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# Proud Scum â The Spectre of The Ingrate

By Matthew Hyland

The term integration has been turned upside down. Once it was the demand for the white majority to integrate the racial other into 'society' by abolishing formal racism within the state and its institutions. Now, writes Matthew Hyland, the (culturally) racialised other is required to 'integrate' into the majority

At some point following the 'riots' late last year in France, that country's interior minister and aspiring president Nicolas Sarkozy is reported to have threatened kicking out 'those families who refused to integrate'. Regardless of whether he actually uttered it, the phrase exemplified a sleight of ideological hand that's become all too familiar.[1] I mean the one where the terms of a question about what institutions do are inverted to make it sound like it's about the behaviour or the character of single subjects. The point being, of course, to hold people retrospectively responsible for what has happened to them. The statement attributed to Sarkozy amounted to a proposal that the state should make use of its borders to distinguish which foreigners were adequately : henceforth, those whom the interior ministry had not chosen to expel would by virtue of this be shown (provisionally) not to have 'refused to integrate'. It never would have been announced in quite that way, but it was already de facto policy thanks to the Sarkozy-ordered emergency provision of fast-tracking for deportation any non-citizen *arrested* (note: not convicted) near the 'disturbances'.

As well as showing the workings of a mechanism commonly used in the rhetorical production of false social problems, the story also drew attention to a remarkable upheaval in the usage of 'integration', a term that has lately become a key banality of racial politics.

The racial integration famously demanded and gradually obtained by the American Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and '60s had a strictly circumscribed meaning: the abolition of *formal* racial segregation in institutions such as electoral politics, schooling, public transport and local administration in general. Integration in this sense could have been imagined by no-one but its stubbornest opponents to imply the breakdown of the wider economy of racism. (That is the object of the older, bloodier and ongoing struggle of which the limited Civil Rights/integration victory should be seen as one important episode.) There can be no doubt, though, that at the moment when the term entered popular political vocabulary, the sense – i.e. the direction – of the imperative to 'integrate' was clear. It was obviously directed at a racial majority: self-constituted 'white' America was forced to suffer a change of circumstances not willed by it, and the agent of alteration was the racial other whose minority (in the sense of 'childhood': supposed incapacity for rational, effective exercise of power) was a myth essential to that of whiteness.[2] It's also crucial that at this stage the meaning of 'integration' entailed logically that it be demanded not of individuals, however personally bigoted, but of institutions in a chain of responsibility ultimately leading up to the nation-state itself.[3]

Returning to the Europe of 2006, in which the Sarkozy-phantom cited above and countless others warn foreigners to integrate or leave, we find that the sense (i.e. direction) of the integration-imperative has been upended over the last 40 years. The command to integrate is now incessantly delivered *to* presumed 'others' in the name of a majority. This reversal implies that of the other essential characteristic of the earlier meaning: the imperative is now delivered *by* the state and its secondary agencies *to* single subjects. (It makes no difference, incidentally, if a multitude of loudmouthed freebooters joins in the admonishing. Whether they notice or not, every time they talk about 'getting tough' they're identifying with the state and invoking its protection.)

What was a transitive verb (e.g. ‘the state must integrate *the school*’), then, becomes intransitive, or implicitly reflexive (‘the alien must integrate [*herself*]’). Integrate herself *into what?* Into ‘society’, ‘the community’, ‘democratic values’, etc. That such names which aspire to the universal are standard aliases for the nation state, as Angela Mitropoulos has observed, is spelled out clearly in this case, *where the act of (self-)integration required by ‘society’ is defined only negatively, by the state action policing its omission.*[4] Rephrased this way, the Sarkozy doctrine at least reminds us that lack of intelligible content in a command certainly does not mean it isn’t backed up by (police) force. Rather, the law’s content remains permanently provisional, to be revealed only retrospectively in each particular instance by the agency delivering the consequences of non-compliance.

There is a widely noted tendency for ‘culture’ to replace biological ‘race’ in British government discourse and the debate around it, with an ensuing confusion of ethnic, religious, linguistic and biological categories. In attempting to understand this phenomenon, it should be remembered that, while either ‘race’ or ‘culture’ may be projected onto someone in order to assign them to a group, only culture can then be attributed to the will of the presumed group members. Unlike race, they can be *held answerable for it*. This exposure to the blackmail of ‘responsibility’ makes culture a more useful category than race for a complex of formal and informal policies and public discourses revolving around a term like ‘integration’, which positively designates nothing less than (certain) subjects’ open-ended obligation to the state and its proxies.

How this works can be seen in almost any mainstream British political party statement or ‘serious’ media/think tank commentary on identity, migration, security, anti-sociality, etc. Between supporters and opponents of particular policy initiatives there reigns a remarkable consensus that (a) something called ‘we’ or ‘society’ exists, (b) its perpetuation is desirable, but (c) is threatened by the cultural self-marginalisation of certain subjects who (d) must therefore be made to change their behaviour. The only disagreement is about which particular outbreaks of alienation do or do not threaten ‘us’, and what combination of enticement, coercion and expulsion should be used to bring about the change desired.

Recently in Europe such language has mostly been directed at ‘Muslims’ (recast as a culture, and, even more absurdly, a unitary one), but there can be no doubt that it is ripe for wider application. By now the logical stitch-up has acquired a fairly regular rhetorical form. First a fact is invoked that lays claim to the utmost moral gravity (the diaspora of Oriental bombs in Western metropoli being the obvious but by no means the only example), followed by some observations on the dis-integration of cultural behaviour (preferably a fusion of anecdote and dislocated statistics, as in: ‘only x per cent of Muslims born here think of themselves as British, and in parts of town nobody speaks English’). The necessary causal relation between one set of phenomena and the other is presumed to be too obvious for statement, and the Expert moves straight on to consider what, in particular, should be done in order *to induce self-identification with ‘society’ among culturally dis-integrated subjects*. Only around the latter, almost technical question can there be any debate: all commentators solemnly and question-beggingly agree that failure to do *something*, i.e. to intervene in some way on this (cultural) territory, would be tantamount to accepting bombs, gang war, sweatshops or whatever other (material) social evil was cited in the first place.

In bourgeois democracies a degree of personal autonomy is generally imagined to come with submission to state power (i.e. acceptance of individuation for criminal liability and taxation purposes). But although the ingrate (as we shall henceforth call the dis-integrated subject, the culturally-profiled recipient of intervention) is already as much exposed to the law as anyone, her intimate subjectivity is regarded as public property pending a satisfactory performance of national identification. Private individuality must be *earned* through public subordination of other group attachments. Unlike anyone else, the ingrate is called on to demonstrate subjective commitment to

‘society’ through *supplementary* gestures beyond those specifically prescribed by law. Thus not only is she asked to adjust cultural practice to the preferences of an imagined majority, the ingrate is expected to *assume responsibility* for her already-existing subjection to the state, to *will* it retrospectively.

All this falls squarely into the mainstream of institutional racism in the post-formal-integration period, despite the recent downplaying of ‘race’ within some racist discourses. Whether spuriously classified by ‘race’ or ‘culture’, the same combinations of skin colour, geographical background, language and religion still systematically receive a gross disproportion of institutional invasions like criminal profiling, compulsory mental health treatment or confinement to the informal labour market. That is, the law is literally the same for everyone, but the ingrates have to do (or do without) more to avoid falling foul of its force. As has always been the case, the effect is the violent internal stratification of the wider working-and-policed class.

In the essay *Under the Beach, the Barbed Wire* (this issue, p.34) Angela Mitropoulos precisely diagnoses the role of such racism in the ‘free’ labour market. At the heart of classical social contract theory, and in particular the individual labour contract as conceived in classical economics and revived with eschatological vigour in recent years, lies the coercing of constrained subjects (or as Mitropoulos puts it, those on the losing side of an asymmetrical relation) into the formal, retrospective willing of their condition. Whether it is income that is ‘chosen’ over destitution or residence over statelessness, responsibility for the *terms* of the decision is assumed – or rather received – by the subject those terms are imposed on. Of particular importance here is the way the coercive power of the contracting regime (whether citizenship in general or employment in particular) depends on its border and the horror of the barely-subjective life beyond it:

Put simply, without the foreigner, the notion and practice of the social (or wage) contract – as a voluntary agreement between more or less symmetrical agents – falls apart.[5]

This is so because of the essential historical role of borders and jurisdictions in the elevation of private property into uniformly enforced law, but also because of accumulation’s dependence on a global division of labour, which in turn depends on national and supranational (e.g. EU, British Commonwealth) borders and *all the secondary stratifications internal to them*. In order that anyone should willingly contract a losing deal, what lies outside the arrangement must be kept conspicuously worse. Hence the fundamental role of the abject foreigner, the extra-legal alien, who has no power to contract anything but remains at the disposal of institutional and/or illegal arbiters of subsistence.[6] The irremediable foreigner’s legally-created ‘inability’ to contract is blamed, of course, on her innate racial, deep-seated cultural and/or plain moral incapacity. The usefulness of this figure of the alien lies in the fact that its condition can be extended *provisionally* to millions of partial or potential *foreigners* to the social/wage compact: all the ingrates from whom supplementary unwaged effort for the privilege of contracting is expected. The long-term benefit claimant, the ASBO-candidate and the non-compliant mental patient, for instance, along with the cultural foreigner who strives insufficiently to integrate, are made aware that in failing to adjust their subjectivity willingly to whatever terms are offered they run the risk of a kind of reverse assimilation, absorption into the *abstract foreigner*, whose incapacitating otherness supposedly threatens society’s integrity and is therefore perpetually exposed to pre-emptive policing and material dependence.

Supplementary contracts-you-can’t-refuse for the wilfully uncontracting and dis-integrated have become a popular institutional tool in Britain, used in welfare crackdowns, school discipline, mental health, public housing and the widening margins of ‘criminal justice’. The device’s relative normalisation is perhaps not surprising given the longer-term spread of conditions once clearly identified with the ‘foreign’ side of the border around the national/wage contract. As Mitropoulos writes, the wage contract customarily distinguishing wage labour from slavery ‘was always

demographically and geopolitically rationed', but with the unlimited interpenetration of labouring and unwaged temporalities, today's "regular" tempo of work more closely approximates the temporality of slavery (and, not least, of housework).'[7] The spectre of the absolutely incommensurable foreigner still mobilises aggressive cross-class national identification in some people and forces a desperate scramble to be counted on the right side of the border among many others, but those 'on the inside' are no longer usually distinguished and rewarded by a stable waged position with 'life'-time separate from work. Visible and permanent success at 'integrating' tends to disappear along with the regular employment status that used to announce it. Meanwhile, provisional, ad hoc and personalised contracts or pre-contracts proliferate, requiring unreserved pledging of subjectivity to prevent their unilateral foreclosure. In this sense the 'demographic rationing' of forms-of-life and work is less simply demarcated than before, but it distributes privation and coercion more extensively than ever.

Of course the development of complex hierarchies of provisional 'foreigners' should on no account be mistaken for the 'democratisation' of anything, even of wretchedness. As the Sydney pogroms and the current projection of 'terror' onto culture in Europe suggest, the phenomenon is likely to entail more rather than less ideological deployment than before of the abstract foreigner and the threat to national-social integrity.[8] More fundamentally, nothing whatsoever has happened to alter the extreme racial concentration of *exposure* to (and, at the opposite pole, relative shelter from) particular forms of exploitation and material constraint. 'Equal opportunities'-bound institutions such as private job markets or public police forces are instantly betrayed by any statistical breakdown of WHO stands WHERE in relation to them: the present-day demographics of their clientele reveals their shared origin in a directly racial organisation of work and slavery. The consciously articulated racist sentiment to which official antiracism restricts its reference (psychologising it even when calling it 'institutional') emerges almost as an epiphenomenon of these gross, long-standing material facts.[9]

In fact the extension and intricate subdivision of ingrate status will probably only provide new opportunities for those inclined to do so to invert responsibility for the worst effects, in best Malthusian fashion, attributing them to the subjective deficiency of the afflicted. (Obviously, the idea of 'culture' is particularly useful for explaining such mass outbreaks of personal moral pathology.) Thus, for example, following the Paris fighting, many right-wing bloggers (the qualification is probably redundant) and other commentators didn't bother to deny the *supplementary* difficulty encountered by young 'Africans' and 'Arabs' of all educational levels in trying to find work. They simply blamed the candidates' cultural eccentricity: they may or may not be technically competent, but they are *unemployably unintegrated*. A more complex but similar logic seems to run through a recent, highly publicised sociological work on the East End of London.[10] The book addresses inter-cultural hostility around perceived English-Bangladeshi competition over housing allocation. However, quantitative facts, i.e. the drastically reduced volume of council housing stock available due to the 'right to buy' policy and the lack of new building, are played down due to survey respondents' apparent lack of interest in 'the economy'. Instead, the interpretive focus is on 'Bangladeshi claims on the welfare state, their rights and entitlements', an alleged 'encouraging of dependency' among those 'who had put nothing into the pot',[11] which is attributed to a welfare system based on need rather than on a somewhat less concretely defined 'national culture of responsibility, mutuality and solidarity.'[12] Thus the authors perform the neat trick of simultaneously displacing responsibility for racism onto the Bangladeshis, while, inasmuch as more of the final blame falls on the state which should have ignored their material need in favour of abstract 'family' and 'reciprocity', they are denied agency even in relation to what they are held responsible for.

The integration imperative can be said to traverse a polarity with the multicultural utopia of full, 'economically active' assimilation into the national first person plural at one extreme and at the other the abstraction of the socially pathogenic foreigner, who is unassimilable to the state and therefore subject to its unlimited force. The toxic foreigner is a fiction, but it is concretely embodied in the

mechanisms whose existence it justifies: first the border enforcement and detention system itself, then all the other lockdown regimes that pullulate across the social body (entrapping ‘ethnic minorities’ disproportionately but not exclusively) from secure wards and special and ordinary prisons to dispersal areas and ASBOs. In the zone of permanent provisional administration between the poles of ‘diverse’ assimilation and hunted illegality, invocation of the Unassimilable (and therefore of its deadly institutional embodiment) functions as an implicit but punctual command to those whose admission to the ‘ownership society’ remains undecided, suspended or revocable.[13] Galvanised by rational fear, potential ingrates are expected to improvise gestures repudiating the abstract alien and distancing themselves from it, in order to keep its very real pursuers away. Exactly *what* is required is indecipherable, as the Thing to be repudiated has no concrete existence and therefore no particular attributes, but the penalties are real enough. This is the immediate, practical meaning of the doctrine that integration must be defined only negatively by the forces policing it, apparently expounded in veiled (so to speak) terms by Sarkozy. And it is in this way that the ingrate confronts in its most acute form a logical impossibility which operates throughout capitalism and its legal appendages, in that she is *commanded to assume responsibility* for her condition.

### **Backdated Epilogue**

In mid-November 2005, in the immediate aftermath of the streetfighting, Sarkozy was interviewed by Denis Jeambar of right-wing French weekly *L'Express*. [14] The interviewer took the minister to task for his notorious reference to those fighting the police as *racaille*, a word usually though not altogether satisfactorily translated into English as ‘scum’. Unlike the recipients of the epithet and some self-proclaimed supporters on the liberal left, Jeambar had no problem with the insult as such. Instead he complained that Sarkozy had *failed to declare anyone guilty*: because the word *racaille* is used ‘every day’ in the banlieues in a *collective sense*, it is ineffectual against ‘*individuals who have lost all sense of personal responsibility*’. From this point, unsurprisingly, interviewer and interviewee went on amicably and earnestly to discuss ways of restoring guilt and personal responsibility in the ghetto, both as psychological ‘sense’ and juridical fact. Might they, however, inadvertently have called forth a new figure of non-integration to counterpose to that of unlimitedly liable, state-saturated ‘illegal’? From another point of view, is it possible without falling into the trap of uncritical riot-celebration to formulate the political question of how to draw on and develop strategically a refusal of impossible personal ‘responsibility’ so unyielding that it can only be *insulted* in collective terms?

[1] Neo-Habermasian sociologist Ulrich Beck thought he heard it at least, and he repeated it in *The Guardian*. Protracted searching yielded no further trace. But, as belaboured at length above, the trace is not the point here.

[2] A majority self-constituted precisely through active practices of exclusion, both formal and informal. The fluidity of the majority’s border and its constitution through these practices is attested to by the transitions-into-whiteness from outside it of immigrant groups such as the Irish, Jews and Southern Europeans in countries including the US and Australia. The cross-class Anglo-Celtic ‘Aussie’ compact described by Angela Mitropoulos in *Under the Beach, the Barbed Wire* in this issue of *Mute*, p.34, is an instructive example of this process.

[3] Related struggles – against endemic casual racist violence in the South, or the overwhelmingly racialised structure of labour exploitation and the ‘criminal justice’ complex – are also institutional, but ‘integration’ is in no way adequate to describe their stakes.

[4] Mitropoulos, *ibid*: ‘They practically deploy racism through the assumption that the problem is a failure of integration. In other words, they reiterate the classical sociological preoccupation with social or, more accurately, national cohesion. Here, having assumed the nation-state as a natural entity – often by obliquely rendering it as ‘community’ or ‘society’ – it is the appearance of divisions that are not expedient for and normalised by the very assembly of national unity which are registered as a problem to be solved.’

[5] Mitropoulos, *ibid*.

[6] A position today stereotypically inhabited by the ‘asylum seeker’ or the illegal ‘economic migrant’, but the same role in the formation and discipline of (contracting) ‘society’ has been occupied in the past by the barbarian, the savage, the slave etc. The mainstream Italian insult ‘extracomunitario’, where ‘community’ refers literally to the EU but also retains a ring of ‘community’ in the sense of village-like shared social identity, as in English, is indicative of the entwining of institutional fact and folk superstition in modern racist practice.

[7] Mitropoulos, *ibid*.

[8] *Ibid*.

[9] As in the ‘Stephen Lawrence Report’ by Sir William MacPherson of Cluny, which simultaneously introduced ‘institutional racism’ to institutional discourse and drained all particular meaning from the category, by making it refer to the amount of anomalous personal racism among an institution’s employees, rather than the racism – i.e. the racial distribution of material possibility – that its structure administers when functioning normally.

[10] Geoff Dench, Kate Gavron and Michael Young, *The New East End: Kinship, Race and Conflict*, Profile Books, 2006.

[11] Geoff Dench, promotional summary of *The New East End: Kinship, Race and Conflict*, in *The Guardian*, February 8 2006: <http://society.guardian.co.uk/socialexclusion/story/0,,1704158,00.html>

[12] The new East End: kinship, race and conflict, quoted in review by Jenny Bourne, IRR News, February 22 2006: <http://www.irr.org.uk/2006/february/ha000021.html>

[13] To use the perfectly apt term coined for George W. Bush’s re-election campaign (and echoed in mainstream British political discourse on housing in particular) for a national state tending towards a property qualification for full citizenship.

[14] <http://www.lexpress.fr/info/societe/dossier/banlieue/dossier.asp?ida=435791>

Matthew Hyland, a refiner of symptoms and founder of the Journal of Childish Psychology [[www.c8.com/wolverine/](http://www.c8.com/wolverine/)], insists that there’s nothing wrong with observation that blindness wouldn’t improve