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Producing white urban Europe?
A critical and reflexive reading of academic knowledge production on urban integration of migrants in Western European cities

Abstract

In this paper, I review studies of urban integration as analyzed for two groups of mobile newcomers: those designated as "migrants", that is, mostly marginalized cross-border movers from outside Europe, and mobile EU citizens in Western European cities. This critical and reflexive reading serves to highlight how academic knowledge production on the topic has (re-)produced an image of white urban Europe. While critics of the concept of immigrant integration have suggested that cities and neighborhoods are better sites in which to study migrant integration than the nation-state, the paper demonstrates that studies of urban integration tend to suffer from similar problems, including an ethno-nationalist focus and an essentializing of (ethnic) groups. The comparison foregrounds how mobile EU citizens are implicitly thought of as white; their presence in the urban territory is rarely questioned and their practices rarely problematized. In contrast, those designated as migrants are researched with reference to integration, whereby integration means moving closer to white spaces. Thus, studies of the urban integration of *migrants* use an ethnic framing, while studies of *mobile* EU citizens focus on class and nationality. The paper thus illuminates how studies of urban integration rely on and reproduce an implicit assumption of whiteness as the norm, even in diverse urban spaces.

Keywords: Urban Integration; Migration; Whiteness; Housing; Networks.

Introduction

IN THE PAST DECADE, the concept of immigrant integration has been increasingly criticized, as various scholars have questioned its relevance

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and power to explain the experiences of immigrants and their descendants [Favell 2022; Grzymala-Kazlowska and Phillimore 2018; Schinkel 2018]. A major criticism concerns the concept's ethnonational focus and the underlying notion of a homogenous society that immigrants can integrate into. As Favell [2019: 3] argues, taking into account "the global studies of the last 25 years", analyzing "(e)conomic, cultural, social 'integration' at the bounded national level evidently is a conceptual nonsense". Another criticism, voiced by scholars with backgrounds in reflexive migration studies, postcolonial theory, and/or critical race theory, refers to implicit processes of racialization in integration research. The imperative to "integrate" is demanded primarily of racialized others designated as migrants, while it is generally not demanded of cross-border movers who are considered as white and privileged, and who are more often referred to as "expatriates" or simply as mobile [Amelina 2021; Favell 2022]. As Schinkel writes, "white citizens are not researched or described in terms of their 'integration'" [2018: 4]. Instead, they get a "dispensation of integration". Categorizing some cross-border movers as immigrants and others as expatriates is an act of racialization that also establishes whiteness as the unspoken norm [Bhambra 2016; El-Tayeb 2011].

Critics of nation-state-centered research on immigrant integration have proposed sites at the local level—cities and neighborhoods—as better locations in which to study processes of integration [Hadj Abdou 2019; Favell 2022]. Immigrants predominantly arrive and settle in cities, hence migration-induced diversity has always been higher in urban areas. Increasing heterogeneity is found not only between but also within "groups" of urbanites, as highlighted by the concept of superdiversity [Vertovec 2007]. Wacquant describes the city as a "site of the flourishing of multiple capitals and the meeting ground of variegated habitus" [2023: 12], and as a "society of microcosms" [*Ibid.*: 15]. Moreover, the city is also "the place where ethnicity […] becomes salient and conflictive" [*Ibid.*: 111]. Given this high level of diversity, the study of integration in the city should respond to calls for the avoidance of methodological nationalism and of the related—untenable—idea of a homogenous society that immigrants could integrate into.

While I agree that studying processes of integration at the local level potentially addresses some of the criticisms that have been voiced, this paper shows how even research on *urban* integration reproduces some of the same problems that have been outlined at the national level. The differentiation between immigrants (and their descendants) and other categories of "mobile" people is reproduced at the urban level, with the

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consequence that questions around urban integration are asked primarily with reference to those who are designated, or, as Wacquant [2023: 112] put it, "defamed", as migrants. The question of how more privileged movers, such as mobile EU citizens, become part of the urban fabric is likewise addressed in sociological research, but in different and less normatively charged ways. Thus, scholars of urban integration contribute to (re-)producing an image of urban Europe that relies on an unnamed norm of whiteness, whereby only marginalized and racialized groups are expected to integrate, a process which, as I will show, signifies moving into or closer to white space(s).

The aim of this paper is decidedly not to dismiss critical scholars' voices (and studies), and particularly not those of scholars who have paved the way for more reflexive urban and migration studies; see, for example, the important works by Schiller and Çağlar [2009] or Suzanne Hall [2021]. Neither do I want to "expose" scholars, but instead engage in a critical reflection on how academic knowledge production on urban integration (my own included) has contributed to a certain image of Western European cities and assumptions about the supposed practices of different groups of cross-border movers, and thereby highlight how whiteness functions as the implicit reference category and norm [Emirbayer and Desmond 2012; Mepschen 2019].

This paper is thus inspired by recent attempts to bring more reflexivity into the ways we as scholars produce knowledge, particularly in the field of migration studies [Amelina 2021; Dahinden 2016; Dahinden, Fischer and Menet 2021]. My aim here is to engage in "epistemic reflexivity", which "aims to control the 'scholastic bias' introduced by the categories, techniques, and theories the sociologist uses" [Wacquant 2022: 5]. This exercise in reflexivity "cannot be separated from studying eurocentrism, racism, [or the] situated positions of researchers".[1] I will show how scholars, through the formulation of their research questions, and through the theories and frames of interpretation they apply, ultimately confirm the European social and racial order [cf. Amelina 2021], even if this is unintentional.

I will do so by critically analyzing and comparing studies on urban integration that result from two different stands of literature: from the intersection of migration and urban studies; and from the sociology of Europe, with a focus on the relationship between cross-border mobility and rootedness/local belonging. While these two literatures deal with similar questions—for example, how do newcomers become part of the

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[1] https://www.imiscoe.org/research/standing-committees/927-reflexive-migration-studies

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urban fabric?—they use differing theories and different categorical frames of analysis. As this paper will show, only the literature on the urban integration of immigrants (and their descendants) uses an ethnic frame, while the ethnoracial category is completely absent from studies of mobile EU citizens, which more often refer to class or nationality. If we analyze these studies together (usually the scholars of these two different fields rarely meet either in person or on paper), we can better understand how academic work reproduces a racialized understanding of urban integration, where those designated as migrants are expected to integrate while the urban practices of other cross-border movers, who are imagined as white and privileged, remain invisible and/or unproblematized.

As Emirbayer and Desmond argue, we must turn our gaze onto ourselves to "inquire critically into the hidden presuppositions that shape our thought" [2012: 574]. Doing so, we discover the "unnamed whiteness" [Montalva Barba 2023: 792] that is "discursively active regardless of its (in)visibility" [Shaw 2007: 190], not only in cities themselves but also in our scholarly discipline. By asking how race is present (or not) in knowledge production on urban integration, I follow scholars who call for race to be made a more central "aspect of our urban analysis and theoretical discourse" [Beebeejaun and Modarres 2020: 7, see also Picker, Murji and Boatcă 2019].

Because of my claim about "white" urban Europe, I want to clarify how I understand whiteness. Inspired by the writings of Sara Ahmed, I view whiteness not as being located in the body, but as being placed onto certain bodies. Ahmed [2007] defines whiteness as "an orientation that puts certain things within reach" [*Ibid*.: 154], as something that "orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they 'take up' space, and what they 'can do'" [*Ibid*.: 150]. Race, then, becomes a "question of what is within reach, what is available to perceive and to do 'things' with" [*Ibid*.: 154]. Thus, processes of racialization impact not only how a person can, and is supposed to, move within and across space(s), but also which spaces are within reach and which ones are not. The ability to move freely—across national borders but also within a nation-state or a city—is connected to questions of home. In Ahmed's [2007: 162] words, "The politics of mobility, of who gets to move with ease across the lines that divide space, can be re-described as the politics of who gets to be at home, who gets to inhabit spaces, as spaces that are inhabitable for some bodies and not others, insofar as they extend the surfaces of some bodies and not others".

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Given the vast number of studies on urban integration, this exercise in the critical reading of existing studies is by necessity highly selective. First, my focus is on cities in Western Europe that are home to a sizeable number of old and new immigrants (and their descendants). I thus disregard cities with differing urbanization histories and different migration patterns and regimes, such as those in southern and Eastern Europe. Second, I focus on two dimensions of urban integration, namely housing/residential integration and social integration. Third, as I attempted a close reading of the studies, I opted to select only a small number of illustrative and "representative" studies, in the sense that they use theories or methods that can be found in comparable studies as well. The paper does *not* give a systematic review of all papers published about the topic within a certain time span. Both my approach and an exhaustive review would have its advantages and disadvantages, but for the purposes of this paper, the close reading of a small number of studies is key. The studies were thematically selected using a Google Scholar search with relevant keywords. Two studies were published in the early 2000s, while all the others appeared after 2010.

In the following I will give a short definition of residential and social integration, before moving on to a critical reading of the selected articles. The discussion will then present the main points that emerge from the comparison of the two strands of literature on urban integration.

Residential and social integration – relevance of the urban

The city and its neighborhoods have always held a prominent place in the study of immigrant integration and social inequality more generally. The Chicago School's founders used the city as a magnifying glass to describe and understand wider societal processes. As Reinecke has shown for France and Germany, social conflicts—also related to migration—were (and still are) primarily resolved, but also studied in the context of cities. Cities are viewed by some as an "integration machine", made up of cosmopolitan spaces where people learn to live together in a diverse setting. Others view cities as more problematic spaces, as they stress the prevalence of urban crises, pointing to issues of "polarization and disintegration" [*Ibid*.: 15].

The focus on specific neighborhoods as sites for (dis-)integration emerged due to (perceived) urban conflicts and problems, such as segregation or riots that had taken place in the urban "badlands" of European

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cities [Reinecke 2021]. At the same time, from around the 1970s onward, urban problems in Western European cities were increasingly explained with reference to ethnicity and culture, while class became less relevant.

The concept of immigrant integration is highly controversial and there is no single agreed-upon definition. In an attempt to bring together various conceptualizations of integration, Ager and Strang [2008: 170] define it as composed of "markers and means" (employment, housing, education, health), "social connection" (social bridges, social bonds, social links), facilitators (language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability), and "foundation" (rights and citizenship). These dimensions are regulated and negotiated on various territorial levels. Economic integration through employment, formal integration through residency or citizenship, or social integration through intermarriage or friendship networks are typically assessed on the national level.

In this paper, I focus on urban integration through housing/residential trajectories and social connections, two dimensions for which the local level is of high relevance. Housing is a major source of inequality, particularly in large cities [Le Galès and Pierson 2019]. Where one lives partially determines one's quality of life and one's access to resources, such as education, the (local) labor market, health, or public transportation.[2] A person's choice of which neighborhood within a city they should move into depends on the depends on the opportunities provided by the housing market, which are influenced by local policies, concerning, for example, the relevance/extent of social housing, or social mixing strategies. Housing and neighborhood choice are also influenced by an individual's or household's economic, cultural, and social capital, by individual/household preferences, and by the practices of gatekeepers such as landlords and housing associations.

The urban space is also relevant for establishing (non-virtual) ties. The number, function, and importance of such ties are commonly used as indicators of social integration.[3] Factors affecting the establishment of a local network include the population structure of the city or neighborhood as well as the presence or absence of opportunities to meet other residents, such as public spaces or third places [Feld 1981; Oldenburg 1997]. In a homogenous neighborhood, it is difficult to meet people who

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[2] The relation between one's place of residence and access to resources has been extensively addressed by the literature on neighborhood effects.

[3] The literature on social networks commonly differentiates between strong and weak ties [GRANOVETTER 1983]; more recent studies have also included those that are more difficult to observe, such as invisible or absent ties [BLOKLAND and NAST 2014; FELDER 2020].

are categorically different from oneself, just as it is hard to meet other people and develop ties in a neighborhood with little opportunities to meet other residents. Moreover, the possibility of establishing category-crossing ties also depends on the residents' attitudes toward diversity, and on whether a positive attitude translates into practice [cf. Blokland and van Eijk 2010].

In the following sections, I will review and critically reflect on some of the studies that have been published on the topic, with a focus on what categorical frames are used, and what this tells us about the (implicit) role of race in studies on urban integration.

Urban integration of immigrants and their descendants

A reflexive reading of the literature on the urban integration of immigrants (and their descendants) from countries outside Europe who reside in European cities, and may have arrived as guest workers, postcolonial migrants, refugees or asylum seekers, serves to highlight two major points. First, ethnicity is the predominant categorical frame, and this is evident throughout: in the formulation of the research question/problem, the selection of theories, the methodological setup, through to the interpretation of results. Second, despite the "multiplicity of microcosms" in the city, integration for migrants still implies geographic and social proximity to native whites—which themselves are presented as a homogenous mass, in a manner not unlike the oft-criticized approach of studies of national integration.

The interest in immigrants' housing and neighborhood trajectories in European cities arose from the observation that neighborhoods with a high share of immigrants became increasingly segregated, a process that was connected to further negative effects of living in a poor, segregated neighborhood, such as higher levels of crime, school dropouts, or unemployment. Despite the differences between Western European and US cities—including much lower levels of segregation in European cities, differing racial hierarchies, and a stronger (local) welfare state—studies on urban integration are highly influenced by US scholarship. Most studies examine whether migrants' residential trajectories express spatial assimilation, understood as "upward mobility into residence patterns that mirror the rest of the nation" [Lichter, Parisi and Taquino 2015: 52]. According to this model, immigrants, or their descendants, are expected to move from an ethnically and/or

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economically segregated neighborhood to an integrated one. In the USA, this would usually mean moving to a suburb, while in most Western European cities, these desirable neighborhoods are primarily located in the inner city. In contrast to the spatial assimilation model, the place stratification model includes ethnic preference as well as structural processes of discrimination, hence explaining why the housing trajectories of some immigrant groups might not conform to the spatial assimilation model [McAvay 2021].

Many studies on migrants' residential trajectories apply a quantitative approach and measure whether migrants move out of "low-status" neighborhoods into those with a higher socioeconomic status. Thereby, the studies often apply rather crude categorizations of migrants versus natives. Moreover, the status of the neighborhood is often determined via the share of immigrants or ethnic minorities, which is a questionable practice.

To illustrate, Kati Kadarik [2020] analyzes the mobility of immigrants toward native-dominated neighborhoods, defined "as neighbourhoods that have a higher share of natives (i.e. Swedish-born people) than the country as a whole" [*Ibid*.: 197], in various Swedish localities. The author includes explanatory variables such as migrants' individual resources, their country of origin, and the settlement context. Based on a panel dataset from administrative registers, she demonstrates that "mobility into a native-dominated neighbourhood is quite rare, especially in the metropolitan municipalities" [*Ibid*.: 202], particularly for migrants from Middle Eastern or Northern African countries, compared to migrants from Western and Eastern Europe and Latin America. The author also shows that higher income does not always lead to spatial mobility, particularly in metropolitan areas with tight housing markets. In fact, "all groups need to have much higher levels of income to reach the same levels of probability of moving to native-dominated neighbourhoods as the poorest migrants from Western countries" [Kadarik 2020: 209], an observation which points to ethnic hierarchies in the housing market.

Similarly, Bolt and Kempen [2010] analyze the housing trajectories of ethnic minorities and native Dutch people in four Dutch cities. They ask whether immigrants move out of "ethnic" or concentration areas, where "the share of non-Western minority-group residents is at least 40 per cent, which is 10 percentage points more than the average" [*Ibid*.: 338], and into "white neighborhoods". The authors find that movers with a non-Western background move primarily to other concentration areas, while Dutch and Western migrants move to non-concentration areas.

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Variables such as the presence of children, income, and level of education affect moving behavior, but do not fully account for the lower probability of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants remaining in or moving to neighborhoods with a high concentration of immigrants.

Both studies use the local share of immigrants to determine neighborhood status, without giving insights on the economic status of the neighborhood. Together with the underlying assumption that immigrants or ethnic minorities are expected to seek to move out of "ethnic" neighborhoods, this approach presents such neighborhoods as deviating from the unnamed norm, namely whiteness.

Another study from Sweden uses socioeconomic status (% poverty) instead of the share of immigrants or ethnic minorities [Vogiazides and Chihaya 2020]. The authors test whether immigrants move out of poor neighborhoods into middle- or high-income ones. They find that within the first nine years in their adopted country, 81% of immigrants live in the same type of neighborhood, which points to residential stability, not to upgrading. Sixty percent live in "stable deprivation" [*Ibid.*: 893], and only 12% have a residential trajectory that would fit the spatial assimilation model. Migrants from the African continent and the Middle East are the least likely to move out of a poor neighborhood. While it is a step forward to use economic indicators instead of ethnic-minority status, the authors still distinguish between immigrants and "natives" (who are not part of the study), thus presenting the residential trajectories of immigrants as something specific that might differ from an unnamed norm.

Similar studies have been conducted for other European cities in France (Dimou, Ettouati and Schaffar 2020; McAvay 2018] and Germany [Lersch 2013; Sager 2012], with comparable results. These studies generally vary according to whether they use the share of natives/ ethnic minorities or socioeconomic indicators to establish the status of a neighborhood, and whether or not they also include data on "natives".

While most authors are critical of the spatial assimilation model and point to processes of discrimination, they still apply an unquestioned differentiation between groups of immigrants and between immigrants and natives. This is problematic insofar as the choice of whom to designate as a "migrant" is not neutral, "but a driving force for societal differentiation" [Dahinden, Fischer and Menet 2021: 539; see also Amelina 2021]. Dividing urbanites into immigrants (or ethnic minorities, many of whom were born in the country) and so-called natives reproduces this societal differentiation. The differentiation between ethnic and white, or concentrated and integrated, creates a hierarchy of places within a city, whereby those populated by whites are established

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as the norm, while neighborhoods with different population demographics are implicitly seen as deviating from that norm. The expected movement of racialized urban residents that would signify successful integration is clear: it should be movement from places that are racialized due to the bodies that inhabit them to "white" places. Neighborhoods with a sizeable number of immigrants and racialized minorities are not the places in which it is expected that people will feel at home.

However, it is not at all clear why we would expect a migrant or a racialized person to move to a white-native-dominated neighborhood in the first place. For bodies read as white, being in a "white" neighborhood is "regarded as unremarkable, or as [a] normal, taken-for-granted [reflection] of civil society" [Anderson 2015: 10]. This is different for racialized people, as countless accounts, academic as well as autobiographic, have demonstrated.[4] In "white" neighborhoods, racialized persons—whether migrants or natives—are particularly visible as the "other"; they are constantly racialized and experience both micro-aggressions and open racist discrimination. Thus, what is commonly called a non-concentration or integrated area and imagined as the norm is often an excluding one. In societies that are organized along ethnoracial lines, moving to a white neighborhood might have disturbing effects for the racialized "others" [cf. Anderson 2015].

Establishing white neighborhoods as the norm also disregards the diversity of the urban population, as illustrated by the increasing number of majority-minority neighborhoods [Crul 2016]. Drawing on Wacquant's argument that race is a "modality of symbolic violence, the bending of social reality to fit a mental map of reality" [2022: 185], the devaluation of migrant neighborhoods (many of which have over time become gentrified and highly desirable—see below) based on their share of migrants can therefore be viewed as an act of symbolic violence. Mary Pattillo [2014], referring to the US context, describes the consequence of such symbolic violence: the "stigmatization of Blacks and Black spaces is precisely what foils efforts toward integration. After all, why would anyone else want to live around or interact with a group that is discouraged from being around itself?" While scholars of residential integration, including the cited ones, certainly do not aim to stigmatize immigrant neighborhoods, as a result of their reliance on an ethnic framing of the research question and analysis, the effect is the same.

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[4] In Germany, for example, several biographic accounts have appeared from the children of immigrants, born and raised in Germany, describing their experiences growing up in different localities [e.g. M. AMJAHID, "Unter Weissen"; F. AYDMEIR and H. YAGHOOBIFARAH (eds), *Eure Heimat ist unser Albtraum*].

This ethnic framing is also found in studies of urban integration through social contacts. Generally, while the literature on network formation has clearly demonstrated the spatial and temporal variability of networks [e.g. Lubbers, Molina and Mccarty 2021], there is still a view in public and also scholarly discourse that "migrants' social world is dominated by tightly-knit, homogeneous, and supportive networks of kin and co-ethnics" [Vacca, Cañarte and Vitale 2022: 3113]. This can either be termed positively as ethnic solidarity, or in a more problematizing manner as network segregation. While many studies have focused on migrants' transnational ties, less attention has been paid to the role of social networks "in the *localized* incorporation processes of newcomers" [Boost and Oosterlynck 2019: 155, emphasis added].

Various studies of local ties have appeared following the increase in social/ethnic mixing in neighborhoods that has taken place as a result of urban restructuring programs or market-led gentrification. Social mixing programs have been one of the main urban policy tools used in Western European cities to break up socially and ethnically segregated neighborhoods [Bridge, Butler and Le Galès 2014]. The policy is based on the contact hypothesis, which assumes that spatial proximity will lead to increased contact between residents, hence also between those of different ethnic backgrounds or different income groups. Social mixing should thus "improve […] social integration and support […] the social mobility of impoverished groups" [Oosterlynck, Verschraegen and van Kempen 2018: 16].

In line with the aims of state-led social mixing programs, most studies analyze their effects by measuring the number and quality of social connections between residents differing in ethnic or class background, or tenancy status. Despite the inclusion of different categories, we still find a predominantly ethnic framing. For example, Uitermark and colleagues [2007] examine the effects of an urban renewal program in Rotterdam that demolished 400 units of social housing, replacing them with 222 new, mostly single-family homes. Based on interviews with local experts and a survey among residents, the authors found that this led to few interactions across class or ethnic lines. Rather, the redevelopment of the neighborhood and the influx of white native Dutch residents increased ethnic tensions, partly because the native newcomers were reluctant to engage in activities with their ethnic-minority neighbors.

Also in the Dutch context, Tersteeg and Pinkster [2016] examine category-crossing ties between residents in a mixed-income development in Amsterdam. In their example, the complex was newly built, meaning that all residents had moved in from elsewhere and had no prior local

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network. Despite this situation, conflicts between different groups of residents emerged quickly. Due to the layout of the buildings, the predominantly native Dutch *homeowners* lived on the upper floors of the buildings, while the predominantly immigrant/ethnic-minority *social renters* lived on the lower floors. Thus, different tenure statuses overlapped with differences "in ethnicity, household size, and location within the apartment complex" [*Ibid*.: 773], likewise leading to suspicion, rather than category-crossing ties.

France has also had major urban renewal programs aimed at the desegregation of the so-called *banlieues*, large social housing complexes often located at the outskirts of large cities. Christine Lelévrier's [2010, 2013] work on three urban restructuring sites confirms the roles of architectural design and the availability and use of public spaces in the development of category-crossing ties. While a physical separation between social housing and owner-occupied units can cause a perceived social distance between residents, spatial proximity between these two types of housing tenure can facilitate interactions. Lelévrier also points out that many of the new residents in owner-occupied housing had an ethnic-minority background and pre-existing ties in the neighborhood to friends or family members. This encouraged intra-ethnic ties across socioeconomic background.

The general lack of interactions and observable ties between residents of different ethnic backgrounds has been confirmed by studies set in gentrifying neighborhoods. These studies have mostly focused on the practices of the in-moving white native middle classes in neighborhoods in Paris, London, Rotterdam, and Hanover. In essence, these studies highlight the (white native) newcomers' local practices, exposing how they value diversity but rarely act accordingly [Bacqué *et al*. 2015; Benson and Jackson 2013; Blokland and van Eijk 2010; Butler 2003; Jackson and Butler 2014; Weck 2019; Weck and Hanhörster 2015].

While some of the studies on category-crossing ties—particularly those focusing on state-led urban renewal programs—include tenancy status or income, the predominant categorical framing remains "ethnicity". Overall, the scholarship on urban integration through social connections also applies a "differentiation mechanism, in which society is divided into allochthonous (ethnic/cultural, outside) and autochthonous (neutral/inside) parts" [Mepschen 2019: 74]. Thereby, both "groups" are homogenized, leading to an image of economically disadvantaged migrants and privileged native whites. This hides the view of two types of category-crossing ties that we might expect in a diverse urban setting, namely between migrants of differing ethnic/national backgrounds and

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between migrants of differing economic status. Only Lelévrier addresses ties between residents of the *same* ethnic but a *differing* economic background. The lack of attention to these types of ties, even in critical studies, implies that "integration" is understood as being included in "white" networks. The possibility that ties to other migrants, or racialized minorities, can have an integrative force remains unexplored, and hence undervalued, while ties to whites are automatically viewed as valuable. The few studies that deal with such intra-ethnic ties have elucidated their relevance for the urban integration of (migrant) newcomers as well as that of long-established but marginalized and racialized immigrants [Barwick 2016, Hanhörster 2014; Hanhörster and Wessendorf 2020]. These studies are also critical of a focus on local ties within a singular neighborhood as it portrays migrants as sedentary, rather than as mobile users of different parts of the city—this topic will be taken up again in the conclusion. Ultimately, most studies of mixed neighborhoods (unintentionally) rely on an ethnonational framing and the "essentializing of groups" [Grzymala-Kazlowska and Phillimore 2018: 180].

The concept of superdiversity explicitly criticizes the concept of integration by arguing that the "diversification of diversity" [Vertovec 2007: 1025] makes the division of people into neat ethnic groups nonsensical; it presents a different perspective on ties in diverse neighborhoods. Most studies on superdiversity are concerned with questions around local belonging, often analyzed through a focus on relations and encounters between residents of diverse backgrounds [Berg and Sigona 2013; Grzymala-Kazlowska and Phillimore 2018].

To illustrate, Susanne Wessendorf has conducted several studies in superdiverse neighborhoods in London and Birmingham. She coined the term "commonplace diversity" [Wessendorf 2013], highlighting an ethos of mixing that expects locals to interact across difference in the public sphere of the neighborhood. These interactions are low level and usually do not result in long-lasting ties, but they function as a sign of local belonging and "the lack of such encounters can lead to entrenched negative attitudes against people who are perceived to stay away from participation in local life" [Wessendorf 2013: 419]. Thus, those who do not engage in local diversity through encounters and interactions are perceived as outsiders.

Based on the experiences of newly arrived "pioneer migrants", that is, those who do not form part of an already established migrant community, Wessendorf [2019] illustrates the benefits of living in a diverse setting. She recounts how migrants from the African continent felt like they stuck out in ethnically homogenous (white British or Asian) neighborhoods and therefore had few local interactions. Those living in diverse

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neighborhoods, in contrast, felt more included, which was also attributed to the fact that "long-term residents were already skilled in such inter-cultural interactions, and everyday multiculturalism was common practice" [*Ibid*.: 142]. Building on the same topic by focusing on reci-procity within relations, Phillimore, Humphris and Khan [2018] high-light the crucial role of established migrants in supporting the arrival and settling process of newly arrived immigrants. In a study of four super-diverse contexts in the UK, the authors examine ties within and across ethnic groups, thereby transcending the common focus on ties between migrants and the (white) majority society. They show how previous migrants' experiences and knowledge help migrant newcomers access important resources, and thereby support the arriving and settling of new migrants in the respective city and country.

While research on superdiversity and encounters between people of different backgrounds is a necessary step toward de-essentializing the category of the migrant and moving away from a focus on the concept of "integration", the studies set in a superdiverse context also illustrate how difficult this exercise is. In most cases, groups of residents are still primarily analyzed and described using the categorical frame of ethnicity or migrant status [cf. Grzymala-Kazlowska and Phillimore 2018], while other cat-egories such as class or lifestyle are not addressed or only described as secondary. For example, the cited studies describe the neighborhoods they selected to study primarily in ethnic terms, pointing out how many ethnic groups live in the respective locality. Moreover, most analyses end up also using homogenizing categories that most often refer to ethnoracial groups or language communities, instead of other explanatory characteristics such as class, length of residence, and so on. To illustrate, in their otherwise excellent article, Kesten and de Souza [2019] examine interactions across difference in the superdiverse borough of Haringey in London. Their sample is inclusive in that they not only interviewed migrant newcomers but also long-established non-white and working-class white British resi-dents. While they find that some residents prefer diversity more than others, expressed through the extent to which they interact across differ-ence, they also mention that the most divisive factor that affects cross-category interaction is social class: "While the focus of the research […] was on social interactions and relationships between residents from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, it became clear that in fact divisions in social class were often the hardest to overcome" [*Ibid*.: 62]. Given that the research is consciously set in a superdiverse context, and the aim is to research a variety of residents, the study's insistence on ethnicity and cultural background as explanatory variables seems too simplistic, and,

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as the authors admit, not able to capture the complexity of the formation of ties/interactions in superdiverse neighborhoods. In the studies cited in this paper, scholars usually place more emphasis on migration-related dimensions than on class.

Relatedly, what is often missing is a historicization of the categories that are relevant in a given (local, but nationally and transnationally embedded) context. As Yeoh [2023: 1654] argues, "Postcolonial nation-states are not just (super)diverse, but are marked by a diversity that is inextricably related to their colonial past". How this plays out at the local level, and is mirrored in encounters and interactions, is a topic that still needs to be incorporated into studies. Doing so would also allow scholars to be more attentive to the role of whiteness. A critical reading of the studies on superdiversity highlights that, still, "diversity becomes associated with certain bodies" only [Ahmed 2012: 9f.]—that is, bodies that are racialized as non-white. While practices of conviviality might make racial differences ordinary, these differences still persist [Back and Sinha 2016]. As Vertovec himself writes, "not all people are equally free to reflect on their multiple categorical identities, especially when living in deprived social circumstances or subject to various forms of identity-based inequity or bigotry" [2023: 183, cited in Song 2023: 1675]. Following Walton [2021], "Habits of whiteness" persist, even in diverse neighborhoods, and they affect what behaviors are desired or expected, particularly of racialized minorities. As Ahmed [2007: 153] reminds us: "'Doing things' depends not so much on intrinsic capacity, or even upon dispositions or habits, but on the ways in which the world is available as a space for action, a space where things 'have a certain place' or are 'in place'". Engaging in encounters and establishing ties across difference is an expression of "doing things", but these actions are not equally available to all, even in mixed or superdiverse neighborhoods. Instead, they are influenced by processes of racialization and hierarchies of power that also manifest in urban spaces and that we as scholars need to take into account when studying urban integration through social connections.

Urban integration of mobile EU citizens

In contrast to the previously described studies on urban integration of those designated as "migrants", revisiting some of the works on the same topic that are drawn from the sociology of Europe shows their complete lack of an ethnic framing of integration; indeed, the local practices of mobile EU

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citizens are discussed in these studies without any reference to urban integration. Instead, these citizens' housing and neighborhood choices or local social connections are explained with reference to class or nationality/ language, and any difficulties encountered are interpreted as an expression of the "human face" of global mobility [Smith and Favell 2006].

Research on the housing and neighborhood choices of mobile EU citizens is rather scarce. As (highly) skilled, desired, and predominantly white immigrants, with relatively high economic and cultural capital, their housing patterns are rarely examined through the lens of residential integration, and common theoretical models such as spatial assimilation or place stratification are hard to find in available studies. If housing and residential choice are addressed, they are used as an example of how moving to a new country and city is challenging even for privileged migrants. Favell [2008: 198] argues that for skilled and mobile Europeans, "the typical European city—however international it is— resembles […] the impossibly competitive scramble for housing and quality of life". Spatial integration is discussed regarding the general struggle for housing that is occurring in all major (and many mid-sized) cities across Europe. In cities such as London, Paris, Amsterdam, or Berlin, the price of housing has increased considerably in the past two decades, making it difficult even for privileged migrants to secure a place to live in a central, desirable location or to become a homeowner.

Using the example of Amsterdam, Favell [2008: 189] describes the "almost comically difficult" struggles to find housing in the city. Given the tightness and organization of the local housing market, Favell observes a quasi-discrimination against foreigners, whose situation is exploited by "a housing market industry that is a goldmine for unscrupulous landlords and agencies" [*Ibid*.: 191]. Similarly, finding housing that suits one's needs and preferences is also reported to be very difficult by mobile Europeans in Paris or London [Barwick and Le Galès 2021]. The London housing market is fairly open to foreigners, but the high housing prices force many European residents to live in small apartments or in neighborhoods outside the center. In Paris, many British nationals struggle with the number of documents that landlords ask for before renting their apartment. Coupled with the language issue, British nationals reported feeling disadvantaged when renting a place. While (white) skilled intra-European migrants are rarely discriminated against due to their national origin, a lack of language skills and information, and the amount and types of documents that need to be submitted to rent an apartment, still put them in a disadvantaged position vis-à-vis local natives.

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For mobile EU citizens, research points to two major residential patterns/trajectories: some European migrants favor neighborhoods with a language-/nationality-based infrastructure, such as French nationals who move to South Kensington in London, which has a strong French infrastructure including a school, or British nationals who move to Paris's western suburbs, where the British school is located. The choice of neighborhood in these cases results from practical considerations, with the educational infrastructure as the most relevant factor. To illustrate, French nationals in London who moved to South Kensington or adjacent areas mentioned that the French school was the most important reason for their neighborhood choice [Barwick and Le Galès 2021; Huc-Hepher and Drake 2017]. The French infrastructure came as a plus, particularly for those lacking English language skills or for the traveling spouses (mostly wives) who had moved along with their partners, pausing their own career and taking care of the children.

The second residential pattern is characterized by a preference for living in the inner city, sometimes explicitly avoiding geographical proximity to conationals. For Italian nationals in Paris, who moved after the financial crisis, Dubucs *et al.* [2017: 583] show that "living in the very centre of Paris appears to be a crucial housing choice", for which the respondents were willing to compromise on size or comfort of housing. The preference for living in the inner city is partly an expression of mobile Europeans' motives for moving abroad, which are not only work-related, but also contain elements of lifestyle migration [Barwick 2022; Benson and O'Reilly 2016; Favell 2008]. Living in or close to the center of the city means being able to satisfy one's material and cultural consumption preferences. As has been shown for middle classes in general, most respondents also have a taste for diversity and prefer to live in diverse neighborhoods. In Berlin, for example, British nationals moved predominantly to neighborhoods within the metro ring, and there was a clear preference for diverse and gentrifying neighborhoods in the center of the city [Barwick 2022]. In London, the younger French respondents or those without children also opted for internationally known districts such as Brixton or Islington [Huc-Hepher and Drake 2017]. In Brussels, the residential choices of many EU citizens has led to the emergence of a "cosmopolitan Europeanized neighbourhood", namely Ixelles, southeast of the city centre [Favell 2008: 128].

Overall, the studies demonstrate that "[m]igrants—particularly highly skilled ones—employ agency when choosing where to settle, but they make their choices between limited options" [Zaban 2022: 2271]. These limited options result from a lack of language skills, a tight urban

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housing market, and practical considerations related to children's educational needs, but also to pre-migration imaginaries of certain neighborhoods, primarily those that are internationally known due to their diversity and options for cultural consumption.

In contrast to the previously cited studies on immigrants' residential trajectories, what stands out from the referenced studies on intra-EU movers is the lack of an ethnic framing of the research problem or of the interpretation of results. In contrast, the prevailing categorical frame is class, at times coupled with nationality/language. Mobile EU citizens' residential practices are never questioned or compared to a supposed norm; they are instead part of the norm. As mobile EU citizens, they are imagined as white and economically privileged, a homogenization that does not match reality, as it disregards the differential experiences (and needs) resulting from the availability of cultural and economic capital (many movers, even privileged ones, are precariously employed or experience downward social mobility). Moreover, the image of the privileged EU mover as white also disregards any differential experience based on racialization. Those Europeans who are racialized as non-white—as children of guestworker or postcolonial immigrants, refugees and so on—are simply disregarded from the outset, as they fall under the category of "ethnic minority" but not under that of "European". Thus, by avoiding categorizing them as "migrants", and by disregarding the diversity within the group of intra-EU movers, an image is created of this group as white and economically privileged; this then gives them the "dispensation of integration" [Schinkel 2018], since "integration", even on the urban level, is only demanded of those designated as "migrants".

This observation is confirmed when consulting the literature on networks of intra-EU movers. For mobile EU citizens, establishing a local network is another example that illustrates the human face of mobility; that is, that mobility is not as frictionless as sometimes stated, even for seemingly privileged movers.

In his study of British nationals living in Paris, Scott [2006] addresses social networks and the relevance of the national and language community. He shows, for example, that British families living in the Parisian suburbs are often part of a rather tightly knit British community, revolving around British associations or the British school. In contrast, those British nationals living in the city—who are more often younger and without children – are more invested in the city than their suburban counterparts, and often try to build local networks with French natives (not always successfully). Scott found that those most integrated into

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French networks were those in a mixed relationship with a French partner. The findings are corroborated by another study of British nationals in Paris and French nationals in London [Barwick and Le Galès 2021] that displays the difficulties faced by British nationals in terms of establishing a network with French locals, even for those with a French partner. In fact, the respondents found the French locals hard to deal with, which affected their satisfaction with life in the city. Their local networks can be described as marginal or isolated. Dubucs *et al.* [2017] observe how the networks of Italians in Paris become more "Italianized" over time for members of both the lower and the upper classes. While the authors attribute this finding to gendered and classed ways of networking, not to the closed networks of the French locals, this development clearly stands in contrast to traditional theories of social integration or acculturation which would predict the opposite, namely an increase over time of ties to local natives in the network.

In their study of French expatriate migrants in London, Ryan and Mulholland [2013; 2014] also addressed network formation. They highlight the importance of the accompanying spouse for the development of a local network. The authors describe the difficulties these women, who had usually given up paid work to take care of the children, faced in fitting in to their new place of residence and building a local network. At the same time, their efforts to build a local network benefited their husbands, who otherwise would not have had any contacts outside work. While they succeeded in building a local network, that network was dominated by other French nationals, not local natives. For a different example, we can turn to British middle-class migrants in Berlin [Barwick 2022]. In contrast to the above-mentioned examples, they had integrated into the urban fabric, including through their social networks. While many respondents also reported difficulties establishing a local network, most eventually succeeded, having built a network with ties to local natives and other international migrants. Thus, the literature on European skilled migrants shows a variety of possible network patterns.

Scott [2006] and Barwick [2022] have drawn attention to the potential influence of the migration motive on local networks. They both find that EU movers whose primary reason for trading places is economic might not be so inclined to invest time in building networks with local natives, and might rather focus on making career-advancing contacts at work. Hence, they remain in predominantly expatriate circles, often with conationals. In contrast, those who move for lifestyle or partnership reasons are more motivated to also establish local ties—though not always with success.

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Compared to studies of local social connections of marginalized "migrants" from non-EU countries, a review of articles on the same topic but concerning a different group of movers provides another glaring example of how different categorical frames are applied to similar research questions. While the studies on mobile EU citizens consider the class and nationality of the respective respondents, the categorical frame of ethnicity, which predominates the studies of those designated as migrants, is completely absent. As privileged migrants, mobile EU citizens are imagined as white, and so are their connections; their networks might not include "native" locals, but since they include other privileged migrants who are also imagined as white, their local social connections are never problematized. This absence of the ethnoracial in the framing of local networks serves as another example of how whiteness is always "discursively active" but remains invisible [Shaw 2007: 190]. Despite the variety of microcosms in cities that privileged migrants such as mobile EU citizens might integrate into, most studies reproduce an image of the white city, where "diversity" becomes merely a context in which the studies are set.

In the following discussion section, I reflect on how academic knowledge production contributes to an image of white urban Europe, as highlighted by the reflexive reading of the two strands of literature. I thereby focus on the use of categories and their effects, and on how the studies reproduce ideas of (im)mobility and sedentariness.

Discussion

The reflexive reading of the studies on urban integration has foregrounded how only certain groups of newcomers to the city, particularly those who are marginalized and racialized, are categorized as "migrants", and how this categorization carries with itself a certain set of research questions, theories, and categorical frames of analysis. While critics of integration research on the national level propose the urban scale as a more promising site for integration research, the comparison of the two strands of literature on urban integration has shown how "integration" is only demanded of those urbanites who are designated as migrants (a category that is often used for those born in the country but who are considered part of an "ethnic minority"). Moreover, despite the urban diversity and variety of microcosms one might integrate into in the city, integration for "migrants" still means moving closer to whites/whiteness

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—not only geographically, but also socially, as expressed through contacts/networks. If integration means moving toward whiteness, it comes as no surprise that the urban practices of migrants who are considered white, such as mobile EU movers, are not analyzed in terms of their integration. Given that the urban space should provide the potential to move beyond commonly voiced criticisms of integration research, such as those that point to its ethnonational focus or homogenization of groups, research so far falls short of these potentials.

The politics of mobility, which impact on who can feel at home in which spaces [Ahmed 2007], clearly plays out along racial lines, as the comparison of studies on urban integration has shown. Bodies read as white can not only move across national borders with relative ease (at least in the EU context), but also within and across urban spaces. Their patterns of housing and neighborhood choice and their local social connections are rarely problematized, but rather viewed as an example of the human face of mobility, that is, the challenges inherent in crossing borders and starting a new (temporary) life elsewhere. In contrast, migrants—a category that is primarily used to refer to marginalized and racialized people from non-EU countries[5]—are supposed to integrate, that is, to move closer to white spaces, while at the same time it is amply clear that these spaces are not open to them, given the structural racism that pervades Western European societies and which persists even in diverse cities.

Comparing the different research questions asked and the categorical frames used, we thus observe a "racialization" of the discourse around urban integration [cf. Phillips 2010], in which the imperative to integrate is addressed to non-white, marginalized, and stigmatized migrants. White spaces are privileged over diverse spaces and networks with members of the majority society are privileged over ties to people with the same ethnic background, while cosmopolitan ties are rarely researched in the first place. Mobile EU citizens, in contrast, are thought of "white subjects 'out of place'" [Lundström 2014: 1]; they are not captured by the imperative to integrate, hence their struggles in settling in a new place are viewed as resulting from the mobility/migration process itself, from a tight housing market that every urbanite must face, or different cultural codes. A "community" orientation, such as choosing a neighborhood based on its "home country" infrastructure or a network with mostly

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[5] However, there is a whole literature on the racialization and migrantization of EU citizens from Eastern Europe who move to Western Europe; see, for example, LEWICKI 2023 for a good overview and further references.

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conationals, is rarely problematized. If racialized subjects have a taste for diversity, it is interpreted as a sign of (unwanted) ethnic preference. In contrast, not problematizing the housing choices of skilled, mostly white, European migrants means that we not only miss their potential negative impacts—such as gentrification and displacement—on attractive neighborhoods, but also the needs these migrants might have and the inequalities they face even as privileged migrants [cf. Hadj Abdou 2019]. After all, mobile EU citizens are not the homogenous group they are often presented as, and the experiences of racialized mobile Europeans likely differ from those of those who are categorized as white [Benson and Lewis 2019; Kulz 2023].

Referring once more to Ahmed's thoughts on how certain bodies are able to or are expected to feel at home in certain places, the comparison also highlights how racialized and marginalized migrants are theoretically confined to their (often-stigmatized) neighborhoods, while the level of analysis for mobile EU citizens is usually the city, thus allowing them a much wider space in which to feel at home. This differing territorial focus of analysis extends assumptions or demands that associate immigrants with permanent settlement/immobility once they arrive at their destination, while associating continuous movement with the "expatriate", the mobile professional who is thought to be only visiting for a restricted period. The focus on the neighborhood, as a container, is particularly obvious in the research on local social connections. In the social mixing literature, just as in that on superdiversity and encounters, the place of residence is the prime location in which—based on the research—fleeting encounters and more durable ties are supposedly formed. However, a focus on the neighborhood discursively locks migrants into that space; it assumes that it is their home and hence the most relevant place in terms of studying their daily practices. The relation between place of residence and social connections (and access to other resources) is not a given [Barwick 2016; Blokland and Vief 2021], and disregards the daily mobility that migrants—just like other urbanites—engage in. A strong focus on the neighborhood reproduces images of sedentariness and immobility, instead of capturing the entirety of migrants' mobilities, which might also alter our understanding of residential and social integration of racialized and marginalized migrants in and across urban space(s).

So how can we move forward? Most importantly, we must not only *replace* whiteness in studies on urban integration [cf. Wright, Ellis and Parks 2005], but also *address* it for those newcomers who usually get a "dispensation of integration", because they are labeled as white and hence

not categorized as migrants. If we are to take the calls to de-migranticize or de-ethnicize migration research seriously [Dahinden 2016; Römhild 2017], we as scholars have to do a better job of analyzing the urban integration of all urbanites (or at least newcomers), taking into account various possibilities that the city with its variety of microcosms offers both for integration through housing and neighborhood choice, and through social connections. These two dimensions of urban integration are influenced by a variety of factors situated on the macro, the meso, and the micro levels. By privileging one explanation (e.g. ethnic preference) over another (class), and privileging white spaces over diverse spaces, we cannot do justice to the urban diversity and the multiple pathways of integration that we might actually find in the city, were we to cease limiting our analytical capacity by applying categories that already come with preconceived notions of who should integrate and what this integration should look like.

This paper has attempted a critical and reflexive reading of studies of urban integration of two different groups of mobile newcomers in Western European cities, highlighting how academic knowledge production on the topic has contributed to the image of a white urban Europe. As outlined at the beginning, only very specific studies were included; hence this exercise in critical reading could be expanded in many ways—for example by including different dimensions of urban integration, or by taking into account other geographical contexts, such as Southern Europe or Central and Eastern Europe—to further highlight how processes of racialization and whiteness play out in urban space and how they are addressed in academic knowledge production.

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