Myth 10: Immigrant integration has failed

Large-scale immigration and settlement of non-European immigrants in Europe, Britain and North America has coincided with increasing concerns about their perceived lack of integration. The perception is often that large sections of immigrant and minority populations have become trapped in situations of protracted unemployment, welfare dependency and segregation. Because of these problems, the second generation has found it difficult to escape disadvantage through study and work. In this way, disadvantage would be passed down through the generations. Particularly in Europe, a new political consensus has arisen that 'multicultural' policies – which encourage migrant groups to maintain their cultures – have prevented their integration.

Voicing these concerns, Chancellor Angela Merkel gave a speech in 2010 in which she declared: 'We are a country that brought guest workers to Germany from the early 1960s. And now they live with us. We have been kidding ourselves for a while. We said: "They won't stay. Eventually they will be gone." That's not the reality. And, of course, the approach to say: "Now let's do Multikulti here, live side by side and be happy about each other" – that approach has failed. Utterly failed!' In the wake of Merkel's speech, other European leaders, including David Cameron and Nicolas Sarkozy, hastened to publicly declare that multiculturalism had 'failed'.

The belief that immigrant integration has failed – or, at least, has severely lagged behind – has become an article of faith that has increasingly dominated public debates about immigration. This resonates with the fact that most people's concerns with immigration are not so much about economic impacts, but about social and

cultural consequences. More and more, cultural difference has become the linchpin to explain differences in the perceived failure – or success – of the integration of immigrant groups. This is linked to the idea that the cultures of recent immigrants are very different from – or incompatible with – Western secular values and democratic societies. In addition, governments' attempts to encourage integration are seen to be continuously thwarted by the 'chain migration' of lower-skilled family members from origin countries. In brief, current levels of immigration seem to exceed the absorption capacity of destination societies and exacerbate racial tensions while 'too much diversity' puts social cohesion under pressure.

In western Europe, Muslim immigrants and their descendants are often portrayed as a group that finds it particularly difficult to integrate, because the norms and values of conservative Islam are fundamentally incompatible with mainstream secular or 'Judeo-Christian' Western values. Perceived problems of educational underperformance, unemployment and crime among Afro-Caribbean immigrants in Europe, who are particularly numerous in Britain and the Netherlands, are also often cast in cultural terms.

In the US, older concerns that German, Irish, Italian, Polish, Jewish, Chinese and Japanese immigrants would imperil the American nation have given way to fears of the large-scale arrival and settlement of Mexicans and other Latin American immigrants. Echoing such fears, in 2004, the political scientist Samuel P. Huntington warned that 'the persistent inflow of Hispanic immigrants threatens to divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages', adding that unlike past immigrant groups, Mexicans and other Latinos 'have not assimilated into mainstream US culture … rejecting the Anglo-Protestant values that built the American dream' and that 'the United States ignores this challenge at its peril'. Among some white majority groups, Latino immigration has typically evoked concerns about social problems like drugs, crime and sexual harassment that migrants might bring, and about the growing use of the Spanish language in public spaces. Since 9/11, Muslim immigrants have also been looked upon with increasing suspicion in the US.

While working-class migrants of non-European ancestry have been singled out as difficult-to-integrate 'problem groups' on both sides of the Atlantic, other immigrants – and particularly those with ancestry from Asian countries such as China, South Korea and India – are often portrayed as 'model immigrants', supposedly because their cultures value thriftiness, education and hard work. On the other hand, anti-Asian racism has never entirely disappeared, and the Covid-19 pandemic saw a resurgence of racism against Chinese and other Asian immigrants.

However, even among observers who reject racist narratives and are more positive towards immigration, the apparent accumulation of problems such as unemployment, poverty and high-school dropout rates among marginalized working-class migrant communities has led to growing worries about the possible formation of new ethnic underclasses. Growing concerns about the problematic integration of immigrants has provoked a political backlash against multiculturalism and a renewed emphasis on the responsibility of migrants to adapt to host societies, learn the language and assimilate into mainstream culture.

How it really works

In the longer run, immigrant integration is a remarkable success

Has integration failed? And do the cultures or religions of certain groups stand in the way of their success? The short answer is no. It is easy to get mired in the problems of integration, discrimination and adaptation that many migrant groups encounter in the first decades after settlement. However, when we look at the longer term, these problems are generally transient, as the evidence shows that the vast majority of immigrants – including those from disadvantaged or entirely different cultural backgrounds – have been remarkably successful in 'pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps' within one or two generations through education and hard work. When looking at the performance of immigrants' children and grandchildren in terms of language, education, employment and income, progress

has been impressive. And this success has almost exclusively been the result of migrants' own efforts to overcome disadvantage and discrimination. There is also no evidence that incompatible cultural differences would generally stand in the way of the integration of so-called non-Western immigrants.

Language and education

The pattern of success is clearest if we look at language skills and education. As migrants' children grow up, they almost automatically adopt the language and local dialect and accent. The migrants themselves – the 'first generation' – often still use the native language at home and in their communities. They may struggle to learn a new language, particularly if they barely went to school in their origin countries. However, almost without exception, the second generation becomes fully fluent in the destination-country language, although they may still be partly or wholly bilingual. By the third generation, knowledge of the origin-country language is often rudimentary at best. For instance, research from the US shows that language integration is happening as rapidly as or faster than it did for the earlier waves of mainly European immigrants in the early twentieth century. In other words, Latino and Asian children in the US now often learn English faster than German or Italian kids did a century ago.

The children of lower-skilled migrants achieve much higher levels of education than their parents, although it can take two or three generations before they have fully caught up with majority populations. Among Mexican American men in the US, there is an increase in average education levels from around 9.5 years in the first to 12.7 in the second generation, approaching the average of 13.9 years for non-migrant white Americans. In Europe, too, the children of former Turkish and Moroccan guest workers in countries such as Germany, France, the Netherlands and Belgium have much higher education levels compared to their parents, as they move closer to the educational levels of white groups of non-immigrant origin.

Although a significant gap remains, this provides evidence for a remarkable intergenerational catch-up in education.

Lower-skilled migrant workers who were recruited to work in factories, mines, farms and domestic jobs in the post-Second World War decades often faced a huge disadvantage. Recruiters often deliberately selected workers with limited education, as they preferred hard workers who wouldn't complain or join trade unions. Given the fact that many first-generation migrant workers were illiterate or semi-literate, the progress by the second generation is all the more remarkable.

There remain substantial differences in academic performance across different origin groups. However, this largely reflects class rather than cultural differences. For example, the children of Chinese and Indian immigrants in the US and the UK, and of Iranian refugees in the Netherlands, tend to do particularly well at school. In fact, they often outperform native-born white children. However, this mainly reflects the high education levels of their parents. While much has been written about particular cultures or religions supposedly assigning high importance to education, studies have generally failed to find an independent ethnic or cultural effect on performance at school. In the UK, children of Black African immigrants have been found to outperform white children *and* children of Indian and other South Asian heritage, again reflecting the generally higher education of their parents. Such evidence defies the idea that there is a specific Muslim, Latino or other 'cultural' factor in explaining the below-average school performances of some migrant-origin groups. Once studies control for factors like the education and income of parents, they have generally failed to find a consistent, significant relationship between cultural, religious or national background and education outcomes, other than what can be attributed to disadvantage and discrimination. Class seems to trump all other explanations.

For instance, in the UK, second-generation minorities of Indian heritage outperform those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin as well as white British children. This is not because they are Indian, or

Hindu, or Sikh, but because of their class background. A substantial number of the Indian-heritage populations in Britain originate from middle-class communities of entrepreneurs and professionals in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Mauritius, and other parts of the former British Empire. They are often descendants of indentured workers and other migrants from Gujarat and the Punjab who came to these British colonies in the nineteenth century, and prospered as an administrative and entrepreneurial middle class between the local Africans and the British ruling class.

In the 1960s, many were expelled from Uganda as part of Idi Amin's anti-Asian racist campaign, and came as refugees to Britain. They had a significant class advantage compared to the lower-skilled workers who were recruited from regions such as Mirpur in Pakistan or Sylhet in Bangladesh to work in British factories and mines. Meanwhile Turkish, Moroccan, Algerian and Tunisian migrant workers in Europe, and Mexican and other Latino migrants in the US, were often from a rural background and had had little schooling on arrival.

It can hardly be surprising that the children of, say, Indian and Chinese engineers have on average higher exam scores than the children of Mexican or Moroccan farm workers. For the same reason, children of higher-skilled Egyptian, Ghanaian or Nigerian migrants in the UK tend to outperform white British kids. Lower-skilled migrants simply have a longer way to go – although for these groups, too, progress has been impressive. If anything, recent evidence from Britain suggests that, by the third generation, children of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin have started to reach education levels similar to those of white British children, providing further evidence of remarkable intergenerational educational progress.

With regard to Muslims, Islam is as diverse as any other major world religion, and most Muslims put high value on education for boys *and* girls. In fact, among the second and third generations in Europe, Muslim girls often outperform boys at secondary school and in higher education. This reflects a general trend in the Western world, with girls increasingly outperforming boys at school, but among

conservative communities in particular, schooling is also a socially acceptable way for girls to gain more independence. For that reason, education often has a strong emancipatory function for girls living in conservative, patriarchal migrant communities.

Discrimination in job hiring is real

While progress in terms of language and schooling has been generally impressive, access to stable jobs and professional careers has proved to be more difficult. While there is strong intergenerational improvement in jobs and income, migrants and their children still suffer significant disadvantages. Prejudice and discrimination often stand in the way of securing apprenticeships or invitations for job interviews. This is a common cause of frustration, and sometimes disillusion, anger and alienation, particularly among the second generation.

Racist discrimination remains a huge obstacle towards labour market integration. One study by Swiss sociologists Eva Zschirnt and Didier Ruedin reviewed forty-three scientific studies conducted between 1990 and 2015 among twenty migrant-origin groups in eighteen Western countries. They found that discrimination in hiring decisions was still widespread in both North America and Europe. On average, equally qualified minority candidates needed to write around 50 per cent more application letters to be invited for a job interview compared to white majority groups. Discrimination was highest among applicants of Arab or Middle Eastern origin – who had to write twice as many letters – followed by applicants of South Asian and Chinese origin.—

A major international research project led by Dutch sociologist Bram Lancee analysed the job application experiences of members of fifty-three different migrant-origin groups in the US, the UK, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands and Norway. Lancee and his colleagues sent out 19,181 fictitious applications to online vacancies. They used random differences in the application packages about country of origin, language abilities, religion and (in countries where it is common to include photographs in applications) physical

appearance, to assess how often employers would react and express interest in their application. The study found robust evidence of discrimination – on average, immigrant-origin groups had to send 40 per cent more applications compared to majority populations to receive a callback.

The more 'different' immigrant-origin groups were in terms of social and cultural background, the more they were discriminated against. This particularly applied to applicants from African or Middle Eastern origin, with Muslims facing the most discrimination. Yet Lancee and his colleagues found large differences across countries: similar groups were not treated the same in different places. For instance, Moroccan-and Turkish-origin minorities faced higher discrimination levels in the Netherlands, Norway and the UK than they did in Germany and Spain. The same study found that Latinos faced substantial discrimination in the US labour market, while discrimination against Latin Americans in Spain was rather low. Possible explanations are that, in Spain, Latin American immigrants are seen as linguistically, religiously and culturally closer. However, Latin American men and women were treated quite differently in both countries. In the US, Latino men experienced intense discrimination practices, but Latino women didn't. This is presumably linked to the enduring stigmatization of Latino men in the US. In Spain, the patterns were opposite, with Latino women being the main target of discrimination, while Latino men experienced little prejudice.

Lancee and his colleagues therefore concluded that national variations in stereotypes and prejudice, rather than cultural or religious traits of migrant groups themselves, mainly explain differences in discrimination. They also found differences in the general level of discrimination across countries, with Germany and particularly Spain having relatively low levels of job market discrimination. In line with this, another analysis of job hiring discrimination in nine countries in Europe and North America identified substantial differences in discrimination levels on the national level: it found that France had the highest discrimination rates, followed by Sweden, with white applicants receiving nearly

twice as many callbacks as non-whites with similar qualifications. In Britain, the US, Canada, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway and Germany, discrimination rates were lower, with white applicants receiving about a quarter more calls.

Migrants pull themselves up by their own bootstraps

Despite solid evidence of prejudice and discrimination towards particular migrant and minority groups, the overall long-term picture is still one of remarkable success. The evidence of studies and reports that have been written about immigrant integration defy doom-and-gloom narratives and show that, although it takes time, even the most disadvantaged migrant groups are able to succeed through hard work, entrepreneurship and community solidarity.

A major review of research evidence on immigrant integration by the US National Academy of Sciences (NAS) showed that the longer immigrant groups stay in America, the more economically integrated they become – regardless of whether they came from Mexico, Central America, Asia or from other countries. While recently arrived migrants generally earn less than native-born workers of similar skill levels, wages grow significantly with length of residency, although immigrants do not fully catch up with the native-born. Compared to their lower-skilled immigrant parents who mainly did manual jobs, second-and third-generation immigrants are generally able to access higher-level jobs. This pattern of upward intergenerational mobility is particularly steep for women.

A study on immigrant integration in America by the Center for American Progress shows that recent immigrants to America have largely followed in the footsteps of European immigrants of the past. On the whole, this also applies to groups seen as most at risk of 'failure', such as Latinos. Only 9.3 per cent of Latinos who recently arrived in the US owned homes in 1990, but that number had surged to 58 per cent by 2008; the rate of citizenship grew at a similarly fast rate, from below 10 per cent in 1990 to 56 per cent by 2008. Second-generation Latinos are more likely than their immigrant parents to have undergraduate degrees (21 per cent), higher-paying

occupations (32 per cent), live in households above the poverty line (92 per cent), and own homes (71 per cent). Despite this pattern of overall success, the relatively high incidence of poverty among a significant number of Latino groups may provide evidence of a pattern of what American sociologists have called 'segmented assimilation', marked by overall success but also the protracted exclusion and marginalization of a discriminated-against minority. This is also visible in higher school dropout rates among second-and third-generation Mexican Americans.

On the other side of the Atlantic, too, studies on immigrant integration from across western Europe show a pattern of long-term progress and remarkable intergenerational social mobility. The second generation have consistently higher employment and income levels compared to their parents. In the UK, for instance, migrant groups of Irish, Indian or Chinese background have employment situations as good as or better than white British groups. Other groups are worse off in terms of jobs and incomes, with a descending hierarchy of Black Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi, but the long-term pattern is unmistakably one of strong intergenerational success.

According to an analysis by the UK Office for National Statistics from 2019, the size of the ethnicity pay gap for those aged 30+ years is larger than for those aged 16–29 years. In fact, many immigrant-origin groups have not just caught up to but have surpassed the average earnings of white British groups. Median hourly pay among Black African, Indian and Arab-origin groups aged 16–29 is 13, 15 and 23 per cent more than among white Brits. Even disadvantaged migrant groups have caught up with remarkable speed. While Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups aged 30+ earn 16 and 23 per cent less than the median hourly pay for white Brits of the same age, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis aged 16–29 earn about the same median wages as white Brits of a similar age.

Likewise, in western Europe, the children and grandchildren of migrant workers who arrived in the 1960s and early 1970s from Turkey, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia – and in France, from Senegal

and Mali – have made huge progress in terms of income, work and housing despite the considerable disadvantage their parents faced as they were hit particularly hard by mass unemployment during the crisis years of the 1970s and 1980s. However, as in the US, there is evidence for concentrated problems of economic exclusion and protracted poverty and segregation among a relatively small but significant minority of groups that may have experienced 'downward assimilation' (see chapter 11).

The evidence also suggests that, generally, the labour market integration of immigrant groups seems to progress more slowly in north-western European countries as compared to the UK and North America, which is presumably related to their more flexible and open labour markets.This is visible in the high gap in unemployment levels between foreign-and native-born in countries such as Sweden, Norway, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany. However, problems should not blind us to the fact that, in general, by the second generation even the most disadvantaged groups have dramatically improved their labour market position in line with their much higher educational levels.

So while the struggles of first-generation migrant workers and refugees frequently give rise to concerns about their supposed 'unassimilability', the picture has usually changed fundamentally by the second and third generations. This general pattern of long-term integration is also visible in signs of socio-cultural integration, such as increased mixed marriages and the rapid adoption of destination-country norms about family size and the number of children. In all EU (and other OECD) countries, over 80 per cent of immigrants report feeling close or very close to their host country.

Another integration indicator is the names that parents give to their children. In France, for instance, only 23 per cent of the grandchildren of immigrants from Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia have typically 'Muslim' first names – as against 90 per cent for the first generation. While the most popular names among first-generation immigrants are Mohamed, Ahmed for men and Fatima and Fatiha for women, by the

third generation this has changed to the culturally more ambiguous names Yanis and Nicolas for boys and Sarah and Inès for girls.

Access to work and entrepreneurship is key to success

Assimilation and integration are processes that ‘happen’ largely independently of whatever official integration ideologies governments adhere to. Traditional immigration countries like the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have never had much of an official integration policy. They have always adopted a more laissez-faire approach, where immigrants are expected to climb the ladder through education and work. Until the 1970s, West European countries never had official integration policies either, and despite this, past migrants to European countries (such as the Irish in Britain, Polish in Germany, Italians in France and Dutch Indonesians in the Netherlands) – have also fared remarkably well, despite the initial hostility and prejudice they encountered.

So, past and present experiences give reason for considerable optimism about the long-term prospects of integration, as it is something that migrants largely do on their own account, through their own willpower and their own determination to work hard to build a better life for themselves and their children. As we will see in the next chapter, it only seems to go wrong when systematic discrimination, intergenerational disadvantage and government neglect of problems excludes minorities (whether migrant or native-born) from education, jobs and opportunities, and condemns them to go to segregated schools and live in segregated areas that become poverty traps.

Sceptically, one might therefore ask whether official integration policies matter that much at all. Given the many bookshelves that academics and pundits have filled about such policies, and the heated debates – particularly in Europe – around integration and the supposed failure of multiculturalism, it is stunning how few studies have attempted to actually measure the effectiveness of integration policies, and those that have done so using appropriate methodologies found that the effects were generally really small.[32]

Much more than official ideologies, what really seem to matter are bread-and-butter issues such as migrants' access to education, work and housing. Targeted employment, anti-discrimination and education policies can have positive effects, particularly for unemployed migrants with low levels of education or refugees with traumatic experiences, provided that governments offer facilities and resources that enable migrants and refugees to learn the language and get an education.

In many ways, the best integration policy is to make sure migrants can get jobs or can easily start a business, as work remains the single most important avenue towards emancipation, language acquisition and integration. Access to schooling and work is determined by general policies that have little to do with specific integration policies. For instance, Germany's effective system that combines vocational education with apprenticeships seems a factor in explaining why Turkish Germans have higher employment rates than Turkish Dutch.

With regard to economic integration, laissez-faire approaches seem to work remarkably well, as long as governments try to combat racism and remove obstacles so that migrants can participate through work and entrepreneurship. This partly explains why immigrants tend to fare so well in 'Anglo-Saxon' countries such as the US and the UK, as their labour markets tend to be more open and their legislation gives more room for entrepreneurship. In the 1990s and 2000s, a number of Somali refugees who were unemployed and living on benefits in the Netherlands moved to the UK because it was easier to start small enterprises like grocery shops. The Dutch government learned their lesson and relaxed the requirements for starting a business in the 1990s, and since then, the number of Turkish and Moroccan grocers, butchers, bakers, kebab joints and sandwich shops has mushroomed.

The worst policies seem to be those that discourage or prohibit migrants and refugees from working. Nothing seems more detrimental for the well-being *and* economic contribution of migrants and refugees than to force them to remain in legal limbo zones for

years because of administrative backlogs and appeals procedures. This leaves them unable to work, increasing trauma and isolation and often pushing them into welfare dependency.

In her research, the Iranian-Dutch sociologist Halleh Ghorashi, professor at the VU University in Amsterdam, has compared the situation of Iranian refugee women in the Netherlands and the United States. She found that the restrictive refugee policies and dominant political discourse in the Netherlands, which treats refugees like temporary sojourners, discourages initiative and pushes them into welfare dependency, reinforcing the prevalent image of refugees as a 'problem group' in Dutch society. By comparison, Iranian refugee women living in the US felt accepted as permanent residents and fared better in terms of work, well-being and overall spirit.

Citizenship is the best integration policy

The evidence shows that official 'integration policies' don't make that much difference. Yet there seems one major exception to this rule: citizenship policies. The Dutch political scientist Maarten Vink has done extensive research on the impact of citizenship rules on integration. His evidence is unequivocal: the sooner immigrants and refugees get access to permanent residency and full citizenship, the safer they feel about their ability to stay, the more motivated they are to invest in a better future. The more migrants identify with their new nation, the better integration outcomes are. Vink's analyses show that access to citizenship is beneficial for the economic integration of immigrants, as it leads to increased labour market access and higher earnings.

One of the studies led by Vink followed the employment and income of 74,500 migrants living in the Netherlands between 1999 and 2011. It found that naturalization gives a major boost in earnings, particularly among migrants who were unemployed or born in low-income countries. Interestingly, the biggest average rise in earnings occurred in the years *leading up* to naturalization. This shows that the mere prospect of gaining access to citizenship motivates migrants to invest in their education and skills. If migrants feel certain that they

can stay – and that they will not be deported one day – it gives them the reassurance to invest in their new life in their new home country.

The offering of clear pathways to citizenship is the most concrete gesture through which governments can show that they are genuinely willing to accept migrants and refugees as full and equal members of destination societies. It is by far the best governments can do in terms of encouraging integration. In other words, as long as governments allow migrants to work, protect their rights and provide pathways to permanent residence and citizenship, migrants do most of the integration on their own. All of this resonates with a central insight emerging from a century of research on immigrant integration: to a considerable degree, migration and integration are *autonomous social processes* that will happen anyway, largely irrespective of political rhetoric or of what politicians do (or don't do).

However, this evidence also highlights the dangers of letting migrants wait for too long with an undocumented status or in other legal limbo zones. This is why the inability of the political establishment to provide pathways to legal status for large undocumented migrant populations (in the US and elsewhere) comes with the huge risk of the formation of a structurally disadvantaged underclass.

'Apartheid lite'

What to make, then, of all the 'fuss' about integration and multiculturalism? In western Europe, politicians have been preoccupied with integration policies for decades – particularly in the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Scandinavia. This issue has been the source of heated debate ever since the 1980s, pitting those in favour of multicultural policies that encourage minorities to foster their own identity and culture, against those stressing the need and responsibility of immigrants to 'fit in' and adapt.

The point is that this has always been primarily an ideological debate – more about 'us' than about 'them', and about what to make of the ways immigration challenges how societies see and define themselves. Immigration has always been an emotional topic,

because it is in many ways the most concrete manifestation of the ways in which societies and the world are changing. Immigrants are the literal embodiment of that change – and if it happens quickly, it almost inevitably creates resistance among some native-born groups, at least initially. This is because immigration seems to challenge not only established ways of living, but also the identity of destination societies.

As we saw in chapter 4, this also applies to nations that have immigration in their DNA, such as the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, as their nationhood was initially imagined to be (1) white, (2) Protestant, (3) north-west European and preferably (4) English-speaking. Therefore, the immigration of Catholic, Jewish, Latino and Caribbean groups was seen as a challenge and a threat to the nation. Native Americans in the United States, First Nations in Canada, Aboriginal people in Australia and Māori in New Zealand have lived much longer in these lands, but were for a long time not recognized as full citizens or full members of the nation – and they may, in fact, resist inclusion in the nation as defined by their invaders.

Although having lived in America longer than most white immigrants, African Americans only achieved full and equal citizenship rights in 1963, and their centuries-old struggle for emancipation generated violent reactions among those who had always imagined the 'true' American to be white. And the same still applies to the Roma in Europe and numerous other racial, cultural and linguistic minorities around the world, who seek recognition of their identity as part of – or distinct from – the nation, as opposed to total assimilation into the dominant culture of the 'mainstream'.

So, integration is not about immigration per se, but about the genuine acceptance of the 'other' as full members of the nation. Racist ideologies have always served to deny non-majority groups that equal status and to give a moral justification to that denial. From this perspective, multiculturalism can perhaps best be seen as a (perhaps well-intended, but rather misplaced) attempt to deny the new reality of having become a de facto immigration country, effectively denying immigrants recognition as full and equal members of the nation by degrading them to 'minority' status.

Multiculturalism – in brief, the ideology or belief that it was a good thing if migrant groups maintain their language, religion and culture – was particularly adhered to by European governments who kept on denying that reality of permanent settlement for too long, in the false hope that migrants would one day go back to their origin countries, and they therefore failed to address the real problems of long-term unemployment, isolation and segregation that were becoming an increasingly pressing reality in the 1980s and 1990s. Overall, the tendency was to look the other way, and then to wake up one day and realize that immigrants were 'there to stay'.

In this respect, it is quite telling that leading politicians of countries like Germany and the Netherlands kept on recycling the 'we are not an immigration country' mantra far into the 1980s, in plain denial of realities on the ground, and that it took Germany until 1991 to reform its citizenship law to make it easier for non-ethnic Germans to become German. This also reflects the social reality that many north-west Europeans still have difficulty fully accepting the idea that a non-white person can be 'truly' German, Austrian, Dutch, Belgian, Swiss, Swedish, Danish, French or English. A typical, and quite disheartening, experience for non-white minorities in European countries, even if they were born there and speak the national language fluently, is to get asked: 'But tell me, where are you *really* from?'

What few people know in this context is that many of the policies typically known as 'multicultural' have their roots in government efforts to prepare guest workers as well as their children for an eventual return to their homeland. The idea was that, to prevent their assimilation and settlement, maintenance of their own identity, culture, language and religion should be encouraged. For instance, the subsidizing of own-language and own-culture classes for children of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants was initially geared to prevent their full integration, and hence to prepare them for their return to their 'home countries'. For similar reasons, governments subsidized cultural and religious organizations that had a strong origin-country focus. Such provisions continued well into the 1990s and 2000s, by

which time it had already become abundantly clear that migration was permanent.

As my first research job after graduating, in 1997 I worked for a think tank in Maastricht, the Netherlands, where I was involved in an EU-subsidized network which connected civil servants working on integration policies at local authorities across western Europe. While I was organizing meetings and writing background reports with typically ‘multicultural’ titles like ‘The Role of Self-Organisations of Migrants and Ethnic Minorities in the Local Authority’, it struck me that all participants involved, except for one Pakistan-born civil servant from Birmingham in the UK, were of non-migrant, white backgrounds, and that the whole tone of debate – and the type of research I had to do – set groups apart rather than considering them as (current or future) full members of European nations. One of the reports I wrote was about the *consultative* (instead of full) political participation of migrants and minorities in local authorities. However good the intentions undoubtedly were, and with all the politically correct lip-service paid to the principles of tolerance, equality and anti-racism, only now do I fully realize how misguided this was. Migrants were still, in essence, being treated like temporary sojourners.

So, the irony is that the policies later sold as ‘good for integration’ were actually designed to prevent just that! This also puts the term ‘tolerance’ in a different, more negative light, as an expression of a rather patronizing attitude that sets groups apart. For instance, the Dutch have often prided themselves on their historical tolerance towards ‘minorities’. But the attitude can also be read as: ‘We accept your presence, you can go your own way as long as you don’t bother us, but you will never be one of us.’ From that perspective, multiculturalism is a form of repressive tolerance, or ‘apartheid lite’.

In practice, the multicultural policies advocated by many West European governments often set migrant groups apart, as they clung on to guest worker illusions for too long and denied the reality of permanent settlement. ‘We asked for workers, we got people instead’, as the Swiss writer Max Frisch summarized the guest

worker conundrum back in 1967. In the meantime, the illusion of temporariness would do a lot of damage, as it prevented governments from effectively addressing the real problems of long-term unemployment, welfare dependency and segregation that hit migrant communities disproportionately hard in the 1970s and 1980s, decades marked by protracted economic recession and mass unemployment.

So, multicultural policies stimulated segregation under the guise of tolerance, and delayed rather than stimulated the integration of migrant groups. This only started to change in the 2000s, when the realities – and real problems – could no longer be denied, and European governments started to accept the new reality of having become de facto immigration countries. In this light, Merkel's 2010 statement that 'Multikulti has failed' can be seen as a sign of finally coming to terms with that reality.

Short-term challenges, long-term successes

The idea that integration has 'failed' is a myth based on a failure to see a consistent pattern of long-term success, and on a one-sided focus on particular groups where problems persist beyond the first and second generations. It is easy to be blinded by the social problems and interracial tensions that often accompany the large-scale settlement of new groups with different religions, customs and habits. However, if we look at the longer term, most groups have fared remarkably well.

Lower-skilled immigrants from rural areas have often found it difficult to adapt to modern city life in a different country. In hindsight, the integration of lower-skilled, semi-literate workers who were recruited from Mexico to work in the US, from Pakistan and Bangladesh to work in the UK, and from Turkey and North Africa to work in Europe was bound to be a challenge, not only because they were often treated like guest workers who were not expected to stay in the first place, but also because they were catapulted from traditional peasant communities straight into modern Western city life.

Their migration was not only the crossing of a border, but also a radical, socially disruptive and emotionally unsettling transition from rural to urban life. It is a huge emotional stretch to migrate from Mirpur in rural Pakistan to Manchester, Birmingham or Bradford; from the Rif and Atlas mountains of Morocco and Algeria to Paris, Brussels or Amsterdam; from Central Anatolia in Turkey to Berlin and Frankfurt; or from Oaxaca in Mexico to Los Angeles. It would have felt like time travel. Having been uprooted, and working long hours, it is only to be expected that, in their free time, these workers would retreat into the familiarity of their own community to find comfort, safety and dignity amid a strange, bewildering and sometimes hostile world they did not really know, that seemed to have little interest in them and that expected them to return.

With the passing of time and the growing-up of children, however, communities inevitably take root in destination societies. Despite the struggles, alienation and conflict that immigration often involves, in the longer run most migrant groups succeed in adapting and adjusting to their new home. Almost unnoticeably, a few generations down the line, ‘they’ become ‘us’, adopting the language, habits and customs of their new homeland. This is what happens when migrants settle and have children, and their children have children too.

Things can change fast. What seemed unimaginable yesterday is easily taken for granted today. In the UK, since 2019, the Johnson and Truss governments have included a record number of ministers of Asian and also African ancestry – a sea change from the nearly all-white cabinets of just over a decade ago. This culminated with the appointment of Rishi Sunak as prime minister in 2022. Perhaps even more significantly, during the Euro 2020 tournament, descendants of Caribbean and South Asian migrant workers of the post-Second World War decades were waving English flags in the streets of English cities and towns – an unimaginable scene just a few decades earlier, when some of the same streets saw turbulent race riots.

Of course, this doesn’t mean that racism is dead. Some would argue that the success stories of select groups of privileged migrants of a certain class background are not representative of the experiences of most migrant and minority groups and can actually

serve as a fig leaf to conceal problems of racism, discrimination and segregation. However, it would also be too harsh to deny that real progress has been made.

At the same time, there are clear differences in experiences across destination countries. Immigrants seem to have generally fared better in societies that accept the permanent nature of immigration, facilitate access to citizenship, and remove barriers to work and entrepreneurship – as compared to reluctant immigration countries that deny the permanency of settlement, discourage migrants and refugees from working and push them into welfare dependency. For too long, governments have made excuses for not taking responsibility for the people they allowed to settle, looking the other way and ignoring long-term unemployment and social isolation.

They become more like us than we become like them

Despite the short-term challenges, the pattern of long-term progress is undeniable. As majority populations get used to newcomers, this usually takes away fear, and may even encourage the adoption of some habits. The first step towards real integration is when majority populations not only adapt and appreciate the foods of migrants, but also start to consider them as their own. Chicken tikka masala has become as quintessentially British as fish and chips (although some say it was actually invented in Britain), burritos and tacos have become as American as apple pie and coleslaw, and kebab and döner have become as German as bratwurst and sauerkraut. This is emblematic of the immigrant experience: those who seemed unassimilable strangers not that long ago have become part and parcel of destination societies.

However, if we look at things from a distance, such changes are rather superficial. While destination societies may adopt certain elements of the new cultures migrants bring – such as food, music and dress – this impact is not as profound as we tend to think. In this context, the Princeton sociologist Alejandro Portes has argued that, although large-scale immigration to the US and western Europe may appear to have fundamentally transformed the 'sights and smells' of

cities, in reality these are ‘street-level’ changes. Immigration has, in fact, barely changed the deeper cultural, political and economic structures of destination societies.

Referring to the US, Portes argued that ‘the fundamental pillars of American society have remained unaltered’ – including the political and legal systems, the educational system, the dominance of English, and the basic values guiding social interactions. Although more and more individuals from non-white migrant-origin groups occupy high-ranking political positions, the systems themselves are essentially unaltered. Portes therefore questions the popular idea that immigration has fundamentally changed the American mainstream. For the same reasons, large-scale immigration seems to have left the fundamental pillars of European nations unchanged.

Although it is often said that integration is a two-way process, this cliché ignores the fact that immigrants have to make by far the biggest effort at adapting and fitting in. In other words, immigrants become more like us than we become like them.

In the same way that immigrant groups once considered unassimilable – such as Germans, Italians, Irish and Jews – are now fully considered as part of the ‘mainstream’, the evidence shows that most Latin American and Asian immigrants in the US, and Muslim, Caribbean and African immigrants in Europe, have become full members of destination societies. In fact, recent immigrant groups are assimilating at a similar – or even faster – pace to previous generations in terms of language, education and work, challenging popular claims that their cultures or religions stand in the way of integration. So, there’s a good chance that the perceived ‘problem groups’ of today will be replaced by the newcomers of tomorrow, and that the migrants of today will start to complain about new immigrants coming in – usually the best sign of successful integration, and that ‘they’ have become ‘us’.

Myth 11: Mass migration has produced mass segregation

‘Ghetto Britain: Entire districts segregated’, ‘Ghettos in English cities almost equal to Chicago’, ‘The powder keg of the suburbs’, ‘An American-style urban revolt’. Such headlines, featured in newspapers across Europe, resonate with broader fears that, with large-scale immigration, Europe has unintentionally imported American-style ‘ghettos’ onto its own soil. Although the integration of most immigrants has been rather successful, the experiences of some groups have proved less positive. Even though this is a ‘minority within a minority’, it is still a significant problem. Across north-west Europe, politicians, media and opinion-makers have expressed worries about racial and ethnic segregation hitherto unknown in Europe.

In the UK, riots broke out in 2001 between local white and South Asian communities in Oldham, Bradford, Leeds and Burnley, sparking widespread concerns about poverty, social isolation and segregation in northern industrial cities. In France, major riots starting in 2005 and 2007 among migrant youth equally awakened public attention to the long-term effects of immigration, and reinforced fears about ghettoization. These events resonated with images of long-term unemployment, poverty and crime among North and West African migrant youth living in the insalubrious high-rises of the *banlieues* – suburban housing estates built in the post-war period.

In Sweden in 2017, gang violence and violent clashes between immigrant youth and the police in the Stockholm suburb of Rinkeby made the international headlines. In 2018, the Danish government

adopted controversial laws with the aim of ‘abolish[ing] ghettoes by 2030’, including measures to evict migrant families from social housing blocks in low-status neighbourhoods to shake them out of self-isolation and life in ‘parallel societies’. Similarly, in 2022 the Swedish followed suit as it proposed a 50 per cent limit on concentrations of people with immigrant backgrounds in so-called ‘troubled areas’.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001 on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC sparked fears in America and Europe that home-bred terrorists of Muslim immigrant backgrounds might pose a security threat from within. In Britain, worries about segregation mounted in the wake of the 7/7 bombings on the London transit system in 2005. In 2015 and 2016, a new wave of attacks occurred in Paris, Brussels, Berlin, Manchester and London. When it came out that the Bataclan and Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris were perpetrated by young men who had grown up in the Brussels immigrant neighbourhood of Molenbeek, this increased concerns that such neighbourhoods had become breeding grounds for religious extremists.

Far-right nativist groups and proponents of the ‘great replacement’ conspiracy theory see all this as proof that immigration is a liberal plot to Islamize Europe and displace white voters. Most people understand that such radicalized youth only form a small fraction of immigrant-origin groups. However, these events did resonate with a more general feeling that, as the then chairman of the UK’s Commission for Racial Equality, Trevor Phillips, stated in the wake of the 7/7 bombings, Britain had been ‘sleepwalking [its] way to segregation’ by ignoring problems for too long.

In the US, concerns about segregation have always revolved around the historical Black–white divide rooted in centuries of slavery and racism, and this is still a problem in major US cities. However, the large-scale immigration of Latino workers has given rise to new concerns about the concentration of social problems, unemployment and violence in segregated neighbourhoods.

Media reporting and politicians' statements have given an impression that large-scale immigration has created permanent ethnic underclasses living parallel lives in segregated neighbourhoods marked by high unemployment, welfare dependency and poverty. It resonates with popular ideas that, as immigrants seem to cling on to their culture, language and religion, their increasing self-segregation obstructs integration, with closed immigrant communities becoming breeding grounds for social dysfunction, crime or religious fundamentalism.

How it really works

With some exceptions, segregation is not alarmingly high

As we have seen, the integration of the majority of migrants, including those of non-Western backgrounds, has been remarkably successful. However, optimistic averages about successful long-term integration conceal the fact that a significant minority of migrant-origin groups are clearly faring less well, as highlighted by high rates of school dropouts, unemployment and welfare dependency. We can also not deny that some immigrant neighbourhoods in Europe and America have become hotbeds of poverty and disadvantage. However, do such problems justify claims that, with large-scale immigration, segregation is on the rise?

The facts give reason to debunk such claims. First of all, levels of segregation among recent immigrant groups are generally not as high as many people think, and although there are real problems, they cannot be compared to historical Black–white segregation in the United States. Second, there is no evidence that ethnic and racial segregation is increasing, despite continued immigration.

Geographers have developed various ways of measuring residential segregation: the most used indicator is the segregation or dissimilarity index, which measures the distributions of population groups across residential areas of a city. The segregation index reaches a value of 100 when groups are totally segregated, and 0 when all neighbourhoods have exactly the same ethnic and racial

mix. Researchers consider values above 60 ‘high’, values below 30 ‘low’ and in-between values ‘moderate’.

Studies that have measured ethnic segregation vary in their findings, depending on the specific data and methods used, but they also show some consistent patterns. First, segregation in continental western Europe is generally lower than in the US, particularly when compared to Black–white segregation. In 1980 the segregation index for Asians (from whites) living in major US central cities was 41, for Latinos it was 52, but for African Americans it was a staggering 75. By 2010, the latter value had dropped to 60, while the segregation index for Asians and Latinos had remained rather stable at levels of 39 and 51 respectively.

Partly depending on urban planning and housing policies, segregation levels in Europe vary significantly across countries, cities and migrant groups. Contrary to the *banlieue* stereotype, French cities tend to have the lowest average segregation levels in Europe – for instance, 23 and 12 for Algerians and Portuguese in Paris, respectively. That does not mean that the problems in some *banlieues* are not real, but that the issues in some ‘problem neighbourhoods’ are not representative of the overall immigrant experience in France. Ethnic segregation is relatively low in Germany, with segregation levels for Turks in Düsseldorf and Frankfurt at 30 and 18. Most Dutch cities have moderate levels of segregation – around 40 – such as for Moroccans in Rotterdam and Amsterdam, and Turks in The Hague. Only for some groups in some European cities – such as Moroccans in Brussels, North Africans in Antwerp, and Iranians in Stockholm – does segregation reach ‘American’ levels, with values between 50 and 60.

Compared to continental Europe, levels of ethnic and racial segregation in the UK are higher, particularly among South Asian groups. This partly reflects generally higher levels of class segregation in the UK. As immigrant groups tend to be over-represented in low-income groups, class segregation tends to coincide with higher levels of racial and ethnic segregation. It is therefore no surprise that some of the highest segregation levels are

found among Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities in cities such as Birmingham, Bradford and Oldham. There, in the 1990s, segregation reached levels of between 60 and 80 – although levels in London were much lower. Black Caribbean and Indian-origin groups in the UK have similar segregation levels to most other immigrants in continental Europe. This reflects their earlier arrival, smaller group size, higher income levels and more dispersed initial settlement patterns compared to more community-focused Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups.

Not only is segregation in Europe generally not alarmingly high, but the evidence shows that since the 1990s, levels of racial segregation have actually decreased in most countries. This reflects broader trends of integration and upward mobility, as migrants and minorities climb the economic and housing ladders. All across western Europe, the large-scale arrival of migrant workers and their families from the 1950s and 1960s initially went hand in hand with a concentration of migrant groups in ethnic enclaves, where housing was affordable and they could count on help from fellow countrymen and -women.

However, these trends have reversed in recent decades, with overall levels of ethnic segregation in Europe declining. As immigrants and their children climb the economic ladder, they can increasingly afford to rent or buy houses in middle-income neighbourhoods, leading to increased racial mixing. In the UK between 1991 and 2001, for instance, the average segregation indices among Bangladeshis living in large urban areas went down from 69 to 61, for Pakistanis from 56 to 51, for Indian-origin groups from 42 to 40, and for Black Caribbean populations from 43 to 37. Since 2001, this trend towards increased residential mixing between white British and other ethnic groups has continued. This has also been the historical pattern in the United States, with immigrant groups initially clustering in typical immigrant neighbourhoods, before spreading out. For this reason, levels of residential segregation for Asians and Latinos have remained relatively stable despite continuing immigration.

Empowerment through community life

While there is evidence that levels of racial and ethnic segregation have decreased rather than increased, we must also question the assumption that the concentration of ethnic groups in particular areas is necessarily a bad thing. Urban geographers have made a useful distinction between the 'ghetto' and the 'ethnic enclave'. Ghettos are areas that are almost exclusively inhabited by one particular racial, ethnic or religious group; are the product of explicit discrimination and exclusion by majority groups, who refuse to have minorities live with them; and have become sites of multigenerational poverty – the archetypical examples being the Jewish ghetto in medieval Europe, African American urban segregation in the twentieth century, and the enduring situation of Romani people in Europe.

The typical immigrant neighbourhoods of Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand are ethnic enclaves: racially mixed areas, where groups concentrate together on a largely voluntary basis, and where such concentrations are generally a temporary, transient phenomenon. As long as it is largely a result of free choice to live together, rather than the result of discrimination and exclusion, the outcomes of ethnic clustering can actually be very positive.

First of all, the desire to live together emanates from a basic human desire to be to among people who speak the same language and who have similar lifestyles, customs and habits. Second, such clustering can in some ways advance integration, because community life can empower disadvantaged minorities. As immigrants and minorities are often confronted with exclusion and discrimination when trying to access good education, jobs and services, migrant community life has proved a vibrant 'emancipation machine', as it can enable them to overcome disadvantages and prejudice and achieve socioeconomic mobility through bonds of solidarity, self-help and entrepreneurship. The presence of large numbers of people with the same origin also provides an initial customer base for migrant businesses, and enables communities to establish schools, places of

worship, sports clubs, trade unions, newspapers and various other organizations.

Entrepreneurship has proved to be an important route towards the economic and social mobility of migrant and minority groups who are confronted with structural unemployment, discrimination and limited access to job markets. Typical examples of migrant businesses include grocery shops, bakers, kosher and halal butchers, barbershops, dry cleaners, tailors, beauty parlours, coffeehouses, bars and restaurants.

Although such 'ethnic businesses' may initially mainly cater for the needs of their own communities, later they often start to serve customers from majority groups as the latter learn to appreciate the growing diversity of affordable options for grocery shopping and exotic foods. Migrant entrepreneurs can enjoy the advantage of being able to rely on the labour of family members, who often feel obliged to contribute to the family business and are motivated by feelings of solidarity to 'make it together'. In the initial settlement phase of new immigrant communities, entrepreneurship allows families to obtain assets, save money, provide a good education for children and eventually achieve middle-class status. Such businesses also create additional jobs for local workers and are a major factor in attracting new migrants from the same origin country, thereby accelerating the growth of migrant communities and further expanding the customer base.

Once they have achieved middle-class status, and new generations have grown up, such groups typically rent or buy houses in middle-class areas and move out of immigrant neighbourhoods. This pattern of moving to higher-status areas is quite typical when we look at the settlement history of immigrant communities around the world. So, the initial clustering of migrants in particular neighbourhoods is no proof of 'ghettoization' – as media and politicians often claim.

Ethnic enclaves as emancipation machines

Ethnic enclaves can be veritable emancipation machines. Many working-class neighbourhoods in cities around the world have seen such a succession through the coming and going of new and old immigrant groups. The Lower East Side in New York City received successive waves of newly arrived immigrants – first Germans, then Italians and Jewish East Europeans, as well as Greeks, Hungarians, Poles, Romanians, Russians, Slovaks and Ukrainians. In a similar way, from the seventeenth century, the East End of London received successive immigration waves: Huguenot (Protestant) refugees fleeing repression by the French king between 1670 and 1710, Irish weavers from the early nineteenth century, Jews fleeing pogroms in Russia between 1875 and 1914, and Bangladeshi and Pakistani workers from the 1950s and 1960s.

The Jewish experience of social mobility in Britain is a classic example of migrant success. The first generation of refugees managed to escape discrimination and badly paid and insecure factory jobs by becoming small entrepreneurs in the ‘rag trade’ (clothing manufacturing) or the retail sector. Putting a strong emphasis on education for their children, many of the second generation were able to move into business or white-collar employment, paving the way for professional careers for the third generation. Bangladeshi people now live in the same areas of the East End, often working in the same sweatshops and worshipping in the same buildings. What is now Brick Lane Mosque was originally built in 1743 as a Protestant chapel for Huguenot refugees from France, then was converted into a synagogue for Jewish refugees from Russia and Central Europe in 1891, before it was turned into a mosque in 1976 after the arrival of Bangladeshi migrant workers from the Sylhet region in the Spitalfields and Brick Lane areas.

So, we come from a much more segregated past than we think, as we have forgotten about past groups living in ethnic enclaves who have moved out and seamlessly blended in. This constant moving-out of old migrant groups reflects their success in achieving higher education and income levels, and broader integration processes. In

other words, the arrival of new immigrants has been more than counterbalanced by the out-movement of long-term settlers. This largely explains why racial and ethnic segregation has *not* increased, despite continuing immigration.

Allusions to racial segregation in the United States are sensationalist

There are more reasons why the experiences of immigrant neighbourhoods, both in Europe and North America, cannot be compared to racially segregated neighbourhoods in America, where the nature and level of segregation is of an entirely different scale and nature. Black–white segregation in the US was caused by explicitly racist policies of assigning separate and vastly inferior forms of housing, education and services to Black populations, based on racist beliefs that Black and white people should not mix.

In their landmark study *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*, published in 1993, sociologists Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton showed how segregation didn't happen spontaneously, or because African Americans didn't want to mix with whites, or because they happened to concentrate in poorer neighbourhoods. Segregated African American neighbourhoods were *intentionally* created by white people during the first half of the twentieth century, to isolate the 6 million or so Black people who had moved from the rural South to the cities of the Northeast, Midwest and West as part of the Great Migration. Yet their hopes of emancipation were quickly dashed. Black workers were excluded from the unions of the American Federation of Labor, while city councils passed laws to create separate neighbourhoods for Black and white residents, effectively 'creating a formal apartheid system'.

Apart from violent attacks on Black people living in white areas, discrimination (in real estate and banking) was the most important institutional mechanism in achieving segregation. This happened particularly through racial redlining: lenders refusing to issue mortgages to borrowers living in Black or racially mixed neighbourhoods, as well as the denial of home insurance to Black

residents in the suburbs, and the building of public housing in segregated districts. These practices became part of official federal policies during the New Deal, between 1933 and 1939. As white Americans massively took advantage of federal lending programmes to buy new homes in burgeoning all-white suburbs where Black Americans weren't allowed to live, Black migrants coming in from the rural South moved into older homes in city centres. In the post-war decades, this led to extraordinarily high levels of segregation.

However, these problems only got really bad from the 1960s onwards, when the jobs that had attracted Black workers from the South started to disappear as industries closed down or moved out of the city centres. As the Chicago sociologist William Julius Wilson documented in his book *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*, this resulted in mass unemployment and rising poverty, as well as the departure of the rising Black middle classes to more affluent neighbourhoods, further depriving inner-city areas of community leaders and structures and exacerbating family dysfunction, high school-dropout rates, drug abuse and crime.

Europe lacks such a recent history of official, government-endorsed racial segregation. For this reason alone, the problems of immigrant neighbourhoods in Europe – as well as in America – can therefore not be compared to Black segregation in the US, which was near-total and explicitly government-endorsed. The French sociologist Loïc Wacquant conducted extensive research on segregated American neighbourhoods, and Chicago's South Side in particular. Based on his knowledge of both French and North American segregation, Wacquant has pointed out why sensationalist comparisons between the French working-class *banlieues* – and European immigrant neighbourhoods more generally – and Black-white segregation in the US don't make much sense.

First, segregated neighbourhoods in the US tend to be much bigger than the typical European immigrant neighbourhoods. Such neighbourhoods in Chicago, New York and Los Angeles have several hundreds of thousands of inhabitants and cover hundreds of square kilometres. The largest French *cités* never even reach one-tenth of

that size. Second, the *banlieues* are mainly residential areas, with many people going elsewhere on a daily basis for work or shopping, as they generally only have to walk a few streets to leave their neighbourhoods. By contrast, the American ‘ghetto’ is a largely self-contained place – or, in the words of Wacquant, a ‘black city within the city’, where many people have little, if any, contact with other races or classes.

Third, segregated neighbourhoods in America are largely mono-racial, with Black Americans forming the overwhelming majority. Typical *immigrant* neighbourhoods (in Europe and North America) are anything but uniform. Although some ethnicities may dominate, there is invariably a rich mosaic of ethnic, racial, religious and income groups – including white and middle-class – living next to one another.

Fourth, the scale and depth of problems of American segregated neighbourhoods are of an entirely different order than in Europe. Violence and crime in even the most notorious European immigrant neighbourhoods mostly concern theft, burglary, vandalism and the small-scale drugs trade, while armed robberies and lethal gun violence are actually quite rare.

It should be said, though, that the image of the American ‘ghetto’ has itself been sensationalized, based on harmful stereotypes that have been reinforced by popular media, racist politicians and prejudiced pundits. As the American geographer John Agnew has stressed, the usual focus on Chicago and a few other notorious examples reinforces a picture of ‘hyperghettoization’ which is not representative of the overall experience of (often more mixed patterns of) racial segregation in the US. America’s ugly history of segregation came to change the very meaning of the word ‘ghetto’. While it was originally associated with Jewish urban quarters in Europe and later also America, its connotation changed in the 1950s to conjure stereotypical images of run-down and crime-ridden African American segregated areas. Because of the racist connotations it accumulated, the term ‘ghetto’ is highly controversial, with many considering its usage slanderous and racist.

Finally, the overall quality of public infrastructure, streets and housing in lower-income neighbourhoods is incomparably better in most European cities, largely thanks to higher public investments in social housing and public infrastructure. In the US, the degradation of working-class inner-city neighbourhoods was reinforced by a sharp decline in federal funding devoted to social housing. The subsidized public housing 'projects' of the post-Second World War era were of such bad quality, and so poorly managed and underfunded, that they quickly became 'last resort' poverty traps.

As we saw in chapter 9, social housing in Europe has also been partly privatized, but the overall size and quality of the social housing stock are much higher than in the US and still considered to be 'respectable'. They look better, are generally safe places for families to live, and have facilities such as playgrounds, parks, schools, commercial areas, public libraries and public transport. Still, in Europe the neglect and defunding of social housing together with growing inequality has created worrying forms of protracted segregation in particular neighbourhoods.

From social housing to social dumping

On 14 June 2017, a fire broke out in the twenty-four-storey Grenfell Tower block in North Kensington, London. Seventy-two people died and seventy were injured, while hundreds of homes were lost. Most tenants were from low-income working-class backgrounds, and 85 per cent of the residents who died were from ethnic minority communities. An investigation revealed that cladding and insulation fitted in 2015 were flammable, and that this had caused the fire to spread so fast. Although the council knew the cladding did not comply with regulations, and was known to be dangerous on façades, it was nevertheless used to save costs. Much social housing in the UK still has flammable cladding or is unsafe in other ways.

This illustrates the consequences of government neglect of social housing. On both sides of the Atlantic, the big social housing programmes of the mid-twentieth century were intended not to house the poor and destitute, but to provide decent homes to working-class

families with regular jobs and incomes. In the US, this was part of the New Deal programme, while in Britain and the rest of Europe, post-war reconstruction efforts provided a huge impetus to pour government resources into social housing, which received support from across the political spectrum. However, from the 1960s, the departure of middle-class families to the suburbs – combined with the defunding of social housing – degraded some of these areas into ‘social dumping’ grounds where only the poorest, most marginalized populations wanted to live.

In Britain, some politicians have used the derogatory term ‘sink estate’ for a council housing estate that becomes run-down because it is starved of investment in amenities, infrastructure and public spaces. As a result, social housing has increasingly degraded ‘from a badge of citizenship to a symbol of segregation’. The neglect, defunding and degrading of social housing has disproportionately affected migrants and minorities, as they have become over-represented in low-quality, unhealthy or dangerous social housing.

Urban planning and social housing policies have a large impact on the level and severity of residential segregation. In France in the post-Second World War decades there were severe housing shortages, and to resolve the problems of urban slums the government embarked on an ambitious programme to build affordable housing (*habitations à loyer modéré*, also known as HLMs) in the *banlieues* of large cities. However, as native working-class families often did not want to live in anonymous, unattractive high-rise estates on the peripheries of cities, immigrant families were settled there.

In the UK, social housing has generally taken the form of council estates, which are geographically segregated from the more affluent neighbourhoods where most houses are privately owned. In the post-war decades, new estates often took the form of mass-housing projects consisting of flats and tower blocks. As many white British families moved out of such council estates from the 1970s, they were replaced by migrants and ethnic minorities. The same applies in

inner-city areas traditionally inhabited by the British working class. So, what is essentially a class divide now looks like an ethnic divide.

Of course, moderate levels of ethnic clustering are not necessarily problematic, and in many cases community solidarity can empower migrant and minority groups through study, work and entrepreneurship. However, in some cases local experiences have created more problematic forms of protracted segregation. In Europe, more extreme forms of segregation are generally the unintended outcome of misguided urban planning in combination with particular historical circumstances that nobody foresaw.

For instance, residential segregation is a growing concern in Sweden, with cities such as Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö reaching some of the most extreme segregation levels in Europe. In some neighbourhoods, such as the Stockholm suburb of Rinkeby, over 80 per cent of the population is foreign-born. While the biggest groups are from Somalia, Iraq and Syria, Rinkeby is inhabited by a wide variety of nationalities. The roots of the segregation between native Swedish and immigrant populations are to be found in the Swedish housing policy of building social housing estates in isolated places – far from the city centre, employment opportunities and spaces for community activities. Housing estates such as Rinkeby were part of the prestigious Million Program, in which the Social Democratic Palme government built nearly 1 million housing units for the Swedish working classes between 1965 and 1974.

As Swedish working-class families didn't want to live in the concrete, sterile, low-quality apartment buildings, they became a housing solution of 'last resort' for socially marginal groups, often living on benefits. From the 1980s, the government started to settle migrants and refugees in these neighbourhoods. It was also a matter of unfortunate timing – as asylum inflows peaked in 1992, the Swedish economy went through its worst crisis for decades, pushing newly arrived refugee families into unemployment and welfare dependence. From the 1990s, the privatization of housing drove the poor out of the gentrifying city centres towards these neighbourhoods. In Rinkeby, the resulting accumulation of poverty

and social problems culminated in a surge of violence between youth gangs.

‘Eyes on the street’ and misguided urban planning

The most extreme and eye-catching problems with segregation seem to have emerged whenever governments have built large-scale, anonymous, low-quality housing estates where native workers do not want to live. These problems can easily be avoided by learning from the errors of the past. This is nothing to do with integration policies per se, but with sensible urban planning that fosters community life, social safety and some level of racial and class mixing. Across the Western world, misguided experiments with modern urban ‘blueprint’ planning in post-war decades had disastrous consequences in terms of the loss of community and the rise of social dysfunction and crime.

‘Modern’ urban planning focused on the geographical separation of the functions of living, shopping, working, leisure and traffic. In the name of urban renewal, slum clearance and modernization, urban planning in many Western cities has long focused on the construction of expressways and high-rises. As the American-Canadian journalist and urban theorist Jane Jacobs argued in her 1961 book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, this turned out to be a catastrophic error, as it destroyed community life and prevented social control, turning dense, lively neighbourhoods into unsafe, eerie places where nobody likes to go and nobody likes to live. Instead of helping city-dwellers to continue living in their neighbourhoods, this literally destroyed these neighbourhoods (stigmatized as ‘slums’) and took the heart out of downtown communities.

Most people don’t like to live in such anonymous places. High-rise buildings intersected by large green spaces inhibit community life and social control and lead to a lack of safety. Inspired by Jacobs’s critique, urban planners have increasingly realized that crime is lower and people’s perceptions of safety are higher when there is a geographical mixing of the prime social and commercial functions of housing, working, shopping and entertainment, because the constant presence of people and, as Jacobs aptly put it, ‘eyes on the street’

fosters social control. This prevents shopping centres and inner-city areas from becoming deserted, eerie-feeling or 'ghost towns' at night, where people don't dare to walk – even though they may look a bit scruffy. Likewise, the presence of small shops, restaurants and cafés in residential areas fosters liveliness and social connectivity.

This is why the rise of shopping malls and large supermarkets on the outskirts of big cities has had negative repercussions for social cohesion in inner-city neighbourhoods. As mom-and-pop stores and local bakeries and hardware shops closed down, neighbourhoods and towns also lost important social centres. The paradox is that old city neighbourhoods and urban slums that may *appear* run down often provide exactly the mixing of functions that tend to be fertile ground for community life and small-scale entrepreneurship typical of ethnic enclaves.

Increasingly, income segregation is the real problem

The evidence clearly defies the idea that the immigration of non-Western migrant groups has led to the formation of permanent ethnic underclasses living 'parallel lives' in urban ghettos. In some cases, segregation becomes protracted, with neighbourhoods turning into multigenerational poverty traps for marginalized minorities. However, this is not so much the result of the particular culture or religion of such groups, but rather of their economic marginalization combined with misguided urban planning policies that turned neighbourhoods into poverty traps.

For too long, governments have ignored and neglected these real problems. Clearly, denying or soft-pedalling these problems will not solve them, but likely make them worse. However, in order to effectively address such problems, we need to understand the structural causes of segregation, which are generally a combination of long-term unemployment, poverty, misguided urban planning and a failure to provide opportunities for the social mobility of marginalized groups.

In this respect, a highly relevant – and worrying – development is the growing class segregation across the Western world, in which rich

and poor groups live increasingly separate lives. A range of studies from north and south Europe show that economic liberalization, growing inequality and the defunding and privatization of social housing have increased class-based residential segregation and growing alienation between economic elites (the most segregated group of all) and middle-income and poor families living in racially more mixed neighbourhoods and suburbs. It is in this intersection of racial exclusion and residential segregation that we find the worst instances of poverty – with income segregation hitting the most disadvantaged migrant communities – as well as some marginalized white groups – hardest.—

In the US, too, the importance of class inequality in explaining patterns of residential segregation has been increasing. As Douglas Massey and his collaborators showed, the outlawing of racial redlining and other discriminatory practices by 1977 prompted a decline in average levels of Black segregation. However, it paradoxically led to a concentration of problems in the largest 'ghettos' because of growing class segregation. As the new Black middle classes moved out, problems became increasingly concentrated among the poor Black families who were left behind. With numbers of Latinos growing from the 1980s, their racial isolation often increased too, while wealthier (often Asian) migrant groups moved into more affluent neighbourhoods. As income groups have become more and more segregated, this has resulted in 'polarized urban geography' marked by increasing concentrations of affluent whites and Asians living in wealthy coastal areas, alongside high concentrations of poverty among poor Black and Latino residents in older, declining industrial areas in the Midwest and the South, which also contain pockets of white and Asian poverty.—

These kinds of segregation have little do with migrant and minority groups supposedly clinging on to their culture, language or religion, unwilling to integrate, but with the inability of poor groups – irrespective of their ethnicity or race – to escape from these conditions. The causes of such protracted class segregation are *structural* and are linked to increasing income inequality and the

liberalization of housing and rental markets. Ethnic segregation is decreasing as previous migrants climb the economic ladder, and recent migrants are becoming more diverse in class background. But because migrant and minority groups are still over-represented among lower-income earners, class segregation is disproportionately affecting them. So, indeed, what looks like a racial divide is essentially – and increasingly – a *class* divide. These new patterns of segregation continue to deny disadvantaged communities access to good education and career prospects.

If anything, this shows that we cannot decouple any debate on segregation from a broader debate on inequality.