Minority Ethnic Segregation, Integration and Citizenship: A European Perspective
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Questions of minority ethnic settlement and integration have recently moved up the political and policy agenda across Europe. This paper re-examines the way in which minority ethnic housing segregation and integration are currently represented in political discourse across the European Union and reviews their implications for housing policy, inclusion and the social rights of citizenship. The paper draws on the RAXEN project reports of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia to provide a comparative investigation of housing segregation and integration across the 15 member-states of the European Union prior to its enlargement in 2004. The paper concludes that political discourses on ethnic segregation tend to accentuate the pathological characteristics of ethnic clustering, and to privilege explanations based on ethnicity and cultural difference at the expense of racialised inequalities in power and status. Such discourses are founded on a limited understanding of the link between ethnic segregation and integration.

Keywords: Housing; Integration; Segregation; Europe; Citizenship

Introduction

Minority ethnic settlement and integration have become more prominent questions on political and policy agendas across Europe in recent years. The ‘war on terror’, together with moral panics about threats to the economy, culture and ‘national security’ posed by immigrants and their descendants, have heightened anxieties about the inclusion of ‘outsiders’ in the nation-state and sharpened national discourses on citizenship rights, national belonging and inclusion. As questions of migrant integration have become increasingly politicised, we have seen a renewed commitment to policy approaches believed to promote ethnic desegregation, common...
values, stability and national unity. The consequences of settlement patterns for the wider integration of new and established migrant groups have long been debated in the policy arena. While some European countries have adopted a *laissez-faire* approach to social and spatial integration, others have a long history of directing the integration process at a national or regional level, particularly through settlement dispersal programmes.¹

This paper focuses on residential segregation and integration across the 15 member-states of the European Union (EU-15) prior to its enlargement in 2004. The discussion examines how minority ethnic integration is variously represented in political and policy discourses across the European Union and looks at its implications for housing policy, minority ethnic group social rights and inclusion. This cross-national comparison draws largely on an analysis of housing reports commissioned by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (now the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights) as part of its RAXEN Project, a full comparative overview for which see Harrison, Law and Phillips (2005).

**Defining and Measuring Integration**

The social integration of minority ethnic groups and new migrants is central to the European Commission’s agenda on social inclusion as embodied in its two Race Equality Directives (2000/43/EC and 2000/87/EC) and the development of ‘A Common Agenda for Integration’ (Commission of the European Communities 2005). Whilst primary responsibility for integration lies at the national and local levels, the Commission encourages a coherent approach to integration that will become integral to policy-making and implementation across member-states. It also acknowledges that housing conditions and settlement patterns are not only important indicators of integration, but that they also play a role in the broader process of social integration through their impact on community relations, neighbourhood stability and the well-being of minority ethnic groups (Spencer et al. 2006).

The term ‘integration’ is widely used in national political discourse and in policy statements relating to housing and settlement. Its meaning is, however, often unclear, and specific links between housing policies and the wider integration agenda can be weak. The academic literature has emphasised both the contested nature of the concept and the complexity inherent in the different socio-economic, legal, political and cultural dimensions of the integration process (Castles et al. 2002; Entzinger and Biezeveld 2003; Korac 2003). Politicians and policy-makers, however, rarely define what they mean by ‘integration’ and, in practice, it can have multiple meanings. As Isin (2007) finds, the idea of ‘social integration’, in particular, incorporates some troubling questions; for example, how easily can minority ethnic groups, that have been represented as ‘outsiders’ in dominant political discourses, be integrated into the mainstream society through social mixing or other means? Muslim minorities, who have been widely depicted as ‘alien others’ in Western European societies, most
obviously fall into this category (Alexander 2002; EUMC 2006). Also, why is it that questions of integration tend to focus on religious or cultural differences, or socially constructed ideas of ‘race’, when other groups (such as class and identity groups) are also socially and spatially separated and often marginalised?

There is great ambiguity in the way the terms ‘integration’ and ‘inclusion’ are used across the EU-15 member-states. The European Commission, in defining the ‘Common Basic Principles’ enshrined in A Common Agenda for Integration, conceptualises integration as a two-way process, whereby minority groups and the majority population participate in the process of change on an equal footing. However, as is explored below, politicians and policy-makers may conflate the notions of integration and assimilation, the latter term being more commonly associated with a one-way process of minority ethnic acculturation and spatial dispersal. Although the desirability of integration as a two-way process may be publicly acknowledged, the expectation is that most of the adaptation will be undertaken by the minority ethnic population. Persistent ethnic segregation, for example, is often blamed on the failure of minority ethnic groups to adapt to the host country and to mix with people outside their own community. Policies aimed at promoting social mixing at the neighbourhood level, however, often underestimate the power of ‘white flight’ and other majority group strategies (e.g. harassment and avoidance) to perpetuate ethnic segregation (Harrison, Phillips et al. 2005).

Confusion over the precise goals of social ‘integration’ is reflected in, and compounded by, an absence of agreed criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of social interventions. This means that policies can be characterised by ambiguities and contradictions. In France, for example, the goal of achieving a good ‘social mix’ is widely mentioned in legislation and in policy statements but, as the authors of the RAXEN report for France indicate, ‘nowhere is it defined’ (NFP France 2003: 28). Similarly, in Belgium there has been a protracted public debate over the virtue of policies that support minority ethnic clustering versus those promoting greater social mixing in neighbourhoods, but there are no agreed criteria for measuring successful outcomes (NFP Belgium 2003: 29).

Discussions of minority ethnic group integration into the housing market tend to be more focused than those on ‘social’ integration. Housing integration is generally understood by politicians, policy-makers and academics in terms of minorities’ ability to gain access to good-quality, safe, affordable accommodation and neighbourhood support services (Bloch 2002; Harrison and Phillips 2003; Robinson et al. 2003). It also has embedded within it, either implicitly or explicitly, the goal of residential mixing between ethnic groups. However, there are still disagreements and uncertainties, within as well as between countries, over how progress towards successful housing integration might be measured. In the UK, for example, the Home Office (2004) has published indicators of refugee housing integration, which focus on tenure characteristics and security, residence in deprived localities, levels of homelessness and the reported housing satisfaction of refugees (Phillips 2006a). These benchmarks, however, provide no adequate measure of housing quality. A reliance on
‘reported satisfaction’ is not particularly helpful, since low expectations and lack of alternatives may encourage migrants to say that they are satisfied with unsuitable accommodation. A report on ‘immigrant integration’ for the European Commission also offers measures of housing integration, but this simply refers to the need to monitor housing quality, patterns of segregation, housing choice and tenure, with little guidance on how to benchmark each criteria (Entzinger and Biezeveld 2003: 32–3). This report also implies that housing segregation is inherently undesirable and should be tackled as part of housing policy. The link between residential segregation and integration is, however, unclear. Minority ethnic segregation, particularly in poorer areas, may well be a sign of social exclusion and discrimination, but it may equally reflect informed choices related to a sense of identity and belonging to a particular neighbourhood or group (Phillips 2006b).

### Discourses on Integration across the European Union

Discourses on housing integration and settlement, as well as policy approaches to minority ethnic inclusion, differ significantly across the 15 EU member-states. Different interpretations of integration reflect the countries’ varied histories of immigration (and emigration), political discourses on immigration, the social, civil and political rights of citizenship, minority ethnic obligations, and varied entitlements in relation to housing, welfare and work. This is manifest in the different levels of state control over the migrant settlement process and strategies for inclusion, which give rise to a range of interventions and varying degrees of housing-market choice for both settled and new migrants.

A country’s approach to the social and spatial integration of its newest citizens not only reflects, and has consequences for, the social rights of minority ethnic groups, but also has wider implications for their experience of citizenship in terms of a sense of belonging and national identity (Brubaker 1996; Heckmann and Schnapper 2003) and reflects what Castles et al. (2006) refer to as different citizenship regimes. As explored below, these range from the ‘exclusive’ (Germany and Austria restrict the political and social rights of migrants and their descendants, effectively casting them as ‘outsiders’) to the multiculturalist or pluralist regimes of Britain and the Netherlands, which have (at least in the past) recognised the rights of cultural minorities to maintain their difference, legitimised their claims for distinctive collective identities and sought to meet demands for culturally responsive public services, including housing.

Cross-national comparisons across the 15 member-states revealed three broad discourses on integration, each of which has different housing policy implications. First, most of the EU-15 frame ‘integration’ in terms of minority ethnic cultural assimilation and spatial dispersal; Denmark, Finland, Belgium, Austria, Germany, Italy, Spain and Greece fall into this category. Policies favour the minimisation of cultural difference through programmes of social orientation, and promote ethnic desegregation through housing integration, often at the expense of housing choice.
The Denmark report notes explicitly, for example, that the concept of integration is used as a synonym for assimilation (NFP Denmark 2003: 11), with references to the goal of avoiding ‘ghetto formation’. Political discourse in Denmark tends to equate residential segregation with a lack of minority integration, even though there is virtually no Danish research establishing this link. There is also little knowledge of the consequences of segregation for the people living in the so-called ‘segregated areas’. Germany also pursues a stringent de-segregationist policy, despite the fact that political and academic discourse here has failed to reach a consensus on its merits (NFP Germany 2003).

Second, integration has been constructed by the Netherlands, the UK and Ireland as a process of promoting minority ethnic inclusion whilst maintaining social diversity. Housing policy objectives include fostering good community relations, eliminating barriers to inclusion and responding to the different housing needs of a socially and culturally diverse population. The UK’s housing policy, for example, is influenced by its stated commitment to multiculturalism, which is grounded in the principle of balancing difference and equality in an inclusive society (Ratcliffe 2004). It thus, at least in principle, aims to respond to cultural diversity through its housing policy whilst widening minority ethnic housing choices (Harrison, Phillips et al. 2005). There are contradictions, however, between the state’s discourse on integration and its policy implementation. The housing sector’s race equality and cultural diversity agenda, for example, sits somewhat uneasily alongside a dispersal policy for asylum-seekers, settlement control for Gypsies and Travellers and the assimilationist and desegregationist overtones of debates about community cohesion in the wake of ethnic disturbances in some multi-ethnic cities in 2001. The contested meaning of integration in the UK policy context is also apparent in the dissension which surrounds attempts to define the point at which the integration process should begin (Phillips 2006a; Temple and Moran 2005). The government conceptualises integration in legal terms, and limits its policies to those who have been granted refugee status. In contrast, civil society organisations have long argued that integration should start at the point of arrival for people seeking asylum (Carter and El-Hassan 2003; ICAR 2004; Refugee Council 2004).

Finally some countries, such as France, see integration as a primarily class-based project, with little explicit reference to ethnicity. The republican discourse on mixing is grounded in a vision of assimilation, and ignores the racialised and religious divisions that structure everyday life for many French migrants. Portugal and Sweden also have a wide range of policies designed to tackle housing segregation, but these are mainly conceptualised in relation to socio-economic segregation (Andersson 2006; NFP Portugal 2003).

These different political constructions of integration underpin different policy interventions in the process of housing integration and settlement across the European Union, as explored in more detail below. These reflect the way in which different nation-states view their new citizens, in terms of both rights and responsibilities, and can serve to reinforce their experience of inclusion or exclusion.
The range of different policy approaches to minority ethnic integration and settlement highlights important differences between countries, and also points to some contradictions within them. Many Northern European countries, for example, have been moving towards granting increasing social rights for migrants (e.g. welfare benefits), yet they continue to exert stringent controls over immigration and new migrant settlement. We can also see a tendency towards a convergence of discourses on integration over time, with Sweden and the Netherlands, and arguably the UK, shifting from a tolerance of cultural diversity towards an assimilationist position. This reflects anxieties over the apparent failure of state-sponsored ‘multiculturalism’ to produce a harmonious and integrated society, a fear which has special resonance in the context of the war on terror (Lewis and Neal 2005).

Policy Approaches to Integration: Housing and Managed Settlement

Despite varying political discourses on minority ethnic integration, all EU-15 countries display a growing sensitivity to the challenges of social and spatial inclusion in an age of increasing international migration. Growing anxieties have been expressed over the implications of ethnic segregation for social cohesion and the housing conditions of minority ethnic groups. These concerns have given rise to a range of policies that seek to address integration through the managed settlement of new arrivals and the improvement of settled groups’ housing circumstances. Policy approaches to housing integration reflect the different conceptualisations of social integration discussed above, which are rooted in discourses on immigration, citizenship rights, diversity and belonging, and the varied welfare regimes of the different countries.

Managing the Settlement of New Migrants

New migrants generally find themselves in the most socially excluded and segregated housing positions, and may be particular targets of settlement and integration initiatives. The most obvious groups to fall into this category are asylum-seekers and refugees (Castles et al. 2006). Most countries have a planned settlement programme for asylum-seekers, which may extend to those granted status as refugees. These programmes generally present the migrant with few choices about where to settle and are designed to ‘control’ the entry of the newcomers into the receiving country, at both national and local levels.

The specific conditions associated with planned settlement and integration programmes for asylum-seekers and refugees vary across countries. In Austria for example, as in many other countries, welfare support for asylum-seekers and refugees is dependent upon their participation in a planned settlement programme. In the UK, asylum-seekers accepting government welfare and housing support are subject to a dispersal programme, designed to reduce the number of new migrants settling in London and the South East. They are, however, legally free to move elsewhere once
they have been granted refugee status (Phillips 2006a). This is not true of all countries. The Danish Integration Act (1998) not only dictates where refugees must settle in Denmark (using a quota system), but ensures that individuals remain in the same municipality for a three-year introduction programme (NFP Denmark 2003). Germany also employs strict quotas as part of its asylum-seeker integration and dispersal programme in pursuit of its policy of minority ethnic desegregation (NFP Germany 2003). Meanwhile, Finland’s Integration Act requires an immigrant to comply with an integration plan if he/she is to receive financial support in the form of an ‘integration allowance’ (NFP Finland 2003). Finnish municipalities are required to devise social programmes for new migrants alongside measures for dispersal. These integration programmes have, however, been criticised for being one-sided because immigrants face sanctions for lack of participation, whereas there are no penalties for authorities that fail to provide adequate housing support.

**Promoting Residential Integration**

Interventions designed to promote residential integration through improvements in minority ethnic groups’ housing conditions, neighbourhood experiences and levels of residential segregation vary considerably across the EU-15 countries. This reflects differences in citizenship and welfare regimes, tenure patterns, the significance of the social housing sector, and varied histories of non-discrimination legislation and housing regulation.

Differences in welfare regimes underpin the potential to deliver programmes aimed at improving housing conditions through social housing investment, housing benefits, the regulation of housing providers and the promotion of social mixing between ethnic groups. Following Esping-Andersen (1990), distinctions may be drawn between (1) the ‘social democratic’ countries of Scandinavia, with their high levels of social provision, de-commodification of housing and universal rights to welfare, (2) the ‘conservative-corporatist’ approaches of Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands and France, characterised by de-commodification but selective welfare provision, and (3) the liberal regimes of the UK and Ireland, where there is limited collective provision, increasing housing commodification, and the residualisation of social housing. We have to add to this typology the distinct position of the Southern European countries (Portugal, Spain and Italy), which have limited welfare provision and a heavier reliance on support through informal networks of the family, community and church. State-led interventions to promote residential integration there are limited.

The drive to tackle residential segregation through programmes fostering social mixing illustrates the diversity of approaches. At the one extreme, Sweden’s housing policy is driven by the aim of breaking down segregation and achieving social integration, although this is constructed in socio-economic rather than minority ethnic terms (NFP Sweden 2003). At the other extreme, Portugal makes little attempt to engineer social mixing (NFP Portugal 2003). In contrast, the integration of
migrants into the German housing market has been fostered by housing and urban development policies, a key goal of which has been to achieve desegregation. This has included locally imposed quotas for non-German households on many housing estates (NFP Germany 2003). In other countries, the goals may be less explicit, but are nevertheless clear in their intention. For example, in Finland, even though there is no official desegregation agenda, various government policy documents encourage ‘the even spatial distribution of refugees and immigrants in social housing’, so as to minimise segregation (NFP Finland 2003: 1). Denmark has also used social housing interventions to achieve greater social mixing.

There are questions to be asked over what might be an ‘appropriate’ level of social mixing. There may be different views on this at national and local levels of government within a country. In France, for example, blatant contradictions can arise between national policy and local practice. Recent legislation aims to integrate migrant workers by giving them rights of access to social housing, rather than housing them separately as in the past. However, problems can arise in the practical application of these rights when, for example, neighbourhoods with high concentrations of minority ethnic groups are subjected to ‘re-equalisation’ efforts ‘wherein requests for housing originating from foreigners and immigrants are rejected out of hand’ (NFP France 2003: 2).

Government intervention in the residential integration process may stall when people object to the prospect of greater ethnic mixing in their local area. This is clearly evident in the case of projects designed to integrate Gypsy/Traveller/Roma people (as discussed below), but cuts across all minority ethnic groupings. In France, for example, the power of local officials to subvert national efforts to promote social integration in the face of racialised differences is apparent. Case-law evidence points to the power of local mayors to influence the social mix and, in particular, the ‘whiteness’ of their towns, through the abuse of their pre-emptive right to purchase property. The French report recounts how, for example, the mayor of Maubeuge was ‘obsessed by what he calls the “demographics of his city”’ and so uses his ‘right to pre-emption’ to buy property whenever the potential buyer has an Arab name (NFP France 2003: 29). He also placed pressure on other owners not to sell to Arabs. A similar incident came to court after the mayor of Grenoble blocked a sale to a Turkish family because he felt that ‘the quota for the municipality has been filled long ago’ (NFP France 2003: 32). Although France’s republican discourse on integration has long proved resistant to the idea of acknowledging ethnic difference amongst its citizens, evidence of discrimination, exclusion and immigrant unrest in France’s banlieues in 2005 triggered a debate about the possibility of introducing ethnic monitoring for the purposes of documenting minority ethnic inequality in housing and other spheres.

Improving Housing Conditions

There is clear evidence that minority ethnic groups experience disproportionately high levels of housing disadvantage relative to the general population in all 15 EU
member-states (FRA 2007; Harrison, Law and Phillips 2005). The experiences of specific groups tend to vary between countries, but two minorities stand out as particularly disadvantaged: Muslim minorities and the Roma/travelling people.

Minority ethnic group housing disadvantage is often deeply rooted in poverty and lack of structural integration (e.g. education and employment). Civil society organisations across the EU-15 also point to the impact of direct and indirect discrimination in the housing market (and other spheres) on housing outcomes. For example, landlords in Spain and Austria were found to overtly discriminate against ‘non-EU foreigners’ in adverts for rental accommodation, and in Italy telephone testing highlighted discrimination against Nigerians, Albanians and Moroccans. Evidence of indirect discrimination in the allocation of social housing has been uncovered through the use of residence qualifications to exclude newcomers (e.g. in the Netherlands and Spain), points for citizenship (Italy and Spain) and the administration of waiting lists (Denmark).

The European Commission’s Race Equality Directives, which came into force in 2000, require member-states to legislate against racial discrimination in housing and other spheres and to establish a statutory body to assist victims of discrimination. However, by 2005, the European Court of Justice ruled that four countries (Germany, Luxembourg, Austria and Finland) had failed to satisfy the requirements of the Race Equality Directives. While there are now signs of convergence in the EU-15’s policy responses to discrimination and disadvantage, some significant differences in the scale and type of legislation and practice remain. At one end of the spectrum is the UK, with its complex regulatory environment. Here, central government intervention is supported by legal structures, private sector regulation and extensive monitoring and inspection of social housing performance. At the other end of the spectrum lie Greece and Luxembourg, where there is little regulation and no co-ordinated equal opportunities monitoring.

Many countries have elected to tackle minority ethnic segregation, housing deprivation and social integration through the renewal of poor areas that house disproportionate numbers of minority ethnic households. These interventions are not targeted at minority ethnic groups, nor specifically designed to meet their housing needs. The assumption is that urban renewal will help to relieve tensions between ethnic groups—which can be exacerbated by social and material deprivation—and to combat wider social exclusion. In some countries, this approach to integration constitutes just one facet of a more sophisticated policy, which may include planned settlement and dispersal policies (e.g. Denmark, the UK and France). In France, for example, integration strategies include schemes for tackling the physical and social deprivation associated with HLM neighbourhoods (Habitation à Loyer Modéré—Low-Rent Housing), where many of the poorest minority ethnic families live. The Netherlands has also pursued a policy of desegregation within its ‘Big City’ urban renewal programme (NFP Netherlands 2003). In other countries, renewal may be the only identifiable approach to minority ethnic integration. In Portugal, for example, where there is little planned social integration, shanty-town
re-housing programmes are the main ways of bringing benefits to minority ethnic groups through improved housing conditions. However, an evaluation of these programmes has cast doubts on their efficacy on the grounds that cultural and economic processes at the root of minority ethnic exclusion do not disappear with renewal (NFP Portugal 2003).

Excluded Citizens: The Gypsy/Traveller/Roma Population

While most integration policies work on the premise that ethnic mixing, through residential dispersal, brings improved community relations, this rarely holds for the Gypsy/Traveller/Roma population. In this case, the ‘appropriate’ solution appears to be one of minimal social and spatial mixing. The social rights of citizenship, in terms of access to basic housing amenities, also seem to be denied to many travelling people.

The Gypsy/Traveller/Roma people stand out as the most deprived and poorly treated group across the 15 member-states. Although their numbers and the size of their encampments vary, they consistently experience xenophobic attitudes from the public (and often from officials as well), and suffer from a combination of neglect in terms of housing provision and control in terms of settlement. This is reflected in their housing circumstances, which are typically highly segregated, deprived and excluded from mainstream society. Approaches to their integration range from continuing disregard for their welfare and potential for inclusion, to the encouragement of site provision (e.g. in the UK), to coercion to settle and assimilate.

The picture painted across the EU-15 countries differs in detail, but is bad everywhere. The housing circumstances of the Roma in Italy exemplify the extreme conditions faced by travelling people in the Southern European member-states (encampments in northern Europe are generally smaller than in Southern Europe, although the reactions to the Gypsy/Traveller/Roma are much the same). In Italy, a negative categorisation of Roma, together with the deeply rooted popular conviction that Roma are ‘nomads’ and do not want fixed homes, has found its way into Italian public policies towards this group for decades (NFP Italy 2003; Sigona 2005). Most regions and provinces have laws providing for ‘transit’ camps for Roma minorities, but these are located in remote, marginalised places. The encampments are described in the report as ‘ghettos, usually overcrowded’ and some have no electricity or drinkable water (NFP Italy 2003: 11). Reports on Greek Roma (NFP Greece 2003; Greek Helsinki Monitor 2006) also paint a very bleak picture of Roma encampments, which often have no access to sanitary facilities, waste disposal, sewage, water or electricity. Some are situated in or close to landfill sites or heavily polluting factories. Property-owners often either refuse to let accommodation to Roma or offer substandard dwellings at high prices.

Local hostilities and local people’s preferences for continuing separation rather than integration are widespread, and in Southern European countries there is some desire for the establishment of separate villages. Significantly, a review of the
conditions in Portugal notes the intersection of individual, institutional and political exclusion in sealing the continuing marginality of the Roma there:

We find direct discrimination of the type displayed by real estate or housing constructors; local population movements either against the placing of Roma families or striving to cast out these families from their neighbourhoods and villages; and political actions taken by local politicians taking advantage of negative feelings endorsed by local populations towards Roma (NFP Portugal 2003: 44–5).

In one village in northern Portugal, pressure from local inhabitants resulted in the mayor ordering the demolition of 33 Roma dwellings, and civil society organisations in Greece and Italy report similar campaigns of demolition. There are a number of initiatives in Portugal oriented towards addressing poverty and social exclusion in general, but few projects address the specific needs of the Roma people (NFP Portugal 2003: 76–8). There are, however, some exceptions, which stand out as examples of good practice. For example, the ‘Apelarte’ project in Lisbon targets young Roma inhabitants of a re-housing neighbourhood with the aim of promoting inter-cultural exchange through dance, cooking, visual arts, etc. The municipality of Moura, South Portugal, has targeted Roma living in shanty towns through the ‘New Routes’ project, which involves non-Roma as well as Roma people in an effort to promote social integration. Meanwhile, the municipalities of Aveiro and Pombal have mounted public exhibitions to promote understanding between Roma and non-Roma people.

Examples from Northern Europe also point to evidence of local hostility and state control. Whilst Ireland, with its long history of travelling people, has the most culturally sensitive policy on Gypsy/Traveller settlement and integration, this population is still highly marginalised here (NFP Ireland 2003). Meanwhile, the UK, whilst appearing to facilitate travelling through a network of site provision in the past, has tightened its controls on mobility over the last decade or so (Niner 2004). Germany’s response to its nomadic population is consistent with its general policy on minority ethnic settlement; it favours desegregation and dispersal. For example, following failed attempts to rehouse the Sinti people of Straubing, the municipality decided to disperse them across the city (NFP Germany 2003). The Finnish authorities have also been insensitive to the needs of their Roma population (Nordberg 2004). Finnish observers note that ‘the Roma are under severe threat from cultural prejudice and misconceptions, both on the part of their potential majority population neighbours, and the authorities that are responsible for securing their housing needs’ (NFP Finland 2003: 31).

Integrating the Other: Muslim Segregation and Integration

A cross-national perspective reveals a range of different political and housing-related policy approaches to minority ethnic segregation and integration. Many are nevertheless underpinned by an enthusiasm for minority ethnic desegregation and dispersal that rests on worries about social cohesion, the emergence of ‘parallel
societies’ and the potential for social unrest. In many EU-15 countries, high levels of Muslim segregation are of particular concern (EUMC 2006).

There have been a number of attempts to quantify the relationship between housing segregation and social integration, using a range of indicators (e.g. Musterd 2003, 2005; van Kempen and Özückren 1998), but there has been less qualitative research into the experiences associated with minority ethnic group segregation and the processes of integration. Recent work on the British Muslim population points to the importance of using a critical, grounded approach to understanding those everyday lived experiences (Hopkins 2008; Keith 2005; Phillips et al. 2007, 2008). In Britain, the global ‘war on terror’, together with anxieties about ‘home-grown’ terrorism following the London bombings in 2005, have prompted concerns about a perceived intensification of segregation amongst the Muslim ‘other’. British Muslims (most of whom are of South Asian origin) are commonly depicted as socially and spatially ‘isolationist’, leading ‘parallel lives’ to the rest of British society and a threat to community cohesion (Community Cohesion Review Team 2001). Minority ethnic segregation, or, more accurately, what is assumed to be ‘self-segregation’ by British Muslims, is believed to be fostering social divisions and fragmenting the nation.

The British political discourse on British Muslim ‘self-segregation’ has focused on, and promoted anxieties about, how best to integrate minorities who exhibit religious and cultural differences. At the same time, it has tended to downplay other forces for segregation, such as the power of economic and institutional constraints to shape minority ethnic housing and neighbourhood choices and opportunities for mixing. Qualitative research with British Muslim populations living in the northern English cities of Leeds (Phillips et al. 2007), Bradford (Phillips 2006b) and Rochdale and Oldham (Phillips et al. 2008) has cast doubt on the reality of ‘self-segregation’ and isolationism. What emerges more clearly is the importance of structural constraints on these groups’ social and spatial mobility, and the existence of bounded choices associated with fears (both real and imagined) of racist harassment. While clustering in community spaces, for social and cultural reasons, was found to be important for British Muslims, their segregation was reinforced by the perception that many neighbourhoods in these cities were out of bounds to them. Both Muslims and whites, for example, recognised the existence of ‘divided’ social-housing estates in these cities, a legacy of housing market segmentation derived in part from discriminatory housing management practices in the past (Karn and Phillips 1998; Ratcliffe et al. 2001). This racial coding of residential spaces presented a major barrier to social and spatial integration in these places.

The coding not only involves white withdrawal (flight) and the abandonment of particular ethnic spaces, but the active production and reproduction of ethnic segregation through institutional racism and racist harassment. Nevertheless, dominant political discourses in Britain, as in many of the EU-15 countries, tend to favour culturalist explanations, which point to the failure of minority ethnic groups to follow normative models of social and spatial integration. This perspective is closely linked to anxieties about the failure of multiculturalism to produce
common values and a sense of citizenship, a debate which resurfaced in the post-9/11 climate.

The discourse of British Muslim ‘self-segregation’ has brought calls for policy interventions to ‘break down’ minority ethnic segregation in Britain (Community Cohesion Panel 2004). The qualitative research in northern English cities indicates that some (usually younger) Muslim families would like to live in a more integrated neighbourhood. However, there are limits on where they are willing to settle given that some ‘white areas’ are perceived as unwelcoming. In policy terms, the findings from this and other research (e.g. Phillips and Unsworth 2002) point to the value of community development strategies that provide on-going support for new or emerging multi-ethnic clusters.

Conclusion

Political and policy discourses on ethnic segregation and integration across the 15 European member-states are infused with images of minority ethnic neighbourhoods as ‘problem areas’ deserving of policy attention. Interventions are often publicly justified in terms of high levels of social deprivation, poverty and exclusion, the presence of culturally exclusive populations that seem disinterested in integration, and the threat of civil disorder. Explicit parallels have been drawn with persistent racial segregation and ‘ghettoisation’ in the USA, with all its negative connotations. Less is said of the positive attributes of minority ethnic clustering and the social capital embedded within community areas.

The link between residential segregation and social integration, and its implications for equality, national identity and belonging, is unclear. It is not easy to ‘read off’ levels of social integration from the extent of ethnic residential segregation. Those living in a segregated neighbourhood may well mix with other ethnic groups in other spheres, e.g. work, education, socially etc. In addition, the role of the place of residence as an indicator of ethnic integration, sense of national identity and citizenship is changing. As authors such as Kaplan and Holloway (2001) and Kennett and Forrest (2006) have argued, national and transnational connections and postnational forms of citizenship may render the local neighbourhood relatively insignificant for some.

More significantly, although empirical studies of ethnic residential segregation have challenged the myth of ghetto formation in European cities (for example, Johnston et al. 2002; Peach 1996; Simpson and Peach 2009), there is little room for complacency about the continuing association between minority ethnic segregation and deprivation. The intensity and extent of ethnic segregation may be lower than in the USA, but it may be argued that there are similar processes at work that have implications for the marginalisation and exclusion of settled minority ethnic groups and newly arriving migrants (Goldberg 2000). The evidence collated across the EU-15 confirms the importance of housing discrimination, disadvantage and exclusion for new and settled minority ethnic groups across Europe, with Roma and travelling
people suffering particularly acute social and spatial marginalisation. Despite differences between countries, there are many similarities in the racist practices (direct and indirect) that occur in the allocation of social housing and in the private sector. Discrimination helps to sustain minority ethnic segregation in specific neighbourhoods, and there is minority ethnic exclusion from particular areas and types of housing, and even towns (as in France).

Comparative work indicates that, although the precise nature of national discourses on segregation and integration, and the policy interventions associated with these, are clearly dynamic, politicised and contextualised, most discourses tend to be racialised. This problematises minority ethnic (especially black and Muslim) segregation, but not the segregation of white people in the suburbs, public housing estates, or privileged and protected gated communities. Contrary to popular imaginings, the highest levels of ethnic segregation in multicultural cities usually occur in the higher-status white neighbourhoods, but this is simply viewed as normal. In addition, many countries seem to be struggling to come to terms with the European Commission’s Common Basic Principle that integration should be a two-way, rather than a one-way, process. In 2007, the Commission observed that:

A variety of measures are adopted in Member States to foster integration as a two-way process. However, to put this principle into practice in a meaningful way is a long term challenge requiring further efforts. Structural initiatives targeting the host population to reinforce its abilities to adjust to diversity are still under-represented in national strategies (Commission of the European Communities 2007: 8).

Much can be learnt from cross-national comparisons of countries’ approaches to minority ethnic housing, integration and settlement. However, good-quality, reliable data on race equality and discrimination are patchy, over time and across countries, and the question of integration remains under-researched and inadequately monitored. Data on religious (as opposed to ethnic) groups are particularly limited. This often leaves important gaps in our understanding of, for example, the housing circumstances and integration experiences of Muslim minorities living in European countries in the post-9/11 era. There is clearly a need to undertake further research on the strategies minority ethnic groups use to adapt and advance their housing careers, especially given the presumed link between social and spatial integration that underpins so many countries’ housing and settlement policies.

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Note

[1] The EUMC (now the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights) was established in 2000 to monitor racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism in the European Union member-states. National focal points in each member-state are commissioned to produce information and research on race equality policies, legislation and practice. Housing reports have been available for the 15 member-states since 2003, and can be viewed through their online database (http://fra.europa.eu/fra/index.php).

References


