

CHAPTER 9

Immigration critique: Moral boundaries, silence and polarization

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Building on theories of symbolic boundaries and the civil sphere, this chapter explores the limits of the Norwegian immigration debate seen from the perspectives of immigration critics. It asks if and why people subdue their views on immigration and immigration policies, and how opinions on immigration relate to moral stigma. The study is based on qualitative interviews with both informants who refrain from uttering their opinions in public and individuals who take an active part in the immigration debate. They all share stories of stigma and social exclusion, expressing the power of moral judgments on their willingness or refusal to express their opinions. Peer effects stand out as vital, and the closer one associates with or has relations with milieus associated with the liberal left, the more painful are accusations of immorality. The chapter finally relates these findings to processes of polarization and echo chambers.

Introduction

The debate about immigration and integration looms large in contemporary society. It reflects conflicts over values, resources and an increasing cleavage between elites and the general populace (Freeman, Hansen, & Leal, 2013). In the wake of globalization, economic crises and recent unanticipated immigration flows (PEW 2016), the US and Europe have seen the rise of anti-immigration and anti-Muslim political movements, and negative attitudes to immigration are on the rise (IOM, 2015). Concomitantly, the worry of established political parties and liberal elites is growing, their mobilization against illiberal attitudes is intensified, followed by warnings that extreme views will gradually infest main stream debate in a manner that resembles a dark European past (Mudde, 2016). Others maintain that an inclusive debate with room for controversial statements is the best way to avoid that people, for fear of stigma, leave the public sphere and turn to closed groups of likeminded discussants. Such echo chambers could boost extremism in the absence of counter voices, the argument goes (Sunstein, 2003).

This chapter explores the effect of a polarized debate climate on people's willingness to express their views on immigration and integration. It studies the boundaries of immigration debates from the perspective of immigration critics; that is, people who are concerned over the perceived negative impact of immigration on society and oppose current immigration levels. The study departs from central findings in the comprehensive surveys of the *Status of freedom of speech in Norway* project from 2013 and 2016 (see introduction, this book). These surveys show that the issue of immigration touches a sensitive nerve in public debate. In general, many people hold back their opinions for fear of offending or hurting others, or to avoid ridicule and social isolation. The fear of being perceived as racist is one

central factor that makes people stay silent about their views, and people who are negative to immigration are more prone to self-censor to avoid social stigma than others (Steen-Johnsen & Enjolras, 2016; Steen-Johnsen, Fladmoe, & Midtbøen, 2016). Why is this, when negative attitudes to immigration are so common (IOM, 2015)? A tentative answer is that negative attitudes are widespread, but so is the disapproval of these attitudes in public debate. Opposition to immigration is associated with dubious and illegitimate positions. People with a liberal view on immigration and higher levels of education, among them journalists and those who associate with the liberal left, are more inclined to support restrictions on immigration critique in public debate than others (Steen-Johnsen & Enjolras, 2016; Steen-Johnsen et al., 2016). To get a deeper understanding of what types of moral stigma and self-censoring are related to negative views on immigration, the present study relies on qualitative interviews with informants who have experienced barriers and costs related to expressing such views.

With the growth of populist right wing movements that propagate anti-immigration ideologies at odds with the ground rules of constitutional liberal democracies, there has been a growing interest in studies of right-wing extremism (e.g. Hainsworth, 2016; Horgan, Altier, Shortland, & Taylor, 2016; Ivarsflaten & Stubager, 2012; Mudde, 2016). The present study follows a different path. Rather than researching the arguments at the extreme ends of the debate, the focus is rather on how a polarized debate climate affects more moderate immigration critics. In this context moderate is defined as respecting and identifying with the ground rules of democratic processes and debates. The study does not include individuals who operate outside or in a grey zone in relation to the law: Extremists with a racist ideology are not included, neither are people who defend

undemocratic means, violent actions or hate speech. As such they represent viewpoints that, in a formal sense, are legitimate parts of democratic debate. Nevertheless, their perspectives are in the crossfire of struggles over which perspectives are morally acceptable and which arguments pose a danger to civil society, warranting collective condemnation.

The 14 in-depth interviews in this study represent a tiny first step towards an understanding of how opinions on immigration relate to deeper moral virtues and vices in the public sphere, and how these moral boundaries affect people's motivation to speak up. To get a glimpse of different types of barriers in the immigration debate, the interviews rely on two types of informants: people who in general refrain from, or to a limited degree, utter their opinions on immigration in public; and individuals who take an active part in the public immigration debate. Theoretically, the analysis builds on Jeffrey Alexander's theory of boundary formations in the civil sphere (2006) paired with theories of silencing and peer effects (Noelle-Neumann, 1974), outlined in the next section.

The moral boundaries of the immigration debate

Boundary formation in the civil sphere

The basic theoretical premise of this analysis is that debates over immigration take place within a normative framework of moral values. These are principles that take the form of *symbolic boundaries* that categorize people and practices; they separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership (Lamont & Molnar, 2002). The theory of Jeffrey Alexander (2006) on the civil sphere, provides a scheme that captures how such boundary formations are tied to binary

values of right and wrong, good and bad, separating legitimate actors, relations and institutions from their uncivil counterparts in liberal societies.

Alexander defines the civil sphere as a moral community based on a shared set of universal values and institutions (the legal system, mass media, civil associations) (Alexander, 2006, p. 31). These are values inherited from a long history of Western philosophy, religious thought and political struggle, expressed in the founding documents of democratic societies, like laws, constitutions and bills of rights (Alexander, 2006, p. 60). According to Alexander, these constitutive values have complementary positive and negative values. On the positive side are the values of autonomy, reason and sanity, built on relations that are open, trusting, critical and truthful. Their complementary uncivil side subsumes dependence, irrationality and madness, based on secretive, suspicious, self-interested and deceitful relations. Civil institutions are defined by rule of law, equality and justice; their uncivil antidotes are hierarchic, arbitrary and based on personal power (Alexander, 2006, p. 57-59).

According to Alexander, these binary codes provide the structure for the everyday stories that guide taken-for-granted political life. Those who are considered worthy members of a civic community are defined in terms of the positive side of this symbolic set; those who are termed unworthy are defined in terms of the negative side. The positive side forms a *discourse of liberty*, the negative a *discourse of repression*.

The constructions of public virtue and public vice tend to be widely accepted even in societies characterized by high levels of conflict. What is contested is how the antithetical sides of this discourse will be applied to particular actors and groups. When defined in terms of the negative codes of the civil sphere, the deepest moral integrity and rationality of an actor or a movement are put

into question. People judged to represent these public vices are regarded as profoundly threatening to the civil community, hence their activities, practices and opinions need – like a contagious disease – to be isolated, silenced, repressed or displaced.

It is vital to note that the theory of Alexander implies that the values of the civil sphere are never actually fulfilled in reality. They represent higher values, a *secular faith*. Real civil societies are contradictory and fragmented, created by social actors at a particular time in a particular place. Arbitrary qualities (e.g. gender, race, nationality) are transformed into necessary qualifications for inclusion in the civil sphere. It is a premise of the theory that the discourse of repression is extended to groups and persons whether they actually are ‘really’ evil or not. A central argument is, however, that insofar as the founding values of democratic societies are universalistic, they are open to inclusions of new groups and actors who can argue their way in as new members of the civil sphere based on a reference to the universal.

As hypothesized by Alexander, symbolic boundaries gain power when they are defined and maintained by elites, e.g. decision makers, intellectuals, media professionals and leaders of civil associations. Other theories of opinion formation add, that people are most receptive to the values and perspectives of peers, i.e. groups and persons an individual identifies and associates with. Individuals need the fellowship of others, and to be socially isolated because of deviant opinions is frightening for most people (Glynn, Hayes, & Shanahan, 1997). Based on this premise, the theory of Noelle-Neumann (1974) argues that people with minority views tend to hold back their opinions and adapt to a dominant climate of opinion. The propensity to defend unpopular standpoints is actually atypical, it is reserved for an ‘Avant Garde’: those few who create change by opposing consensus and tradition.

The dual nature of immigration debates

The framework of Alexander captures the existential and dual nature of public debates concerned with the ground rules of inclusion and exclusion - like current immigration debates. These debates are based on a system of classification with a double face, expressing both the power and limits of the universal values of the civil sphere. The regulation of immigration is marked by a contradictory and ambiguous co-existence of idealism and *realpolitik* (Brochmann & Kjeldstadli, 2008, p. 16). Nation states monopolize, organize and distribute rights and duties, entitlement and responsibilities based on national membership (Tilly, 1998). At the same time, nation states based on constitutional democracy, adhere to and are limited by universal values of human rights, individual freedom and equality before the law, expressed in international conventions and national constitutions. Their universal rhetoric might conflate the divide between in-groups and out-groups based on nationality in the current world order. They do nevertheless make a difference. The asylum principle, immigrants' claims and minority rights are defended with reference to these higher moral principles (Borchgrevink, 1999; Brochmann, 2002; Vertovec, 2011). They regulate public debate in the sense that debaters who wish to take part in the mainstream, democratic public sphere cannot ignore them.

Debates about the scale of immigration, the closure of borders, the limits of tolerance for differences, and inequality take place in a climate where contenders on both sides depict each other as threats to the very existence of civil society as they know it. This debate then, while discussing the principles for inclusion and exclusion of groups with geographically and culturally foreign origins, at the same time defines who are moral insiders and outsiders *within* the national community. The subsequent analysis of the experiences of immigration critics, explores how these

informants react to an ascribed status as uncivil outsiders with illegitimate and potentially dangerous and contaminating views.

Design: Informants and interviews

The informants in this study shared a deep worry over the consequences of immigration to Norway and Europe. They were critical towards current immigration policies and concerned over the perceived lack of successful integration of immigrants. They defended more restrictive policies, ranging from total border closure to a reform of the asylum system and more active integration policies. They were, in particular, critical to the scale and consequences of non-Western immigration. Most informants referred to the negative influence of conservative religious practices connected to Islam, particularly related to gender. Others focused on the assumed negative consequences for the welfare state, pointing to the challenges following low-skilled immigrants from clan based societies. The prospect of increased social instability, insecurity, violence and crime were often mentioned. All informants considered the media coverage of issues related to immigration and integration as severely deficient, and pointed to a muting of vital information and voices in the public.

The informants were recruited through different approaches during the year 2016. A few were contacted through personal networks. They were asked if they knew potential informants who had experienced some type of barrier or cost related to the expression of their views. Through them, new informants were recruited. Additionally, I monitored Facebook discussions on immigration, and got a good overview of different levels of engagement. New informants were contacted based on their activities there, often in the form of a personal message. A last couple of informants were recruited to represent the front

players in this debate; they were contacted directly with reference to their public role.

The informants were selected to represent gender (5 women, 9 men) and age variation and different types of occupation in the public and private sectors. Their education varied from low to high. Most of the informants voted for the party with the most restrictive immigration policy, the Progress Party; others did not have a clear party affiliation or voted for parties on the moderate left or center of the political spectrum. Most importantly, the informants were selected to represent both people who were reluctant to share their views on immigration in public, and main actors in the public debate.

The informants can be divided into different groups based on their participation or lack thereof in open debates. These groups range from those who refrained from uttering their opinions in most forums (4), to those who uttered their opinions in social media only (2), individuals who occasionally entered public debate (6), and finally, full time debaters in public forums (2). The most active debaters tended to have expert skills relating to the media and professional communication. The interviews were based on a semi-structured interview guide, conducted face-to-face, and lasted from 60 to 90 minutes. All interviews were transcribed and analyzed through qualitative analysis software. For many informants, full anonymity was a premise for their participation, and was fully secured. For those who are front players in public debate, full anonymity was not a prerequisite. Their stories might make them recognizable to some readers, even if personal details are omitted.

The aim of this study is to understand the lifeworld of the participants and to give them a voice in a non-judgmental way. This approach does not imply the absence of critical questions. Taking people seriously, involves challenging their views by

probing the implications of their opinions. Their stories are told through extensive quotes that allow their own expressions to come forward. This approach, even if common in qualitative studies, is not often used vis-à-vis the group of people in focus here (but see the recent and extensive fieldwork of Arlie Hochschild on the Tea Party Movement (2016)).

Self-censoring and stigma in the immigration debate

The informants in this study had in various ways experienced the social costs of uttering criticism related to immigration and integration. However, they chose different strategies to tackle them, ranging from choosing not to discuss the issue to taking part as full time information providers and opinion leaders. In the subsequent analysis they are grouped along this passive-active dimension, involving the *silent*, those going *semi-public* in social media, and finally the actors that engage part time or full time in the *public* media debate.

The silent

The group of informants presented in the following, largely remain silent about their views in public. Two of them are women living in Oslo in areas with many immigrants, with children in schools having a large proportion of pupils with Muslim backgrounds. They describe themselves as initially positive to their diverse neighborhoods. But, gradually, experiences of what they regard as repressive Muslim gender practices and religiously based in-group loyalty changed their minds. One, a librarian, describes herself as a ‘dedicated atheist’, against any type of increased religious influence in society. In recent elections she

voted for the Progress Party, not because she agrees with their ideology in general, but because of their position on the immigration issue. She gives this account of why she believes current immigration patterns are problematic:

Basically, I know about it through my kids: they go to a really multi-cultural school. It's things like kids not coming to birthday parties, single-sex swimming lessons, and girls not being allowed to go on school trips and take part in the social life outside school. There are immigrants from all over the world, and it's fine, mostly. But those with Muslim backgrounds have problems. They're the ones who aren't allowed to take part.

This informant explains that she does not have anything against particular individuals, it is the overall influence of Muslim norms on society and what she sees as a changed social environment for girls that concerns her. She believes that gender equality should be a core focus in school, rather than what, in her opinion, is an exaggerated focus on religious feelings. When asked what development she fears most she answers:

I fear a development where the control of girls increases. I see it in our neighborhood, you do not show your belly or wear short skirts on the street, and if you do, you can blame yourself for any unwanted attention.

The other informant works in public administration and has been active in local politics in the social democratic party. For her, it does not really feel as if immigrant groups represent a vulnerable minority and that she herself belongs to the dominant majority. Rather, she sees the rise of a Muslim identity as a reversed form of othering at the expense of those who are not part of the Muslim community. Aware that she will easily be

judged as too overly generalizing, she hesitates often, stops herself and starts again:

In the last few years this religion thing has gotten much stronger. Before, it was like Norwegian-Pakistanis or Norwegian-Iranians, or... now, it's like, "We're Muslims". And I see it in our school as well, from an early age. They're brothers and sisters, you know? And those who aren't Muslims, well they're not brothers and sisters. There is something a bit unsettling about it. It becomes a way of excluding. And especially this thing with girls, the views on women. That's what you notice the most. Covering up girls, with scarves terribly early. It becomes a marker that, yeah, we're different. Equality and gender, those are really important values, but it's not like they are carved in stone.

Neither of the two women find that they can discuss their concerns about a changed local community freely, whether it be in their neighborhood, in meetings at their children's schools or in their workplaces. They feel that to be considered legitimate, criticism must be directed at the conventional majority. 'It is always the same bias. It is all about hate speech from Norwegians. It worries me when legitimate criticism is defined as hate speech,' explains one. She points to how many families in the neighborhood avoid the nearest school because of a high share of immigrant boys. This is not discussed in the open: Families make their decisions in private, but in public 'everything is fine' she explains. Stories of kids being bullied because they are white non-Muslims are kept secret, or only mentioned in private. She feels alone with these experiences in many settings, like her workplace, she explains:

At work no one has kids in a school with such a high proportion of minorities as I do. Nonetheless, they have no interest whatsoever in hearing about it. They are very politically correct, some of them. I know about all these stories that were really bad. But no one cares,

because it's bad on the wrong side. And I said that to my boss once. And he says, well, after all, we are the majority. So I said, but when you go to our school, you don't think of yourself as a majority.

The other informant explains that if she talks openly about her views, she is met with 'embarrassed silence' even if some 'whisper to me that, actually they agree quite a bit'. In school, her disapproval of gender segregated activities like swimming has been met with ridicule and lifted eyebrows from the principal. In general she feels that people avoid issues related to religious suppression and Islam. She gives this example:

This weekend, I shared a status on Facebook about enjoying a glass of wine and eating cashew nuts. It got lots of likes. And then I shared a link about the fight against circumcision of girls. Then it is all silent. Nothing. It is telling I think. I mean, no one is really *for* circumcision. But it is like they don't want to touch it.

It is the fear of being perceived to overly generalize, to seem prejudiced, or to be looked at as an outright racist that keeps these informants from uttering their thoughts in different forums. This is a type of subtle stigma that works through silence more than outspoken counter arguments. It is communicated through evasive body language, downcast eyes, uneasy laughter or simply silence.

A male informant shares the concern over an increasingly segregated society with the female informants presented above. But in contrast to them, he lives in a white middle class environment in the western part of Oslo, and is part of a milieu of media professionals and creative professions. He sees himself as open minded and individualistic, without strong ties to any political side. He expresses his point of view in the following:

Norway has been so uniform - culturally speaking. It felt very safe and then there were loads of reasons to make fun of it as well. A bit stuffy... boring. But anyway, I think that a successful society is a society where

the vast majority accepts a few basic principles and where there is a good mix across ethnicities, where within a generation immigrants have Norwegian boyfriends and girlfriends. But now it is pretty water-tight. I fear segregation and a class based society.

Working as a freelancer in the media, he does not share these views in public. He can discuss with friends, but finds that he is quickly placed to the far right politically. To speak openly about how he looks at the influence of Muslim immigration, involves being associated with attitudes he feels no familiarity with. Politically it means to be grouped with the extreme right; personally it means that you have a callous racist personality. He explains:

You can't say anything without being branded. You have to, like, make 500 qualifying statements if you just want to say how things are. I find it so much easier to be grouped with left wing people, then you can be ridiculed as nice and naive, that's the worst that can happen to you. It's far worse to be stigmatized as racist and evil.

He follows discussions on immigration in social media, but never gives his own opinion, even if he gladly discusses other political questions. He is also very careful not to 'like' anything from profiled immigration critics on Facebook, even if he agrees with them. He says it is a question of social stigma, but also about fear of losing his job:

I don't have a permanent job. Workwise, it can be risky, someone could report me, you never know what might happen. "Do you know what he believes?" That sort of thing. Media companies want to protect their reputations: you have to be very careful in that branch.

Like other informants in this study he argues that the issue of immigration policy is so delicate because it is intrinsically linked to morality and humanity, a complex policy field is reduced to a good or bad side, he asserts.

The young feminist activist presented in the following shares the frustration over a perceived dominance of feelings rather than rationality in the debate. She has experienced what those who hold back their opinions fear: In a post on Facebook she referred to an incident involving the harassment of women by male asylum seekers. As a feminist she has been fighting many types of oppression of women; she has been offended by adversaries, but has always been supported by her own peers. This time, it was all different she tells:

And so I write that it's enough now. Women are unsafe enough, with Norwegian men. We should not import even more abusers who can treat them like dirt. And people are just... Oh, my God. Everyone at my university course was just, ah "racist"! In and of itself, being in favor of a restrictive immigration policy, which I haven't been until now, is not the same as being a racist. And it just amazes me how everyone is willing to sacrifice the struggle for women's rights in the fight against racism. I mean, people in the feminist movement come up and say, "You shouldn't say that because you are paving the way for fascists".

To her mind, religion is intimately related to discrimination of women; Islam, like Christianity and Hinduism, is 'hatred of women embodied' she declares. She refers to herself as someone who in general speaks out about any type of subject, but not on this issue. In social media there are posts she would like to share, but she stops herself. Disappointed by the Women's Movement she has been a part of, she feels abandoned and has resigned from organizational duties. She has experienced assaults, and even threats from Norwegian men after demonstrations against repression of women. In a certain way, that actually gave her some credit she explains, it was a sign that she had done something right. But the lack of support from her own group hurts much more than harassment from angry men.

In the semipublic space of social media

As opposed to the young feminist who experienced a ‘one time moment of public shame’ and went silent afterwards, the group of informants presented in the following regularly use social media to discuss immigration. But they keep a low profile with family and friends, and are not active debaters in mainstream media. One of them was very much in doubt as to whether it was a good idea to participate in this study, his wife told him not to. The reason is that he runs a small firm, and feels vulnerable: He cannot risk losing customers because of his opinions. He is an active debater on Facebook, but does not in general share his views with his old friends in person. Apart from the concrete economic risk associated with going public, he believes that what he calls the risk of ‘intellectual murder’ stops people from speaking their mind. In his opinion there are people who act as consensus guardians, who attack the few who dare to speak up:

They signal to all of society that it if you say this, then it will cost you a bloody lot. Like taking quotes out of context and sending them to your aunts and grandmother, and anything that will do maximum damage.

He, like the other informants, feels that there is no ‘ceiling of blunders’, if you have uttered something that can be used against you, it will always stick to you he claims:

You must be allowed to say something stupid. You must be allowed to share something, whatever, conspiratorial, and then say, “Yeah, those are good counter arguments, I was convinced, but I don’t believe in what I said anymore’. But that’s not the way it is. There’s no undo button.

He is familiar with arguments implying that his views are connected to Nazism and fascism, but says he chooses to confront

these types of allegations up front. He refers to debates during the refugee crisis in the autumn of 2015 in the following:

In that period Nazi references were rife from those who thought that with every tightening of asylum policy we were well on our way to a holocaust. But there are very few who say it right out. They say something like, “Yeah, we haven’t seen that policy since the 1930s”. “Yeah, if you mean Nazi then say Nazi,” I write.

This informant, with a background in technology, has had many positions of trust through his work but has never been active in politics. He has voted for the Norwegian Communist Party ‘to get some critical voices into parliament,’ but now votes for the Progress Party. In his view, to be an immigrant is a much tougher destiny than people are aware of, and he fears what he calls a ‘client state’ where many asylum seekers never succeed in taking an active part in society through work:

I don’t think that people, as individuals or a group or a race or nationality, are lazy or useless or sly or anything. I just think it is really tiresome and difficult. We know that half of those who come here will never get a real job. And I think any realism about the whole thing is just totally lacking.

This informant expresses a feeling of deep unrest. He was brought up with a belief in the United Nations and the fraternity of people, but has lost faith in international organizations. He fears the breakdown of a generous welfare state, and a society characterized by ethnic and religious conflict. His conclusion is that immigration must stop altogether. He always expresses his views politely he says, but is scared by this development; in his view, those with power do not seem to listen or understand.

Another informant engaged in the semipublic sphere of social media. He has lived for years in the eastern part of Oslo, with

kids in a school dominated by minorities. He does not fear Islam so much; rather he is worried about immigration from what he calls dysfunctional states where kinship is central to social security. He fears that Norwegian society will not live up to the challenges, and does not take the welfare state for granted. Having seen how it is to live without one, he explains:

I really do believe that immigration in many ways has been a good thing. But at the same time I see many challenges in the wake of the arrival of people from very different cultures. Integration is not straightforward. That is why I support very restrictive immigration policies. I have travelled a lot, met many great people. But meetings between cultures are not always easy. “Norwegian” has for instance become an insult among groups of immigrants in Norway. Like, “You have become too Norwegian.” We didn’t think it would be like that when the first Pakistanis came to Norway in the 70s.

He underscores that he has not in any sense been threatened due to his opinions, and will not appear as a victim, but nevertheless expresses sadness over the social exclusion that follows from perspectives like his. He has mainly used social media as the arena where he discusses issues related to immigration policies. It has been, and still is, a disagreeable experience, he conveys:

It’s not okay at all. A colleague said he couldn’t work at the same school as me, he considered resigning. It happened in a discussion on Facebook.

The more typical reaction however is no response at all. He meets silence from former friends and fellow discussants more than counter arguments, he tells:

I have lots of friends on Facebook - very few have unfriended me, but they never like anything I post and they never comment on my

posts anymore. It's dead, it's sad. And I should add that I have never said anything racist, nothing disparaging about other cultures, never said a word about Islam. But, it's just that if you are for a restrictive immigration policy, that's enough in itself. Some people who I know pretty well, I never see anymore. I never hear from them, there is quite a lot of that.

He has many contacts among journalists and in academia. He describes this milieu as avoidant, immigration is a 'none issue' all together. He adds, 'And really – where they live they don't experience the consequences of immigration – or if they do only the positive effects – exotic restaurants, cheap labor'.

Part time on the public stage of the immigration debate

The next group of informants are engaged in the public debate about immigration through professional or semiprofessional writing, in the mainstream media and the editing or writing of books. For them, the perceived lack of transparency in the debate is a main motivator. These informants have close connections to a milieu dominated by media professionals and academics, associated with broadly leftwing liberal attitudes to immigration. On the one hand this makes them vulnerable to condemnations from this group. On the other hand they are angered by the alleged hesitancy of the political left to criticize illiberal movements and practices when ethnic minorities and immigrants are involved. Their professional position to some extent makes them protected from economic repercussions; they have multiple professional identities and competencies. However, in spite of their public profile as critics of immigration policies they, like the informants outside the public spotlight, find the issue of immigration too troubling and delicate to be

suitable as a subject over lunch or in conversations with neighbors. A prerequisite for their engagement is the support, or at least the absence of disapproval, from their own family.

One of these informants has a background in business and academia, and writes regularly for selected newspapers. She is often involved in debates on controversial issues, and often takes what she calls ‘super contrary’ positions. She is used to public scolding but has also been given credit for her alternative perspectives. When she conveys her analysis on immigration and integration however, it feels very different, she recounts:

If I say something about immigration, it’s like I’ve got some disease or something that makes people avoid me. Someone wrote on Twitter that he had long had a suspicion about what I was like as a person - now he had it confirmed. There hasn’t been much of that - but what there is hurts terribly. Some crazy person on Facebook said I should think about my responsibility when kids in asylum centers burn to death. I saw who had liked it, and there were many well-known people within culture and the media. I take that sort of thing very hard.

Like the young feminist, it is not the moral condemnation so much in itself, but whom it comes from that is painful. She explains that these experiences make her strategic and careful, without silencing her completely – she considers the issue far too important for that. But she intentionally avoids writing about immigration too often – a couple of times each year is the maximum. And she is careful to make her arguments as acceptable as possible. She criticizes, for instance, the Progress Party when she finds that their arguments lack statistical underpinnings, and she always refers to minority voices to provide examples of successful integration: ‘It’s important to me to lift the good voices that exist, strategically, so I’m not called a racist, but also because integration is vital. I want things to go well for

those who are here,' she explains. But sometimes she feels dishonest. As an example she mentions that she was a source in a news story where she agreed with a claim that the tables are turned now, it is no longer a problem to support opponents of Muslim practices and vigilant critics of immigration policies in public. She elaborates:

But it was a lie! I said it for two reasons: Firstly, to be optimistic. But mostly to be accepted by the left. And I wanted to puke when I said it. For the thing is, to support these actors in public actually gave me lots of problems. Like, my boss, who otherwise is a wonderful person, told me she thought it must be difficult for Muslim students to have a lecturer like me. And what she is really saying by that is: my job is at risk. But I have *never* talked about these things with my students, I am professional. If we discuss discrimination, hijabs, it is strictly pros and cons. It is not about my personal views at all.

Another informant works as a journalist in a niche newspaper. He points to his multi-professional background as an important premise for his critical pieces on the economic consequences of immigration: His journalist identity is not all that important to him he claims. He refers to statistical analyses of population growth and migration trends as decisive for his position. In his view, disinformation and intended lack of openness about statistical facts, be it from top politicians, researchers or the Norwegian Census Bureau make it all the more worthwhile to do the necessary research and math himself:

If you think that the best thing for, for example, Somalis is to bring them to Norway, then do it. But don't come to me and say that it is so terribly profitable. There are some very worrying trends when you look at employment statistics, which are very low for non-Westerners and even lower if you group them by Islamic countries, and that is what we have done in my newspaper. That gets people really worked up, right? But as

we say, it would be unfair to Tamils not to group them. Because, after all, they work an incredible amount. And we did it a bit just for the pure hell of it. When people tell me that I can't write something, it makes me sort of angry and "yeah, we'll see about that" sort of.

He has received many reactions to his reports, from the top levels in the Norwegian government to critical colleagues and economists. Accusations of fascism and Nazism are familiar to him, even threats to his personal safety have occurred. In the beginning, the reactions from his own colleagues were strong too, they found his focus inappropriate and indecent. He was also criticized for the absence of *cases* – of stories of individual immigrants in his reports. He elaborates:

Journalism must have a case, right? But it is obvious that you just find the positive cases. And so I've always said that, if these are the statistics, then I'm not going to use a positive case. And it would be totally unethical to hang an individual out to dry who represents those who have failed.

He does not agree with the notion that discussions of the negative effects of immigration might lead to prejudice and a more polarized society. Rather he refers to free debate as the founding principal of open societies.

It is a kind of banal post-modern theory that I despise, the idea that words are actions and that as long as we don't talk about things then everything will be fine, right? The entire West is based on the idea that we talk about things. That is what an open society means.

Like other part timers in the immigration debate, he has some strategies when he writes about immigration. He is careful not to do it too often, and he takes care not to be obsessed with the topic, a type of monomania he thinks characterizes some who engage in immigration critique.

The informants in this group of public debaters, all point to a fascination with the unsayable. They understand themselves as the one who sits in the back of the classroom, raises their hand and says what others might be thinking but do not dare to express. An example is the informant presented in the following, who is relatively new on the stage of the immigration debate, but has a status as an *enfant terrible* in general public debate. Like the other part time debaters, he has an independent position, with several sources of income. He has an academic degree, 'but is not a face in the corridors of the university'. He contends that until recently, the economic cost of immigration has been under communicated, the threat from Islam as an ideology has been underestimated, and the breaks with basic rights to freedom within minority groups neglected. His public engagement in these issues started when he defended a controversial Norwegian Islam critic and activist in public:

My point was that the criticism against her was completely exaggerated and unfair. And symptomatic for a perspective that perceives immigration critics or Islam critics to be a bigger problem than the Islamists themselves.

The response was massive. There was a pile of emails and personal messages from people who thanked him for saying aloud what they were thinking, some of them in academia, some related to the political left. The *public* response from these milieus however, was shocked disapproval. He became the new representative of the 'dark side' as he calls it, condemned for instigating prejudice, exclusion, hatred and even violence against Muslims. He asserts that he regularly meets invalid arguments, of the type 'ad hominem', guilt by association and straw man:

You always have to explain that no, I never said that. No, this is not correct. I have never criticized 1.5 billion Muslims and so on. You

have to repeat it again and again. And sometimes you just don't have the energy.

He refers to the stigma of being associated with the wrong sources and actors, independent of what these sources are actually arguing for in a particular text. They have a status of being contaminated – and thus contaminate those who refer to them, he explains. He has himself become a person whose postings others hesitate before they like or share in social media, and even he hesitates before sharing articles from actors defined as illegitimate. Like other informants, he points to the role of emotions and morals as important in explaining why the debate is experienced as being so sensitive. He believes attitudes to immigration define not so much who people are, but who they are *not*:

If you have higher education, like from the social sciences or the humanities, and identify with the broader left, then it goes without saying that you are *not* against immigration. We might not be able to define who we are, but at least we know who we are not. Even if you have this awareness that, hell, things are not as simple as I thought, things are going in the wrong direction...Even then, it takes a lot to make concessions to the dark side.

Full time in the immigration debate

The last two informants presented in this study, have very different backgrounds, but are both more or less occupied full time with issues related to immigration and Islam critique. Due to their public roles in the immigration debate, they find that their career choices and professional opportunities have become limited. One is an intellectual writer and former editor. His story starts with his personal confrontation with the orthodox Christianity of his childhood. Gradually he became aware of the

spread and power of an orthodox form of Islam, fueled by key events like the fatwa against Salman Rushdie and Islamist terror attacks. 'From criticizing the oppression of Christianity, I simply moved on to criticizing the oppression of Islam, just more strongly,' he states. When he was a professional editor he published a book on the issue. It was the start of what he calls a big 'social fall':

I didn't know it was that bad. I could hold a contrarian stance and so on before, but people didn't link it to my moral character. There was no stigma linked to my viewpoints. I enjoyed great respect and recognition. And I lost that in extensive parts of the milieu I was a part of.

Coming from a well-connected position in a network of authors and editors, he now has no formal professional position. Gradually more isolated from his old network, he has intensified his own writing on the negative impact of Muslim orthodoxy and cultural segregation. He writes on these issues daily in social media, with a large group of followers, and has written a book on the issue. It frustrates him deeply when he is associated with right wing extremism and totalitarian ideologies. He makes many references to a Western philosophical canon, describing his engagement as part of a long critical discourse. Like other informants he finds what he calls the sentimentalization of public debate as a vital barrier to rational deliberation. The importance paid to protecting feelings stops viable arguments he contends:

There has arisen a sentimentalization of new groups in society to whom you are not allowed to apply normal critical sense. I did it anyway, and I crossed some sort of decency line. What was or had been normal debate was suddenly subject to loads of sort of moral responsibility norms that are pretty alien to a Western culture.

Immigration policies are related to morality in a very different manner than other policy areas in his view:

And if you don't manage to deliver the phrases that save your skin, you can very quickly end up in total darkness. I don't want to overdo it, but I think it has cost quite a lot, including friendships and not least acquaintances.

Debaters with a liberal approach to immigration, some with influential positions in the Norwegian or Swedish debates, have characterized him as 'brown', connoting Nazism. They might not be that many, but he feels it deeply when no one comes to his support:

These are people who express themselves from a very superior position, and even though I believe that many think "those were curiously harsh words", there are in fact very few who go in and show solidarity with those who are picked out as right-wing extremists or nationalistic.

Turning from academia, the informant presented in the following is not connected to Norwegian cultural elites. When entering the immigration debate as a writer and editor of an internet site dedicated in full to immigration and Islam critique 10 years ago, she 'came from nowhere, with nothing to lose,' she claims. That said, in a passing remark, she mentions that when she recently changed her occupation, she did not really have the opportunity to opt for an ordinary job anymore. She has a diverse professional background and was part of the anti-racist movement in her youth. She votes for the social democratic party, but insists that the established parties have lost contact with ordinary people and lack the ability to take their opinions seriously, in particular with regard to immigration policies. After several years working full time with what other

interviewees describe as a ‘contaminated’ source of information, she is used to harassment and assaulting emails late at night. She elaborates:

Much of what I receive would probably have frightened me ten years ago. I often get it in the neck because I’m not educated, there is a lot of that. Like, “Why in the world should we listen to this type of idiot, right? You don’t even have an education”. And there are a few who say something like, “You better watch out”, but I have a big dog and my husband’s from the country, so we’ll be fine.

She tells however about a traumatic time in the aftermath of the Oslo terror attacks July 22, 2011. The terrorist was a male ethnic Norwegian with an extreme anti Islam right wing ideology. Her milieu soon came into the spotlight, partly as a possible network for the perpetrator, partly by being blamed for his extreme ideas. Stressing that there are others who are the real victims here, she recounts:

It was July 22nd and when you are sitting there and are a totally unknown writer, and then the day after you are suddenly having problems getting the BBC not to come and film your house, right? They called my kids’ mobile phones, and it was... I think I got 54 calls before noon... It was like the world had just torn down a wall and came crashing in. I still feel a bit unwell when I think about it. Obviously, when you are defined as sort of “insulation” for this terrorist, it’s catastrophic really. And being hung out to dry as a racist and Nazi and God knows what. I received lots of threats and had to contact the police. I had kids who were suddenly not welcome in their classmates’ homes. But after that, after we got through that somehow or other, then it would take a lot.

People who have worked close to her have suffered much more in the wake of Nazi, racist and fascist characteristics, she

explains. Some have lost their job, friends and public reputation. Some live with protection from the police. She herself has been advised to no longer have a public phone number. But as opposed to friends and colleagues, she started out with no connections to Norwegian academia or the journalistic milieu.

If you are in this journalist environment and that's where your friends are, it's difficult. I have seen how much it pains them when they walk into a room where there are people who they have perhaps known all their lives and worked with, and people turn their backs. If someone turns their back on me, I just think, that's because they don't know me, right?

She adds that even if she works full time with these issues, she is not engaged 24/7. Home, family and friends are another place, she does not bring her job with her.

Polarization, isolation and echo chambers

The participants in the Norwegian immigration debate are used to characterizations that position them on the wrong side of the border between the civil and the uncivil, the good and the bad, in the public sphere. At the same time, they are involved in boundary work to separate their own position from perspectives they themselves find illegitimate, facing movements and arguments that scare them. The editor presented above is well aware of the presence of extreme attitudes directed towards individual immigrants – and Muslims as persons. She distinguishes her own position by pointing to levels of generalization she finds unacceptable, and denounces any type of conspiracy theory. She works together with people of Muslim background, and it is important to her to communicate that they are as varied as anyone else. It worries her when people do

not see the individual, but only threats and enemies. She elaborates:

It's fine to say what the heck you want about Islam, because it's a religion. But you can't call Muslims a cancer. It's this dehumanization that lies beneath what they are doing. And that's not okay. We have pre-moderated comments, but especially when there has been a terrorist attack, we have to delete seventy percent, they just can't go out.

I: What do you delete then?

P: Well, it's that sort of, right "Chase them out and set fire to them," people go completely crazy. I have noticed that before it mostly came from anonymous people. Now, you often see people writing stuff using their real name, and that is a pretty new phenomenon.

We believe that those who want to contribute to a better immigration debate cannot just go ahead and shriek like that. But then they think that it's censorship. And I answer, yeah, because clearly I want Fredrik1234 to write really racist things that I, under my full name, have to take responsibility for, yeah?

Informants like her fear a development in which right-wing extremism, violence and racism grow. But they wholeheartedly believe in an inclusive debate. They do not accept the argument that criticism of immigration policies, religious practices or cultural norms leads to racism, violence and extremism. Rather, they believe that silence and silencing are the main conduits to right wing populism and extremism, expressed by this informant:

I believe that it is those who paint a rosy picture, who deny reality who spur right-wing populism, by branding those who are skeptical, putting very ugly labels on them. That, with good reason, makes good people frustrated, sad and angry. Not least angry. I understand that anger, I have felt it myself to some degree. In my opinion it's

quite the contrary. It's fact-oriented criticism built on liberal values that restrains right-wing populism.

Other interviewees describe how people who engage in the immigration debate experience heavy stigma and high costs, and cannot avoid being affected by it. Processes of exclusion and the formation of likeminded groups might push people towards less flexible and pragmatic views. They see a tendency where people in the absence of inclusive debate forums, gather together with likeminded people. On the one hand they refer to it as a boost to finally be able to discuss the topic. On the other hand, processes of reinforcement might lead to a type of monomaniac absorption in the issue.

Some see an opening up of the debate in the wake of the migration crisis in 2015; more people are engaged and it is easier than before to present critical analysis. Others describe the debates in social media as increasingly similar to echo chambers where opinion leaders are surrounded by fan groups. A paradox arises: debaters might find themselves in a situation where people they would like to discuss with abandon them, while they themselves back away from the embrace of people with a racist or conspiratorial worldview.

Concluding discussion

This chapter has explored the moral boundaries (Lamont et al., 2002) of the immigration debate seen from the perspectives of immigration critics. The analysis reveals that informants relate themselves, their values and arguments to key values of the civil sphere to explain who they are and why they think and feel as they do. In line with the theory of the binary principles of the civil sphere by Jeffrey Alexander (2006), they express how their positions are deemed uncivil, evil, immoral and potentially

dangerous by counterparts in public debate. Informants refer to the elites of the civil sphere, like intellectuals, journalists, and leaders of civil organizations, as key players in this boundary work, creating a climate of opinion where the fear of social exclusion and moral condemnation stops people from conveying their opinions openly. Echoing the central concepts of Alexander's theory, they describe how some actors and sources are depicted as contagious and untouchable, in which a mere association with them is enough to be compromised in the public sphere.

Immigration critics are often related to a type of populism where emotion rather than reason, dramaturgy and rhetoric rather than facts and arguments, authoritarian rather than liberal values are defining characteristics (Muller, 2016). Indeed Alexander's theory stipulates that affect and frenzy are the uncivil antidote to the civil values of rationality and calmness. Interestingly, the informants in this study do not concur with this type of psychological diagnosis. Instead they reverse the binary classifications by referring to their own values and virtues as those based on openness, reason, individual freedom and truth. Further, they point to the liberal 'good side' of immigration debates as the uncivil, describing *their* arguments as irrational, emotional, secretive, and dishonest. Those informants who actively engage in the public debate on immigration share some traits worth noting. They have in common that they regard themselves as opponents and dissenters with an inclination to go against the common crowd.

While grounding their views in the core of classic values of Western liberal societies, informants in this study *do* criticize a cosmopolitan ideal of diversity and tolerance related to relativism (Calhoun, 2008). Instead they defend the primacy of a type of secular individualism and lifestyle they feel the need to

protect against norms based on religion and traditional culture. These perspectives position them in the heart of current negotiations over where to strike the right balance between the assimilative forces of universal values versus the value of diversity and acceptance of difference (Haidt, 2012).

This study has explored the experiences of people with very different connections to public debate, from those who refrain from conveying their views openly to front players in the current Norwegian immigration debate. It is worth noting that they all describe the threat of social exclusion from people one identify with as the main factor that leads to withdrawal from a forum of discussion, be it public or private. This is a type of peer effect (Glynn et al., 1997) that warrants more research: The stigma associated with immigration critique seems to be stronger the closer people identify with a broad liberal and leftist mindset, a phenomenon also discussed in Midtbøen, Ch. 7. This finding points to an important implication. Processes of silencing and repression might prevent some actors from entering public debates, while representatives of movements further away from liberal values and the established public sphere, might grow and dominate the debate untouched by the constraints of a liberal discourse turned repressive.

One could call it an irony that those who identify the most with the normative canon, the positive side of the codes of Alexander, might be the ones who find it most troubling to convey their opinions on immigration policies and integration regimes. To be defined as, or even associated with, the 'bad' side of the civil sphere involves social sanctions that cannot but influence – or change those who experience it. Bitterness, feelings of alienation and a search for alternative support that again strengthen a feeling of alienation from their usual crowd might ensue. The consequence could be a debate climate that silences the

more nuanced, principled and reflective critical voices, resulting in a polarized and one-sided debate.

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