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Measurement and Analysis of Segregation, Integration and Diversity: Editorial Introduction

Ludi Simpson and Ceri Peach

This editorial introduction briefly sets the context for the special issue and its constituent papers. It notes the origins of the debate in discourses of ‘parallel lives’ and ‘sleepwalking into segregation’ and highlights the inherently problematic nature both of the terminology and of attempts to measure segregation and integration. Key issues which arise from the papers which follow are highlighted.

Keywords: Segregation; Integration; Diversity; Multiculturism; Social Cohesion

Since 9/11, there has been a significant change in the discourse on the accommodation of British ethnic minority groups—from multiculturalism to social cohesion. Figuring large in this transformation has been the issue of ethnic concentrations and segregation. Sometimes this has been represented as the challenge of non-contacting parallel lives (Cantle 2001), sometimes as self-segregation, sometimes as increasing segregation (Poulsen 2005). However, the unspoken argument at the root of this change in public discourse seems to be that all ethnic concentrations undermine social cohesion. Recent work by the eminent Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam (2007) has added academic fuel to the fire. His uncomfortable finding is that the greater the ethnic diversity in an area, the less social trust there is.

Issues of diversity and complexity run through this JEMS themed collection of papers like the letters in a stick of rock. Aspinall’s paper illustrates the conflicting pressures on ethnic data collection between maintaining definitions (to allow comparability) and recognising granularity of identity, insisted upon by the
collectivities themselves. Mateos, Longley and Singleton’s paper extends the argument, by demonstrating that ethnic classifications are inherently unstable in both their upward aggregation and downward granulation. The results of ethnicity analysis may possess no validity independent of the ethnicity classes on which it is based. Consider, for example, the opacity of the ‘Indian’ category which dissolves into Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, Jain, Parsi, Christian and Buddhist religious categories and reconstitutes itself into cross-cutting ethno-religious, vernacular linguistic and caste components. Sabater and Simpson’s paper shows that changing census definitions are not the only factors that destabilise the reliability of ethnic census data. Differential rates of ethnic under-enumeration and changing local authority boundaries can result in mistaken conclusions. For example, between 1991 and 2001, Birmingham District’s total population showed a 2 per cent loss rather than the 1.7 per cent gain derived from the 1991–2001 direct comparison; the Caribbean population also shows a decrease rather than an increase. Fortunately, Sabater and Simpson make an important contribution by also presenting methods which can be used to resolve these issues. Adding to the complexity and diversity, as the period of settlement of the postwar British minority cohorts extend, ethnogenesis is taking place, not least through inter-marriage and cohabitation. Ethnic and religious mixed partnerships are the subject of David Voas’ paper. Issues of diversity are reflected in the latest changes in the choice of indices of unevenness. Peach’s paper notes that the switch in discourse from multiculturalism to social cohesion has prompted the addition of new diversity measures to the old standards of dissimilarity and isolation.

This collection of papers was ignited by a 2005 speech by Trevor Phillips, then Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality, who argued that Britain was sleepwalking toward American-style segregation (see Finney and Simpson 2009). Trevor Phillips’ claims were largely based on a paper given by Mike Poulsen at the Institute of British Geographers/Royal Geographical Society Annual Conference claiming that Leicester and Bradford were more segregated than Chicago and Miami (Poulsen 2005). His paper also claimed that ethnic minority segregation in Britain was increasing. Poulsen further argued that the whole index-based literature on segregation was misleading and did not measure segregation.

Such assertions have continued to be voiced but are flatly contradicted by several contributors to this special issue of JEMS, which is partly based on the conference ‘Segregation or Integration: What’s Going On?’ organised by Manchester University’s Population and Places research group in May 2007. Conflict of evidence has the beneficial effect of clarifying the key points which are at stake.

The issues of diversity, complexity, social cohesion and ethnic segregation are common to many countries of Western Europe. The Dutch literature is the most developed in this field and has the advantage of being integrated with the methodologies of the Anglo world. The paper by Musterd and Ostendorf in this special issue deals explicitly with the relationship between segregation and integration in the context of two opposing sides of the Netherlands debate. Musterd and Ostendorf conclude that the relationship between segregation and integration suffers
from too much political and too little scholarly attention. Politicians, they argue, focus too much on large-scale spatial social-engineering projects. The empirical evidence from their paper argues for more policy attention to be paid to education and to labour market access.

Segregation, as Peach observes in the opening paper, is a slippery concept. In everyday conversation it is used to mean ‘high segregation’ and is almost always employed with a pejorative meaning. In the academic literature, on the other hand, segregation is used in a more neutral way and is qualified by employing a range of values from low to moderate to high. Finney and Simpson’s paper, for example, challenges the persistent assumption that segregation is the result of divisive separation of ethnic groups. They also demonstrate that the increases in population of minority groups, in some of their areas of high concentration, are more the product of natural increase than immigration and ‘hunkering down’. Virinder Kalra and Nisha Kapoor add historical depth to this argument in their paper. They argue that attempts to promote desegregation of minorities as a way to improve their material standards have been replaced by a desire to remove concentrations to promote the removal of cultural differences. Nor does segregation always implicate an enforced situation. Irina Kudenko and Debbie Phillips’ paper on the Jewish population in Leeds illustrates the voluntary congregational association of Jewish people and refers to the recent growth of eruvim in British cities with a large Jewish population. *Eruvim* are areas demarcated by largely invisible wires suspended over poles designating areas of the town which can be regarded ritually as an extension of the home and within which work activities, prohibited outside the home on the sabbath, such as pushing a pram, or carrying money or keys, are allowed. Spatial concentration of a community is necessary for such provisions.

Fundamental to the understanding of segregation is measurement. How segregation is measured depends on what the measurer conceives segregation to be and what some measurers consider to be highly segregated is conceived by other measurers to be totally integrated (see the discussion in Peach’s paper).

It is our hope that this collection of papers helps to dispel the notion of a dangerous edge to current ethnic geographical patterns. The papers offer several challenges to current ‘knowledge’. First, the categories of ethnic origin which analysis displays as discrete turn out to have permeable boundaries. Through mixed unions some groups change and could dissolve, as in the case of the British Caribbeans (Voas), while the tendency of categories to proliferate (Aspinall) adds considerable uncertainty to analysis and interpretation (Mateos *et al*.). Second, immigration is not the main cause of minority population growth: it is, rather, the natural imbalance of births and deaths in young populations (Finney and Simpson). Third, current levels of segregation do not suggest severe separation, either by following established definitions of ghettos, or by comparison with the United States (Peach). Some highly clustered groups are diverse within themselves, such as the Jews in Leeds whose degrees of attachment vary in relation to changing external contexts (Kudenko and Phillips).
Studies of the nature of segregation suffer from a preoccupation with the current policy framework, which has shifted from equality and multiculturalism toward social integration and cultural compatibility (Kalra and Kapoor; Musterd and Ostendoorf). An additional handicap is the slippery nature of terminology relating to segregation and integration—terms more helpful in identifying a problem and a solution respectively than in measuring their extent. The adjective ‘segregated’ is applied both to a single area and to a system of areas. It may be measured by a variety of indices none of which provide a threshold to indicate how much segregation should be regarded as acceptable. Similarly, how much integration is needed to be acceptable? Most studies of segregation pathologise ethnic diversity by implicitly or explicitly suggesting that any degree of separation is problematic. When arbitrary thresholds have been set, areas can be stigmatised as ghettos in spite of having more ‘host’ residents than any minority group (Peach).

In short, the study of ethnic segregation is itself patterned by attitudes to ethnicity and difference. Several contributions to this collection clarify the measurement of ethnicity which will continue to be a thorny issue even as several European countries add it to measures of citizenship or migration status to indicate cultural differences that will be addressed by integrationist policies. The papers included here document several new approaches to measurement. The near-complete coverage of the population census and its general availability each ten years in Britain is a fundamentally rich resource, especially when its deficiencies are overcome (Sabater and Simpson). Between censuses, administrative sources include ethnicity and are increasingly available (Aspinall; Mateos et al.).

Note
[1] The full title of the conference was ‘Segregation or Integration: What’s Going On? Demography’s Contribution to Debates on Segregation, Diversity and Integration’, held at the University of Manchester, 16–18 May 2007. As guest-editors, we are grateful to David Owen for critical improving comments on the whole set of papers included in this special issue.

References