Segregation, mixing and encounter

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The growing diversity of cities has been simultaneously conceptualised as economically productive, socially creative and nurturing of tolerance of difference (Florida 2005) and problematic, as evidenced through socially and spatially segregated populations, persistent inequalities, weak social capital, informal trust and co-operation and heightened prejudices towards ‘otherness’ (Amin 2012). Threaded through these debates has been the politicisation of residential segregation as an indicator of minority adaptation, social integration and intercultural relations (Phillips 2006). Whilst the meaning and measurement of residential segregation have long been contested in the scholarly literature, urban policies that aim to manage diversity through the promotion of spatial, social or ethnic mixing abound. At the forefront of such initiatives has been a concern across many European cities with the promotion of migrant integration and harmonious group relations through intercultural mixing, particularly at the neighbourhood scale (Phillips et al. 2014).

This chapter focuses on shifting conceptualisations of minority ethnic segregation and their implications for policy interventions designed to manage ethnic diversity and difference. Whilst traditional models of migration, settlement and urban change envisage relatively smooth pathways to integration for many groups, largely through processes of acculturation and spatial dispersal, newer understandings seek to complicate this transition through a greater appreciation of individualised identities and differences within groups, the contextualised experience of negotiating diversity and difference and the power of structural factors to undermine policy efforts to build good relations in diverse social settings. Underpinning such concerns is the vexed question of the link between segregation, isolation and social mixing, and the value of interventions that commonly aim to build ‘communities of place’ through a focus on neighbourhood-based encounters with difference. This chapter argues for a more sensitive appreciation of the complexities of new migrants’ and established minorities’ sense of identity and belonging, greater understanding of the specificity of place and the contingent outcomes of negotiated differences. This has methodological implications for research, which offer a challenge to the quantitative–qualitative divide that besets much of the existing scholarship in this field and strategic implications for policy.
Residential segregation contested

Residential segregation has long been seen as a marker of diversity and difference. The meanings, indicators and implications of persistent social and spatial separation are, however, contested. A significant body of scholarly literature has variously conceptualised ethnic minority segregation as a signifier of newcomer status, weak bridging social capital, strong cultural/religious differences and structural inequalities associated with minority discrimination and ‘otherness’ (e.g. Bolt et al. 2012). Intertwined with such debates are questions about temporality, causal mechanisms (i.e. is segregation voluntary or forced?), ‘good’ versus ‘bad’ segregation (Peach 1996) and the responsibilities (and culpability) of minority ethnic citizens that may appear unwilling to mix with other social groups. Political discourses on the interconnections between growing diversities, faltering multiculturalism, good citizenship and national belonging have sharpened the debate on the meaning of persistent minority ethnic residential segregation across European Union states (Phillips 2010). Anxieties about the apparent failure of some minority ethnic groups to follow the usual pathways towards social and spatial integration has brought a raft of policy interventions designed to enhance contact, promote mixing and minimise the potentially damaging effects of living with ‘too much’ cultural difference at the local and national scales.

A hegemonic discourse that associates levels of minority ethnic integration with degrees of spatial mixing raises a number of areas for critical enquiry. A large body of scholarly work has sought to measure the intensity of ethnic, racialised and religious segregation, using a range of statistical indicators (see, for instance, Musterd 2012). Policy makers, keen to quantify the dynamics of diversity, have found such statistical outputs appealing. Such research is, however, underpinned by contentious issues that relate to the validity of different indices, the interpretation of outputs and the appropriate geographical units for measurement. There has also been a tendency for researchers to present the results of such analyses in ways that emphasise segregation as group outcome, rather than an ongoing process that is individualised, politicised and contextualised. Demographers and population geographers, amongst others, have spent considerable energy computing indices from large data sets, such as census wards or tracts, or, where data permit, smaller output areas. Whilst this can apparently offer valuable comparative insights into changing trends in segregation and mixing, the administrative units chosen for analysis may have little bearing on people’s everyday lived experiences at the street or neighbourhood scale.

Critical voices, such as those of the Radical Statistics Group in the UK, have offered incisive critiques of statistical analyses used (and misused) in ‘race’ and segregation debates. Ludi Simpson (2007), for example, has exposed the way in which erroneous inferences can be drawn about the trajectories of minority ethnic groups through the neglect of wider demographic processes of population change. Meanwhile, Finney and Simpson (2009) have challenged dominant segregationist discourses by interrogating a series of racialised myths surrounding immigration, integration and settlement through a far-reaching re-interpretation of statistical data. These authors have also called for greater insights into segregating processes through research that crosses the quantitative–qualitative divide. The work of Stillwell and Phillips (2006) in Leeds and McGarrigle (2010) in Glasgow provides examples of research that has combined statistical analyses of population diversity and change with qualitative data on the processes at work in these localities, but detailed studies that use qualitative research to ground findings emerging from quantitative analyses are relatively rare.

Our understanding and conceptualisation of segregation, diversity and difference is furthermore reflected in, and shaped by, the socially constructed data categories available to us in large quantitative data sets. Critical commentaries by scholars such as Alexander (2002) and Howard (2006) have exposed the politics of group representation in census data, for example, and how
this serves to recognise, and underline, certain diversities and differences, whilst rendering others invisible. The powerful historical effects of such official encodings are most evident in the ideological census classifications employed in the legally enforced segregation of Jim Crow Laws in the USA and apartheid South Africa. Approaches to data categorisation in democratic societies nevertheless still have the power to shape scholarship, through the nature of research questions we ask, and can answer, on the integration and settlement of diverse populations, as well as policy interventions in this field, and thus deserve further critical evaluation.

The rigidity of ethnic and national labels can also serve to fix people’s identities according to their group affiliations, effectively masking complex intra-group diversities that arise through individual attributes, personalised biographies and contextualised experiences. Wright and Ellis (2006) alert quantitative researchers concerned with computing segregation indices to the particular challenges of reflecting growing diversity within households, for example. Drawing on research in the USA, they point to the distinctive geographies of households characterised by mixed-race partnerships, and suggest that this field is ripe for further investigation. Meanwhile, studies drawing on post-structuralist scholarship, which recognises the fluidity, complexity and hybridity of people’s identities, and, more specifically, sociological work on ‘new ethnicities’ that cross ascribed ethnic boundaries (Back 1996), highlight the complexity and diversity of identities, life-styles and interaction patterns embedded within and across officially encoded populations. Greater attention to such diversities, particularly using ethnographic methods, has the potential to open up debate about what we expect from the integration process. Geographers such as Hopkins (2007) and Dwyer (1999), for example, reveal how gender, class and religious difference intersect to produce multiple ways of being British Muslim over time and space. Their work challenges popular discourses and undifferentiated representations of these minorities as segregating, unpatriotic and inward looking – commonly ascribed group characteristics that are perceived to impede good intercultural relations and traditional pathways to social and spatial integration for these citizens.

Narrow concerns with charting changing patterns of residential segregation are increasingly giving way to qualitative studies that explore the dynamics of migration through everyday experiences of living with diversity and difference (e.g. Wise and Velayutham 2009). These studies disclose the social, political and material connections of urban spaces, and reveal the complexity of associations, contextuality of experience and situatedness of prejudice, with clear implications for the development of locally grounded policy agendas. A growing body of research on trans-locality reminds us that migrant (and non-migrant) experiences are not only a product of the local, but also a multiplicity of imaginations, discourses and practices at a range of nested scales (Brickell and Datta 2011). This has implications for how we might conceptualise social and spatial integration in an era of growing mobility and transnational connections and points to multiple expressions of citizenship and belonging. As Nagel and Staeheli (2008) remind us, integration is a complex socio-political process, involving a dialogue between diverse groups as they negotiate a social membership that may well rest on multiple loyalties in sending and receiving countries as well as locally embedded encounters.

Segregation, encounters and mixing – managing diversity

If living with growing diversity and difference is one of the most pressing questions of the twenty-first century, as Hall (1993) contends, then the management of that diversity has been one of the greatest challenges for politicians and policy makers. Positive perspectives on the creative advantages and economic potential of new migration are commonly outweighed by the immediacy of concerns associated with everyday tensions, spatially segregated minorities, popular
Deborah Phillips

prejudices, welfare rights and wider anxieties about the construction of national identity, social cohesion and citizenship. A range of policies, across European cities, has been designed with the aim of creating more liveable, cohesive and harmonious spaces in the face of growing diversity (Arapoglou 2012). Integral to these has been a concern with breaking down the social and spatial segregation of ethnic and religious minorities through the promotion of social and intercultural dialogue and mixing. The efficacy of such policies is, however, uncertain and raises questions about the meaning of segregation, expectations of integration and belonging and the potential for change through social contact.

Scholarly interest in such interventions has focused attention on varying scales of interaction from the city to the body. Fincher and Iveson (2008), for example, drawing inspiration from literature on both urban planning and social encounters, examine how urban policy makers might best respond to growing diversity through interventions designed to create a ‘just city’. Their argument rests on the productive intersection of strategies for re-distributional justice, in the face of inequality, the political recognition of unheard voices and the value of opportunities for social encounter between diverse groups for breaking down (unequal) social and spatial segregation. Crucially their work recognises the contextuality of experience and outcomes, but also, through the use of a range of case-studies, opens up a conversation on the key elements (or ‘social logics’) of diverse and socially just urban living that can be missing from more narrowly focused studies. A closer evaluation of initiatives designed to engineer physical mixing between diverse groups, however, points to limited evidence of success (Bolt et al. 2012). Housing and regeneration schemes, for example, incorporating minority ethnic household quotas, mixed tenure developments or mobility initiatives appear to have had little impact on residential segregation levels, because of selective out-migration, and can undermine ethnic minority housing choice and community building. What emerges is a need for more attention to the impact of structural inequalities on positive outcomes, the contingent effects of the characteristics and histories of migrant populations and the local politics of place.

As new diversities arising from migration continue both to enrich and complicate the dynamics of urban community, a renewed interest in places of potential intercultural encounter has emerged. A burgeoning literature on hospitality, urban citizenship and cosmopolitanism has sought to explore how a co-presence in public spaces might facilitate the negotiation of social and cultural difference and break down preferences for separation (e.g. Koutrolikou 2012). Inspired by social contact theory (see Fell and Hewstone, this volume), and the apparent promise of mundane interactions to erode prejudices, weaken stereotypes and help to build conviviality, scholars have turned their attention to the multicultural capacities of encounters in, for example, streets, parks, buses, markets and the everyday spaces of the neighbourhood. In policy circles, the politicised ‘parallel lives’ discourse, which associates ethnic residential segregation with poor social integration, cohesion and citizenship, has focused particular attention on the neighbourhood as a site of ‘everyday multiculturalism’ and bridge-building between divided groups. Although a raft of social initiatives has been implemented across European cities, and wide-ranging claims about the positive effects of social engagement have been made, we know relatively little about the impact of these on those involved (Phillips et al. 2014). It is unlikely, as Vertovec (2007) points out, that fleeting encounters between strangers in public spaces will do more than promote basic modes of civility. Meanwhile, Amin (2002) amongst others has warned that social interactions played out against a backcloth of racist discourse and unchallenged prejudice may serve only to exacerbate divisions. Encounters, Ahmed (2004) observes, can re-open particular histories so that some bodies are read in more hostile ways than others.

We thus still know relatively little about how diversity is constructed and shifts, how it is imagined and performed in different places and the implications of this for policy interventions
that seek to erode social and spatial segregation. As Anne-Marie Fortier (2007) has argued, social interventions in the management of diversity not only find spatial form through social and spatial engineering and place-based cohesion initiatives, but also invoke ‘specific emotional and ethical injunctions’, such as ‘embracing the other’ and ‘loving thy neighbour’ (ibid.: 107). This opens up questions about shifting constructions of imagined differences, the engineering of affect and the management of ‘multicultural intimacy’ that deserve further exploration. Negative discourses on the uncertain place of Muslim minorities in the national imaginaries of non-Muslim nation-states, for example, highlight the selective and politicised nature of the national embrace. Gendered and embodied constructions of the good Muslim citizen versus the feared Muslim ‘other’ expose further uncomfortable questions about ‘acceptable’ diversity and whether, as Amin (2012) questions, we can really work towards a ‘civility of indifference’ to difference.

Drawing on research with new and established migrants in Bradford, Phillips et al. (2014) suggest that structured, mediated forms of intercultural dialogue around shared neighbourhood and community concerns may well have greater transformative power than fleeting casual encounters, where deep differences (perceived or real) tend to remain unspoken. Intercultural dialogue that directly challenges tensions, they argue, presents an opportunity to negotiate socially constructed group boundaries and unsettle stereotypes that underpin everyday animosities and present barriers to social and spatial mobility. They caution, however, that the capacity for negotiation appears to differ within and between groups, reflecting individualised complexities of identification, affiliation and belonging. Women with children living in areas undergoing rapid change through new migration, for example, seem more willing to reach out to bridge divides than, say, young, single men who readily project their own insecurities on to the incoming ‘other’. Perceived and real inequalities in power and resources between diverse residents may also undermine policy-driven bridge-building efforts to open up dialogue and forge new associations.

Conclusion

Scholars concerned with urban residential segregation, mixing and its consequences in the context of growing diversity face a range of conceptual and methodological challenges. Deeper critical understandings of the meaning and implications of residential segregation rest on more nuanced insights into different ways of negotiating difference in the light of politicised discourses that problematise some forms of segregation and not others. The conceptual challenge lies in marrying the appeal for greater attention to relational, dynamic and performed identities that are sensitive to people’s multiple biographies, attachments and experiences with how these translate into broader understandings of compositional, contextual and structural effects. At the local scale, we might do well, following Valentine (2007), to prioritise research into the operation of intersectionality, which seeks not only to acknowledge the complexity of identification, but also to expose how diversity is entangled with intersecting ‘grids of power’ that infuse gender, class, ethnic, ‘race’ and other relations. This may also help us to gauge how to move beyond the learned ‘grammars of sociability’ (Buonfino and Mulgan 2009: 16) that characterise the convivialities associated with many everyday multicultural encounters, but do little to diffuse more deeply rooted tensions. Meanwhile, the global picture calls for more comparative research, and there have been some notable contributions in this respect. Maloutas and Fujita (2012), for example, move beyond the universalisation of the Anglo-American experience to explore urban (mainly class-based) segregation in different historical, socio-economic and political contexts. Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2009) offer a comparative theoretical perspective on locality to reveal different pathways of migrant incorporation and how migrants contribute differentially to the
(re)making of post-industrial cities. Cross-national comparisons, however, bring their own challenges. As Harrison et al.’s (2005) review of ethnic minority statistics in 15 EU countries makes clear, the accuracy of data, the descriptors used and the ideological premises underpinning the construction of data categories vary considerably between countries.

Research into migration, segregation, mixing and encounter has brought cross-fertilisation across a wide spectrum of intellectual disciplines, ranging from migration and refugee studies to demography, geography, anthropology, sociology, etc. Nevertheless, there is room for interdisciplinary methodological innovation. The field has long been fractured by divisions between quantitative studies of ethnic isolation, integration and settlement, on the one hand, and qualitative research encompassing ethnographic insights into, for example, the enactment of diversity and difference on the other. Despite a growing interest in mixed methods studies, which combine quantitative and qualitative approaches, truly interdisciplinary research that moves beyond an ‘additive model’ remains nascent. As Bracken and Oughton (2009) highlight, the everyday challenges of engaging in interdisciplinary scholarship remain considerable, and can be hampered by differences in ontology, epistemology, working practices, publishing strategies and the differential value accorded to particular data outputs by disciplinary scholars. There are certainly examples of enthusiasm for new forms of engagement, including from participants in the aforementioned Radical Statistics Group, but there is also a frequent retreat into the safety of empiricism, and therefore there are relatively few examples of real theoretical advancements. One possibly fruitful avenue rests with methodological innovation in pursuit of the co-production of research, which involves quantitative as well as qualitative researchers working with research subjects rather than ‘on’ them or distant from them. The challenge for scholars is to capture the dynamic, individualised and multiple trajectories associated with migration and settlement without fixing them in time and space, as well as to uncover the deeply embedded structural inequalities in ‘race’, class, gender, etc. that underpin enduring divisions and open up new ones.

Academic contributions to the field of ethnic segregation and mixing, such as those by Alba and Nee (2003), have established that social integration cannot simply be read off from patterns of residence, and that there is no simple pathway to ethnic minority incorporation into the nation-state. One of the key challenges for scholars is to communicate this more effectively beyond the academy. My own experience of engagement in the UK and wider European policy sphere suggests, despite lip-service to the recognition of diversity, the prevalence of a fairly undifferentiated view of migrant groups by practitioners. This is all too often accompanied by an uncritical adherence to the ‘parallel lives’ discourse that sees residential segregation as inextricably linked to weak social integration in ways that may have little meaning for the everyday lives of either newcomers or longer established citizens that they seek to support.

References