefore I am (still other). This tension captures the core contradiction of integration, a process framed as inclusionary but deeply rooted in exclusion. By foregrounding the conceptual and affective dimensions of integration, this research contributes to critical debates on migration, belonging, and nationhood. Rather than attempting to salvage or reform the concept, this thesis argues for abandoning the integration paradigm altogether. The very premise of integration depends on asymmetrical relations: a stable national “we” that sets the terms, and an “other” that must adapt, conform, and prove their worth. In this framework, belonging is always conditional, and otherness is never fully erased.

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