Ethnic and Racial Studies

ISSN: 0141-9870 (Print) 1466-4356 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rers20

What about the mainstream? Assimilation in super-diverse times

Richard Alba & Jan Willem Duyvendak

To cite this article: Richard Alba & Jan Willem Duyvendak (2019) What about the mainstream? Assimilation in super-diverse times, Ethnic and Racial Studies, 42:1, 105-124, DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2017.1406127

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1406127

Published online: 11 Dec 2017.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 3718

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Citing articles: 20 View citing articles

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=rers20

ETHNIC AND RACIAL STUDIES
2019, VOL. 42, NO. 1, 105–124
https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1406127

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Check for updates

What about the mainstream? Assimilation in super-diverse times

Richard Alba[a] and Jan Willem Duyvendak[b]

[a]Graduate Center, City University of New York, New York, USA; [b]Department of Sociology, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands

ABSTRACT

Super-diversity has become the conceptual touchstone for a large body of research on immigration in European societies. Evolving from the ideas sketched by Steven Vertovec in his famous 2007 essay, the concept as deployed in research has become a successor to multiculturalism. The super-diversity lens has trained attention on horizontal processes of "living together" in very diverse settings, like some urban neighbourhoods where no group holds the majority status. However, we argue here that for a fuller understanding of integration, we need the vertical dimension of social power. This dimension is manifest through the mainstream, which permeates many institutions (including local ones such as schools) and becomes visible in the cultural adjustments made by members of immigrant-origin minorities, particularly among those who aspire to social mobility. The power axis represented by the mainstream is not strictly dependent on the demographic distribution of ethnic groups, given that white natives remain very powerful even when they are a numerical minority. At the same time, the character of the mainstream may be altered to some extent by the entry of individuals with non-white minority origins. To illustrate these ideas, we offer the examples of the "culturalization of citizenship" in the Netherlands and the social locations of young people of mixed background in the US.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 6 March 2017; Accepted 8 November 2017

KEYWORDS Super-diversity; assimilation; power; Netherlands; US; mainstream

Introduction

Over the last decade, the concept of "super-diversity" has captured multiple intellectual worlds in Western Europe, becoming a touchstone for social scientists, policymakers, urban planners, and social workers, alike. The concept, which originated with a 2007 essay by Steven Vertovec, refers to "a worldwide diversification of migration channels, differentiations of legal statuses, diverging patterns of gender and age, and variance in migrants' human capital" (Meissner and Vertovec 2015, 541). Today, any European scholar addressing

CONTACT Richard Alba ralba@gc.cuny.edu

© 2017 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

issues of migration, integration, and (ethnic) diversity who does not explicitly take into account the notion of super-diversity runs the risk of being reproached for neglecting the "new multicultural condition of the twenty-first century" (Meissner and Vertovec 2015, 542).

Super-diversity challenges conventional migration studies by "moving beyond … the 'ethno-focal lens'" (Meissner and Vertovec 2015, 542). This refocusing supersedes multicultural approaches, particularly strong in the UK, which were mainly concerned with migrant populations from the former colonies and the so-called guest workers, who originally had been contracted to work in Western Europe. Vertovec has observed that multicultural policies "had as their overall goal the promotion of tolerance and respect for collective identities"; but since the influx of immigrants in the 1990s, "new, smaller, less organized, legally differentiated and non-citizen immigrant groups have hardly gained attention or a place on the public agenda" (2007, 1027–1028). Instead of focusing solely on the country of origin and ethnicity of immigrants and the second generation, the super-diversity concept highlights the need to recognize the complexity of migration processes and the range of shifting variables involved in integration patterns in order to adequately address the needs of individual immigrants and their descendants and to better understand the dynamics of their inclusion or exclusion (Vertovec 2007, 1039).

Super-diversity can be viewed first of all as an observation – a profound one – and thus as a description of a novel phenomenon, "a term coined to portray changing population configurations particularly arising from global migration flows over the past thirty-odd years" (Meissner and Vertovec 2015, 542). One of the key implications of the notion of super-diversity concerns societal conditions in the early twenty-first century: It conveys a notion of diversity as the new normal for Western societies, an inescapable circumstance affecting not only migrants but also members of native majorities. Meissner and Vertovec (2015, 550) see a super-diversity analytic lens as leading potentially to "a greater recognition of *diversity as normalcy*" (Meissner and Vertovec 2015, 550; *italics added*). Meissner (2015, 557) goes on to emphasize how ordinary diversity has become:

> More and more researchers have been moving away from seeing ethnic diversity as exceptional. In their studies they have identified that, by and large, practices of living with tremendous ethnic diversity have actually become so normal in the everyday lives of their research subjects that this aspect of differentiation has become somewhat ordinary. (2015, 557)

One of the most consequential strands of research inspired by the notion of super-diversity pursues the idea of the normalcy of diversity into quotidian social life, the universal tapestry of human experience. The major finding reveals a conviviality that appears to reflect a degree of levelling and everyday

acceptance of ethnic difference. In super-diverse contexts, people seem to get along rather well (Padilla, Azevedo, and Olmos-Alcaraz 2015, 623). Suzanne Wessendorf (2014), in her much cited work on Hackney, explains that this conviviality is not necessarily based on the active appreciation of differences but more on the ability simply to deal with them by not problematizing differences that are "out there". The linkage of conviviality to super-diversity leads to a view of super-diverse areas as increasingly level playing fields, where everyone, the native majority included, has become a minority and no one ethnic group is dominant. Following this logic, Crul, Schneider, and Lelie (2013) argue "that everybody will adapt to everybody". From this perspective, the hegemony of the native majority appears to be receding to the margins; the nature of integration is being altered profoundly.

In this paper, we focus on the question of whether the new view of integration arising from super-diversity research will prove adequate in the contemporary immigration societies of North America and Western Europe. In so doing, we heed the call to "critically interrogate, refine and extrapolate" the notion of "super-diversity" (Meissner and Vertovec 2015, 542). We recognize that super-diversity originally, in the work by Steven Vertovec, was not so much concerned with issues of integration,[1] but nevertheless it is being used to generate insights into the complexity of immigrant trajectories in a super-diverse world, with a plethora of distinct intersections of such variables as ethnic origin, religion, gender, family status, and legal situation. Inevitably, then, super-diversity has implications for integration. We try to specify where super-diversity has something important to contribute. But we are also concerned about what we see as the concept's blind spot, namely, differences in social power, broadly construed, that affect integration. Others have seen that blind spot in terms of the disregard of social-class inequalities or racism (Back and Sinha 2016). To clarify what we are concerned with, we introduce the concept of mainstream assimilation. We then give some examples of how the mainstream matters for integration and assimilation, looking in particular at the contemporary Netherlands and US, two countries that, for historical reasons, exemplify different boundaries between the mainstream and major immigrant minorities (brighter in the Netherlands, blurrier in the US). In conclusion, we see a prospect for the super-diversity perspective to extend its grasp by recognizing the critical importance of the mainstream.

Majority–minority demography and horizontal relations

In its empirical reach, the super-diversity concept calls attention to settings in which diversity has become part of quotidian "normalcy". Susanne Wessendorf argues that this is true of the "super-diverse" district of Hackney in London, where diversity has become "commonplace", "habitual and part of the everyday human landscape" (Wessendorf 2014, 3). Padilla, Azevedo, and

Olmos-Alcaraz (2015) refer to "hybrid spaces", where "heterogeneity … is experienced on a daily basis" and "difference/otherness is internalized", possibly being "transformed into a quotidian positive feature".

Two aspects seem fundamental to such findings. One is demographic: Super-diversity corresponds with the absence of a visible numerical majority of some kind, whether it be ethno-racial or something else, a group that has both strength of numbers and a degree of establishment, allowing it to set the dominant social and cultural tone, one that must at least be heeded by others, if not adapted to by them. The other is a tendency of this research to focus on what might be called "horizontal" interpersonal relations, exchanges where any inherent authority possessed by one participant (as there would be, for instance, in an interaction involving a teacher and the parent of a student) is at a minimum. Wessendorf's (2014) field observations of Hackney, for instance, involve interactions among several or more people in shops, playgrounds, a knitting club, and an IT class, and at a public party at a housing estate.

Of these two dimensions, the demographic one tends to be seen as more definitive. Crul (2016) bases his influential analysis of super-diversity largely on numbers:

> My first criterion for a city or neighbourhood to be labelled super-diverse is that there *no* longer is an ethnic majority group that is dominant based on its *demographic majority* position. … The second characteristic of a super-diverse city or neighbourhood is that in this majority–minority context, both *number and size* of different ethnic groups must be substantial. (2016, 2, *italics added*)

Along the same lines, he argues that the demographic context determines the pressure newcomers feel to assimilate:

> The idea of assimilation or integration becomes at any rate more complex in a situation where there is no longer a clear majority group into which one is to assimilate or integrate. The pressure to assimilate, coming from the – old – majority group, is less strong if not backed by sheer numbers *in everyday life*. The group into which one assimilates in the *concrete situation* of a neighbourhood or a school is, as a result, more and more unlikely to be the old majority group but rather an amalgam of people of different ethnic backgrounds, migration cohorts, migration statuses and socio-economic positions. (Crul 2016, 4, *italics added*)

We accept that there may be something distinctive about majority–minority areas. As Crul's argument suggests, they provide many social contexts in which the mainstream majority is no longer visible, or at least no longer seems dominant. In this sense, the daily experiences of many minority residents do not seem to require adjustments (or, at least, not many) to the mainstream. There is a *proximity principle* at work in the argument: mutual adjustment depends on the people encountered as neighbours, at school,

in the market, or on the street. Indeed, when individuals with native-majority backgrounds appear in these settings, they too may even adjust their behaviour to fit with the others they meet, thus apparently assimilating (at least for a time and in some respects) to a minority group (Jiménez 2017). Situations like these lend themselves to the creative cultural syncretism that often appears in migration settings. As Philip Kasinitz points out: "We all know that there are times and spaces where cultural creativity comes into flower, and cities with diverse populations and cosmopolitan outlooks tend to be fertile grounds for artistic achievement" (2014, 283).

However, we caution that this picture of mutual adjustment among diverse individuals who share a rough equality cannot be extended to all super-diverse settings. In recent years, a team of researchers at the University of Amsterdam has been pursuing such questions as: do citizens consider "diversity" as a normal fact of life? Is diversity for them the new normalcy? Most of our research has taken place in Western Europe, particularly in the Netherlands. And what we found suggests something opposite to what one would expect from the super-diversity thesis: citizenship itself has become politicized and "culturalized" in some Western countries, while space for diversity has decreased instead of increased, let alone come to be considered "normal" (Duyvendak, Geschiere, and Tonkens 2016).

This problematization of cultural and religious differences is not only happening at the level of national discourse but in neighbourhoods as well. As Paul Mepschen concludes in his recent PhD dissertation on the "culturalization of everyday life" in a multi-ethnic neighbourhood in Amsterdam New West:

> The contemporary global city is characterized by a powerful focus on locality, belonging and identity "fixture". … Dutch "culturalism" produces an increased awareness of the proximity and alterity of others. The resulting focus on "autochthony" is a process of boundary-making between those who belong and those who are construed as guests or strangers. (Mepschen 2016; see also article in this special issue)

Very few people seem to be *indifferent to difference*; the emergence and reinforcement of exclusionary articulations of belonging – so central to the "culturalization of citizenship" – create *increasing* physical awareness of the cultural, corporeal alterity of others, and not a lack thereof. The powerful emergence of autochthony in the Netherlands stands in contrast to Wessendorf's observations regarding Hackney. Autochthony denotes a bright, powerful boundary between those who come from elsewhere and those who can claim to be "born of the soil" and thus the nation as their home (cf. Duyvendak 2011).[2] This boundary between "autochthonous" and "allochthonous" residents plays a key role in everyday discourse in Amsterdam New West and many other super-diverse neighbourhoods in the Netherlands, and is

intimately entwined with political and public discourses that impose meaning upon everyday life.

So what about the mainstream?

All of the North American and Western European societies that have taken in massive immigrations since the mid-twentieth century possess dominant native white majorities and stark power differentials between this majority (which is still a demographic majority on the national plane) and immigrant minorities. The concept of the mainstream provides a way of understanding how the power of the native majority is expressed in relation to minorities and generates the specific conditions that shape integration.

Two interlocking aspects of the mainstream reveal the power of the native majority. One is institutional: The mainstream encompasses a core set of societal institutions, such as the education system, the economy, the polity, and the media, whose leading positions are occupied by members of the native majority or by others who have met their standards for acceptance (Alba and Nee 2003, 12). These institutions broadcast mainstream standards and values to all parts of the society, and they also possess a critical gatekeeping role. Thus, the gatekeeping that controls access to improvements in educational credentials and jobs for immigrants and the second generation is generally in the hands of individuals who employ mainstream criteria, as it occurs through institutions such as schools that reflect the mainstream's culture and standards. (The exception – a rare case – is when a minority group has successfully established its own sub-economy; and usually this offers just truncated ladders of mobility.) For this reason, one can speak of "dominant formal and informal ways of doing and thinking" in a society, which reflect the most consequential parts of the mainstream.

Another aspect of the mainstream consists of the social and cultural settings – not just formal institutions – where the members of the native majority, even when they are working class, feel "at home" (Alba 2009). This aspect emphasizes the more subjective and emotional side of being part of the mainstream. Feeling at home not only means that the setting is familiar, safe, and predictable but that one feels in control as well: one belongs, and one believes (perhaps incorrectly) one has the power to define who else belongs (Duyvendak 2011). This conception highlights also that the use the singular "mainstream" is a matter of convenience because the mainstream can be itself internally diverse, differentiated by region, religion and social class, to name but a few dimensions. Moreover, although the presence of the native majority identifies the settings that are part of the mainstream, these milieus need not be ethno-racially exclusive (though, obviously, some may be). That is, members of immigrant minorities can and do participate in them also, whether in work environments, neighbourhoods, or sports

teams; and the interaction across boundaries is greater when some degree of social compatibility exists. In the usual case, such compatibility requires more adjustment, whether achieved by past assimilation or present efforts, by individuals from minority backgrounds than by those in the majority. This asymmetry reflects differences in social power, especially the potential for exclusion by the majority.

This more social-demographic aspect of the mainstream is the more encompassing: it overlaps with the institutional one insofar as institutions can be constituted by assemblages of social settings, such as offices and social relations among personnel (institutions also require rules and procedures, which are not implied). Nevertheless, any operationalization of the socio-demographic conception demands recognition of certain practical limits that are hard to specify with complete precision. There has to be a socio-economic floor to the mainstream – for instance, we should not count the homeless or desperately poor in it, even if they belong to the native majority. And some in this majority – such as the adherents of certain religious groups, for example, the Amish and Ultra-orthodox Jews – shun the mainstream society and should also not be reckoned as part of it. But we believe that the native-majority working class belongs in it because integration, which often requires multiple generations to run its course, can begin with integration with the working-class part of the mainstream. The very fact that, more recently, parts of the white working class claim not to feel at home in their "own" land anymore (Hochschild 2016) illustrates our argument: they were used to be self-evidently part of the mainstream, it was their country, and now they feel threatened in their mainstream status.

Super-diverse areas such as those described by Wessendorf can co-exist to some extent alongside the mainstream, but they cannot avoid exposure to it, even its intrusion. Certainly, it is much more difficult for some residents to gain access to the mainstream in highly segregated cities, for example, certain US cities that suffer from high black and Hispanic segregation. But even in segregated neighbourhoods, minority citizens know very well what the mainstream is, who controls the resources and power, has the power to arrest, etc. In Europe, where segregation overall is less pronounced, the mainstream is even less distant.

Indeed, institutions of the larger society, schools most obviously, reach into super-diverse areas. Even when they accommodate in significant ways the specificities of the backgrounds of their non-majority students, schools still teach a curriculum infused with the mainstream – e.g. the history of the larger society – and they do so, with very rare exceptions, in the mainstream language. The findings of Crul (2016, 12) exemplify how in different European countries mainstream institutions and settings shape the lives of the second generation:

> We see how differences between Swedish and German institutional arrangements in education for the second generation are crucial because of the resulting differences in partner choice and in the pace of change in gender roles among the lower and higher educated.

This is exactly how mainstream institutions work: dominant societal norms – regarding, for example, education and men's and women's participation on the labour market – are translated and "embodied" in local institutions, even in highly diverse neighbourhoods. The very existence of mainstream institutions turns children of diverse backgrounds into Swedish or Dutch citizens, with all their national peculiarities. Proximate institutions and settings represent norms, values, practices, etc., that have formidable reach and shape children's subjectivities and life chances.

The mainstream should not be viewed as inherently static, a point that is quite visible in countries with long histories of immigration. The US mainstream has been altered – in superficial and profound ways – by the inclusion of the descendants of the immigrant waves of the past and present. For instance, the assimilation of Jewish and Catholic second and third generations after the Second World War was accompanied by an expansion of the American core identity, which became "Judeo-Christian", whereas previously it had been "white Christian" and vociferously not Catholic (Alba 2009). This was a profound change, given the importance of religious identities since colonial times in North America. Nevertheless, change was asymmetric – the descendants of the early twentieth century European migrants changed far more than did the mainstream. Indeed, they even refashioned their religious identities to a considerable extent, with the rise of Reform Judaism, at mid-century a Protestant-like denomination, and the individualization of Catholic faith, including a new willingness to reject specific Church teachings, such as birth control, that were seen as incompatible with contemporary family life, as well as an exodus from the parochial school system.

The Dutch mainstream: the culturalization of Dutch membership

In Western Europe, many policymakers and citizens apparently do not embrace diversity as a normal fact of life. Quite the contrary: over the past decade, Western European countries have heatedly debated how much and what kind of cultural differentiation is acceptable in the public domain. It is questionable to what extent citizens, and particularly native-majority residents of diverse neighbourhoods, consider the diversity they witness around them as "normal".

In the Netherlands, powerful discourses, which reverberate throughout the political world, cast Muslim immigrants as a threat to social cohesion and national identity. The building of mosques, the call to prayer, religious

symbols such as the headscarf, gender inequality, the alleged refusal to embrace LGBT rights, and Islam-inspired political extremism are all popular subjects in politics and the media, often portrayed as threatening Dutch culture.

In the background of these discussions and debates are important discursive changes that emphasize the need for immigrants to adopt "Western" (or Judeo-Christian or "Dutch") values and the right of the "natives" to define their country's identity (see Geschiere 2009; Kesic and Duyvendak 2016a; van Reekum 2014). This *culturalization of citizenship* (Duyvendak, Geschiere, and Tonkens 2016) would not have been possible, however, without an important development that is easily overlooked because of the country's political divisions: the majority population of the Netherlands has rapidly become more culturally *homogeneous*. After a period of intense cultural polarization during the "long sixties", the majority has developed remarkably uniform, progressive ideals.[3] Almost the entire political spectrum now supports similar values on gender, family, sexuality, abortion, euthanasia, drugs policies, and so on.

The culturalization of citizenship and the homogenization of the native majority – the virtual consensus within the majority population that immigrants should share "national" values – has important consequences for the space for diversity. This "progressive" consensus requires policy to enforce the acculturation of those who are assumed to fall outside of it. Since the "native" culture is seen as under threat, its "traditional" cultural heritage has to be protected (for instance in the form of a "canon" as part of the history school curriculum and the lessons taught to newcomers in citizenship courses; see Kesic and Duyvendak 2016b).

The cultural consensus among the native Dutch goes hand in hand with a dismissal of other sets of values. Hence, the advancement of liberal moral and social values is tied to the belief, trumpeted by vocal politicians, that everyone must adhere to them. Debate in Dutch politics now focuses less on the substance of certain topics (e.g. homosexual marriage) than on the procedural question of how to deal with people who do not share the relevant "modern" values. This question polarizes the political spectrum as nothing else. So whereas cultural polarization on moral traditionalism has declined since 1970, polarization on the majority's moral authority has grown (compare de Koster and van der Waal 2006; Houtman et al. 2008).

This is also apparent in the programmes of Dutch political parties: The data clearly show that the decline of support for traditional moral values has fuelled a new polarization over the importance of individual freedom and cultural pluralism. Among the supporters of the ethnic majority's moral authority, we see the desire for uniformity and community, and preference for ethnocentrism and a shared understanding of the Netherlands as "home" (Duyvendak 2011, Chapter 4). All in all, the majority population of the Netherlands has

come to define cultural diversity as a growing problem, brightening the boundaries between natives and immigrants (who remain immigrants forever, even into the 3rd generation). And the Netherlands is clearly not the only country in Europe where this is happening.

It is not only that on the discursive, cognitive level the idea is forcefully rejected that "everybody adapts to everybody" (dismissed as old-fashioned "multiculturalism"). The processes sketched above also reflect the *emotional* aspects of citizenship, which has evolved from a status or practice into a deep sentiment. Citizens are subjected to new "feeling rules" (Hochschild 2003, 82). Belonging, or feeling at home, has become a requirement (Morley 2001). Particularly at the national level, new feeling rules are applied to immigrants who are increasingly expected to demonstrate feelings of attachment, belonging, connectedness, and loyalty to their new country. Because feelings as such cannot easily be perceived, certain actions become their symbolic stand-ins (Verkaaik 2010). For example, having dual nationality has come to represent lack of loyalty to Dutch culture in the eyes of a majority of Dutch politicians.

These emotional aspects not only play out at the national level. As Mepschen and many others have shown, relations at the local level have become extremely tense and emotional: there is a lot of territorial and emotional boundary-making going on, based on resistance (and not on indifference) to differences. Recently, this emotional investment in a bright boundary intruded in a remarkable way into public life, when the liberal-conservative Prime Minister, Mark Rutte, scolded a small band of Dutch Turkish youth for harassing a TV news team in their neighbourhood, telling the youth to "fuck off" and to leave the country ("pleur op"). The coarse language, unheard of from a European national leader speaking about fellow citizens at a news conference, emphasized Rutte's view of the great distance separating these immigrant-background youth from mainstream respect.

The very fact that the Dutch mainstream is not readily opening up to Muslim migrants does not imply that they are not affected by it. They are, in contradictory ways. Some assimilate into the mainstream, or at least make impressive progress in terms of education, work, and income. The second generation is often more liberal than its parents, another sign of ongoing integration (Maliepaard and Alba 2016). However, the harsh xenophobic discourse in Dutch political and public debate causes many migrants and their children to have difficulty identifying as Dutch (Slootman and Duyvendak 2015) and therefore to feel excluded from the mainstream.

The US mainstream: signs of an expansion

If we now turn to the US, we find evidence of a rather different story, one of blurring boundaries, at least for some: that is, an expansion of the mainstream

shows some similarities to, but also some differences from, the post-Second World War expansion that brought the descendants of Jewish and Catholic immigrants, mainly from Ireland and from southern and eastern Europe, en masse into the mainstream.

A number of social forces contributed in the mid-twentieth century to the mass entry of previously excluded groups into the mainstream. Their shifting generational distribution – the young adults from these groups then belonged mainly to the second and third generations – combined with the cutoff of immigration since the 1920s brought about rapid Americanization and the weakening of mother tongues. The educational attainments of low-status groups like the Italians soared in the post-war period (assisted, one should add, by the state-sponsored expansion of higher education); and large-scale occupational mobility ensued (Alba 2009; Perlmann 2005). The development of suburbs and homeownership encouraged young ethnic families to forsake urban enclaves for mixed communities. As a consequence of these processes, rates of interethnic and interreligious marriage climbed sharply (Alba and Nee 2003).

This mass assimilation was stoked by the unusual prosperity and reduced inequality of the post-War period. In addition, the issue of legal status among immigrant parents was much less consequential than today (Ngai 2003). Assimilation in the post-war period was driven in large part by a prodigious expansion of opportunity – for instance, the higher educational sector of the US grew fivefold in the 1940–70 period – which allowed massive non-zero-sum mobility. That is, numerous ethnics of the second and third generation could move upwards without challenging the opportunities available to already established groups. As a vast literature has established, inequality is much higher today, and social mobility more constrained.

One can presume therefore that the scale of mainstream expansion is much less today than in the earlier, unusual period. Nevertheless, assimilation processes still operate. One structural force that promotes them is demographic shift (Alba 2009). It has led to a widening of entry into higher occupational tiers by non-whites, as the number of whites who can compete for positions there declines.

The growing diversity in the top tiers of the workforce emerges in sharp profile from an analysis by Alba and Yrizar-Barbosa (2016). They show that, over time and as new cohorts enter economic life, whites' onetime dominance of the top quartile of jobs (as ranked by the average pay to specific occupations) is eroding. The fraction of these jobs held by non-Hispanic whites slipped from nearly 90 per cent in the oldest cohort (56–65 years old) in 2000 to about 70 per cent in the youngest one (26–35 years old) of 2010. These changes have come about largely because of the retirement of cohorts where whites monopolized the best jobs and the altered demographic composition of cohorts that are maturing and entering the workforce.

The groups that are benefitting most from this growing diversity at the top are of immigrant origin – Asians, both immigrant and native born, and native-born Latinos. Black Americans have also seen some gains, but these are modest compared to those of the other groups.

Concomittently, as socio-economic parity between whites and some minorities rises, and demographic shifts also encourage higher rates of interaction between them, the level of mixed unions increases. Recent analyses of census data have revealed that the overall rate of intermarriage among new unions is about 17 per cent, representing a steep increase in marriage across the major lines of race and Hispanic origin over the last several decades (Livingston and Brown 2017). This increase is normalizing intermarriage in some parts of the country. That rising intermarriage is indeed connected with mainstream expansion is shown above all in the characteristics of the children of these unions.

The evidence concerning these children – individuals with mixed ethnoracial backgrounds, who consequently have family connections to two different groups – is telling. These children now represent a substantial fraction of the American youth population (Alba, Beck, and Sahin 2017) – 14–15 per cent of the infants now born in the US. And the great majority of them, about three-quarters, come from mixed majority–minority families – that is, one of their parents is non-Hispanic white, and the other is non-white or Hispanic.

The social contexts in which these children grow up are diagnostic for the integrative character of mixed unions, as are their identities, social affiliations, and partner choices as adults. An examination of the income and residential characteristics of the families of mixed infants indicates that, on the whole, the families that mix one majority with one minority parent resemble much more all-white families than they do the all-minority families that share the same minority origin. But mainstreaming is not just a matter of developing characteristics like those of all-white families, but also being located in similar residential spaces and, by implication, having white families as neighbours. Families that have a white mother and a black father, which make up the great majority of white–black unions, are the exception to these generalizations. The families that meld two minority origins look very much like other minority families.

If we examine the adult characteristics of individuals from mixed majority–minority family backgrounds – and, admittedly, the evidence is sparser here – we again find a picture consistent with integration into the white mainstream for most, with those of partly black ancestry the prominent exception. In terms of social identities, the data support the idea that for the most part these identities are more fluid and contingent than are the identities of individuals with unmixed backgrounds (see Alba, Beck, and Sahin 2017; Lee and Bean 2010; Pew Research Center 2015). For individuals who are partly white but not black, this fluidity often "tilts white", in the sense that they appear to incline

more to the white side of their ancestry than to the minority side – importantly, in their sense of acceptance by others. For those who are partly black, it tilts in the other direction. This pronounced divide among those from mixed backgrounds reveals one very bright boundary in American society: the still powerful stigmatization of African heritage (Alba and Foner 2015).

The social worlds of individuals with white and non-black minority parentage also tilt white. For example, individuals whose parentage is partly white marry mostly all-white partners. In the case of individuals who are white and either American Indian or Asian, about 70 per cent do (Miyawaki 2015). Even in the case of adults who are partly white and partly black, a majority takes white partners.

This mixing speaks to a potent form of conviviality, which brings families from different sides of an ethno-racial divide together, at least for important symbolic occasions such as weddings and funerals. Yet it is also deeply coloured by power differentials, in which the less powerful adapt to the most powerful. African-Americans' experiences with bright boundaries strongly resemble those of Dutch Muslims. They experience the exclusionary impact of a very real mainstream on a day-to-day basis, resulting in very low percentages of intermarriage for these groups with mainstream natives.

Experiencing (super)diversity I: assimilation diversifies immigrants

Super-diversity researchers focus particularly on the increasing diversity in everyday lives of the immigrants themselves (Vertovec 2007). That is, immigrants to Western countries have become more diverse in terms of age, gender, country of origin, ethnicity, language, religious background, and migration channels, resulting in an increased variety of legal statuses, along with more diverse forms and levels of human capital. Some of these differences are present upon arrival, some are produced by family reunification and marriage, and others have to do with the passing of time in the receiving country. Some of these differences have a temporary character; others are more permanent.

What should be acknowledged though is that a portion of this diversification is actually produced by mainstream assimilation, in other words by the adaptations some immigrants and their children make to the mainstream in order to improve their opportunities, understood in the broadest sense. As we have already noted, Crul and his co-authors demonstrate that at least some members of immigrant-origin minority groups eventually adapt to the dominant norms, values, and practices of receiving societies, changes that are often associated with the experience of upward mobility channelled through mainstream institutions. Indeed, these scholars observe

that the socially mobile members of the Moroccan and Turkish second generations are generally the most progressive members of their groups, thus bringing some mainstream values into their homes and communities. Not surprisingly, ambitious members of the second generation, who recognize that the gatekeepers impacting their chances to rise employ mainstream standards for assessing talent, accommodate themselves to an important degree to the mainstream culture (Alba and Nee 2003), especially since, in general, this does not require wholesale abandonment of their familial and ethnic cultures.

The heterogeneity introduced by assimilation grows over time because of the mobility and assimilation experienced by some – but not all – children of immigrants (on Mexicans in the US, see Agius Vallejo 2012; Jiménez 2010; Vasquez 2011). Its lack of uniformity is a hallmark, as assimilation introduces or exacerbates differences and inequalities among immigrants and their children, which range from different language competencies (in the mainstream language and the mother tongue) to different levels of educational credentials and occupational qualifications in the receiving society. How do the members of immigrant-origin groups experience increased internal diversification, caused by the assimilation of some? On the one hand, we know that this can produce painful forms of difference, for example incomprehension between children and parents who have received very different educations (Slootman 2014). On the other hand, we also know from the literature that differences among immigrants caused by the assimilation of some can be broadly welcomed: parents are proud that their children move up and into the mainstream, even when they move out of the neighbourhood, stop speaking the homeland language and embrace the norms and values of the country of arrival. More research is needed to better understand the appreciation by immigrants of diversity produced by assimilation processes.

Thus, the *experience of increased diversity* within immigrant-origin groups is an important aspect of super-diversity, one that raises critical questions. When it comes to the new variabilities introduced by immigration itself, a safe assumption is that, while some are really experienced by immigrants and their children as differences (particularly the linguistic, ethnic, and religious ones), others are probably not experienced in this way at all. They may well in fact be experienced as getting back to normal: alongside male immigrants, there are now also female immigrants; alongside the young and middle-aged, there are older people and children; alongside the lower-educated, there are now many with higher educations. What may appear as "super-diverse" in the eyes of migration scholars could be experienced as a return to regular, non-deviant, and therefore non-diverse situations by immigrants themselves.

Experiencing (super)diversity II: assimilation diversifies the mainstream

It is, however, not only the immigrant population that seems to recognize its experiences in the notion of super-diversity. Many in the native majority consider their country as increasingly diverse as well, and not all of them are pleased with this development. Here, it is important once more to stress that the processes of immigrant and second-generation assimilation partly cause the experience of diversity in the mainstream: individuals of immigrant background now live almost everywhere (not only in the poor neighbourhoods of the big cities), have various educational backgrounds, and move into diverse professions. All citizens of Western countries are now very much aware that immigrant minorities form an important part of their societies. But does this awareness – driven by both demographic changes and processes of assimilation – necessarily tell us something about how these new groups are experienced and appreciated by natives? Writing on super-diversity often seems to imply that the majority will get used to these differences, particularly where the majority group becomes a numerical minority itself. But the earlier examples of the Netherlands and the US suggest that the outcomes of diversity are variable and contingent, especially for the boundary strategies employed by the majority group and for the intimacy of the social relations that develop across the majority–minority boundary.

In the Netherlands, the growing diversity that appears in mainstream settings is connected frequently with a brightening of this boundary, at least from the perspective of the majority, whose members consider some groups of newcomers to embody the antithesis of Dutchness. Many in the majority see "adapting" as surrendering to non-natives and do not want the boundaries to blur. Even though the processes of assimilation are implicated in the increasing frequency of interactions between the native population and (successful) immigrants and their children, many in the Dutch majority focus on what they see as the eruption of diversity in their daily lives and give less attention to the commonalities created by assimilation. Particularly when certain group characteristics are culturalized and politicized, individuals from certain immigrant backgrounds are viewed and treated as "different", even when they themselves think and feel that they conform to the mainstream (Slootman and Duyvendak 2015).

In the US, this pattern also appears, as the white nativistic assertiveness during the 2016 election shows. When it comes to the growing diversity within the families of the mainstream majority, however, the evidence is strong that boundary blurring is occurring at the same time that some degree of socially acknowledged diversity is maintained. To begin with, many Americans – about a third – now acknowledge having a "close" relative from an ethno-racial group other than their own (Wang 2012). Moreover,

many of those coming from mixed majority–minority homes (again, with the exception of many black–white individuals) feel accepted by their white relatives and, more generally, by whites (Pew Research Center 2015). These feelings appear to indicate that they perceive little or no disparity in their treatment at the hands of the majority. At the same time, a substantial portion asserts at times the minority sides of their heritage, in the form of professing mixed identities, for example. Such identities are preferred by most white-Asian individuals and, though the evidence is more tentative, by individuals who are Anglo and Mexican, it appears (Pew Research Center 2015; Vasquez 2014). Very likely, these mixed identities are linked to everyday expressions of ethnicity that are relatively muted and easily shared, just as was the case for European Americans. After all, individuals in mixed family networks have strong incentives to get along with one another.

Assimilation therefore *produces experiences of diversity within the mainstream, but these experiences are not uniform*. In some contexts, people do not grow indifferent towards each other's differences. On the contrary, they remain aware and even wary of (alleged) differences. In such cases, it may appear that the "mainstream" is expanding since newcomers share comparable socio-economic positions and socio-cultural convictions with the native group; but the appearance can be an illusion. In other contexts, the mainstream does actually expand, as social, cultural, and relational boundaries between groups and between individuals blur, producing feelings of mutual acceptance. Thus, it remains an open empirical question how and to what extent the mainstream changes by expanding. Often, newcomers can only really become part of the mainstream when differences have already become relatively small. In this sense, mainstreams are far from super-diverse.

Yet, in one respect, the experience of diversity does seem to produce similar outcomes in the Netherlands and the US: Those in the native majority have become more aware of their distinctiveness (Jiménez 2017). Whereas once their equation of the nation with their own group identity was automatic and unself-conscious, in both countries it has been troubled by the undeniability of growing diversity. In the Netherlands, it has taken on as a result a pronounced defensive character; in the US, this is true also for portions of the native white population. This effect of growing diversity is profound in both societies and of uncertain outcome in the long run, and a crucial question remains as to whether, and to what extent, the recognition of the presence of "others" eventually generates more tolerance or intensifies intolerance (or does both at the same time).

To conclude

Super-diversity, which in the last decade has swept through the social sciences studying immigration in Western Europe, offers a lens that yields

some new insights but also misses something critically important: the mainstream. The point of departure for the idea is the observation of a thorough-going change in the immigrant-origin populations in Europe, as the single axis of national origin has been replaced by a tangle of multiple axes, from age and generation to legal status. We argue that super-diversity, at least to judge by the research it has so far inspired, seems best attuned to the "normalized" everyday diversity that sometimes characterizes horizontal interpersonal interactions in micro-settings with a very substantial immigrant presence.

The super-diversity lens has so far been less able to capture the vertical phenomena that reflect the social power of the native majority. This may be partly because observing them requires a lens operating on a macro scale, rather than a micro one. Since one of the goals of the super-diversity idea in its original formulation by Vertovec is to offer guidance to social service practitioners, the mainstream institutions that interact with immigrants have not been entirely left out of its field of vision. But the emphasis is on the need for these institutions to adapt to the new super-diverse condition; neglected is the power they exert to bring about adaptations by the immigrant and their children.

When we take macro-processes into consideration, we see that in countries of Western Europe such as the Netherlands the native majority draws sharper immigrant/native boundaries than before. Although the Netherlands has been often misunderstood as a "multicultural paradise" (Duyvendak et al. 2013; Duyvendak and Scholten 2012), culturalized and homogenized versions of citizenship have grown hegemonic there over the past decade(s), as they have in many West European countries. The new ethnic hierarchies and sensitivities linked to this nativist turn have not been taken into account by many super-diversity scholars.

Yet, despite the boundary intensification, many immigrants and their children still assimilate according to mainstream standards in terms of both conduct and convictions, though this is not always enough to bring them truly into the mainstream. This assimilation, when its implications are understood, points to ways that the ideas of super-diversity could benefit from recognizing the power of the mainstream. For, as we have argued, the processes of assimilation produce internal diversification and experiences of increased diversity among immigrant-origin groups; and they lie behind some of what is "lived" as pluralization by the hyper-sensitive native majority as well. Such experiences may be another reason why the term "super-diversity" resonates so strongly: not because immigrants are no longer forced to assimilate given the new normalcy of diversity, but *as a consequence* thereof.

Notes

1. In this paper, we use the terms "integration" and "assimilation" as approximate synonyms, although we recognize that there are some conceptual differences between them (see Alba and Foner 2015, chap. 1).
2. As we write this paper, an important Dutch advisory body has recommended that the government scrap the autochtonous/allochthonous distinction (de Volkskrant 2016). However, its use is widespread in the populace, and aligned there with common distinctions between "white" and "black". Whether a government decision will make it fade from popular use is doubtful.
3. According to the Euro-barometer, European Social Survey, European Values Study, International Social Survey Program, and the Continuous Tracking Survey, as recapitulated in various studies.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

References

Agius Vallejo, Jody. 2012. *Barrios to Burbs: The Making of the Mexican-American Middle Class*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.

Alba, Richard. 2009. *Blurring the Color Line: The New Chance for a More Integrated America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Alba, Richard, Brenden Beck, and Duygu Basaran Sahin. 2017. "The U.S. Mainstream Expands – Again." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, doi:10.1080/1369183X.2017.1317584.

Alba, Richard, and Nancy Foner. 2015. *Strangers No More: The Challenges of Integration in North America and Western Europe*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Alba, Richard, and Victor Nee. 2003. *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Alba, Richard, and Guillermo Yrizar-Barbosa. 2016. "Room at the Top? Minority Mobility and the Transition to Demographic Diversity in the US." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39: 917–938.

Back, Les, and Shamser Sinha. 2016. "Multicultural Conviviality in the Midst of Racism's Ruins." *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 37: 517–532.

Crul, Maurice. 2016. "Super-Diversity Vs. Assimilation: How Complex Diversity in Majority – Minority Cities Challenges the Assumptions of Assimilation." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42: 54–68.

Crul, Maurice, Jens Schneider, and Frans Lelie. 2013. *Superdiversiteit: Een Nieuwe Visie op Integratie*. Amsterdam: VU University Press.

Duyvendak, Jan Willem. 2011. *The Politics of Home. Nostalgia and Belonging in Western Europe and the United States*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Duyvendak, Jan Willem, Peter Geschiere, and Evelien Tonkens, eds. 2016. *The Culturalization of Citizenship. Belonging and Polarization in a Globalizing World*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Duyvendak, Jan Willem, Rogier van Reekum, Fatiha El-Hajjari, and Christophe Bertossi. 2013. "Mysterious Multiculturalism. The Risks of Using Model-Based Indices for Making Meaningful Comparisons." *Comparative European Politics* 11: 599–620.

Duyvendak, Jan Willem, and Peter Scholten. 2012. "Deconstructing the Dutch Multicultural Model: A Frame Perspective on Dutch Immigrant Integration Policymaking." *Comparative European Politics* 10 (3): 266–282.
Geschiere, Peter. 2009. *The Perils of Belonging: Autochthony, Citizenship, and Exclusion in Africa and Europe*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
Hochschild, Arlie. 2003. *The Commercialization of Intimate Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Hochschild, Arlie. 2016. *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Houtman, Dick., Peter Achterberg, Anton Derks, and Jeroen van der Waal. 2008. "A Decline in Class Voting? Class Voting and Cultural Voting in the Postwar Era (1956–1990)." In *Farewell to the Leftist Working Class*, edited by Dick Houtman, Peter Achterberg, and Anton Derks, 71–89. New Brunswick: Transaction.
Jiménez, Tomás. 2010. *Replenished Ethnicity: Mexican Americans, Immigration, and Identity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Jiménez, Tomás. 2017. *The Other Side of Assimilation: Immigration and the Changing American Experience*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Kasinitz, Philip. 2014. "Immigrants, the Arts, and the 'Second-Generation Advantage' in New York." In *New York and Amsterdam. Immigration and the New Urban Landscape*, edited by Nancy Foner, Jan Rath, Jan Willem Duyvendak, and Rogier van Reekum, 263–286. New York: NYU Press.
Kesic, Josip, and Jan Willem Duyvendak. 2016a. "Nationalism Without Nationalism? Dutch Self-Images among the Progressive Left." In *The Culturalization of Citizenship*, edited by Jan Willem Duyvendak, 49–71. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
Kesic, Josip, and Jan Willem Duyvendak. 2016b. "Anti-Nationalist Nationalism: The Paradox of Dutch National Identity." *Nations and Nationalism* 22 (3): 581–597.
de Koster, Willem, and Jeroen van der Waal. 2006. "Moreel Conservatisme en Autoritarisme Theoretisch en Methodisch Ontward. Culturele Waardeoriëntaties in de Politieke Sociologie." *Mens & Maatschappij* 81: 121–141.
Lee, Jennifer, and Frank Bean. 2010. *The Diversity Paradox: Immigration and the Color Line in Twenty-First Century America*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
Livingston, Gretchen, and Anna Brown. 2017. *Intermarriage in the U.S. 50 Years After Loving v. Virginia*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.
Maliepaard, Mieke, and Richard Alba. 2016. "Cultural Integration in the Muslim Second Generation in the Netherlands: The Case of Gender Ideology." *International Migration Review* 50: 70–94.
Meissner, Fran. 2015. "Migration in Migration-related Diversity? The Nexus Between Superdiversity and Migration Studies." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38: 556–567.
Meissner, Fran, and Steven Vertovec. 2015. "Comparing Super-Diversity." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38: 541–555.
Mepschen, Paul. 2016. *Everyday Autochthony: Difference, Discontent and the Politics of Home in Amsterdam*. PhD, University of Amsterdam.
Miyawaki, Michael. 2015. "Expanding Boundaries of Whiteness? A Look at the Marital Patterns of Part-white Multiracial Groups." *Sociological Forum* 30: 995–1016.
Morley, David. 2001. "Belongings: Place, Space and Identity in a Mediated World." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 4: 425–448.
Ngai, Mae. 2003. *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Padilla, Beatriz, Joana Azevedo, and Antonia Olmos-Alcaraz. 2015. "Super-diversity and Conviviality: Exploring Frameworks for Doing Ethnography in Southern European Intercultural Cities." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38: 621–635.

Perlmann, Joel. 2005. *Italians Then, Mexicans Now: Immigrant Origins and Second-Generation Progress, 1890–2000*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Pew Research Center. 2015. *Multiracial in America: Proud, Diverse and Growing in Numbers*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.

van Reekum, Rogier. 2014. *Out of Character: Debating Dutchness, Narrating Citizenship*. PhD, University of Amsterdam.

Slootman, Marieke. 2014. *Soulmates: Reinvention of Ethnic Identification Among Higher Educated Second Generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch*. PhD, University of Amsterdam.

Slootman, Marieke, and Jan Willem Duyvendak. 2015. "Feeling Dutch: The Culturalization and Emotionalization of Citizenship and Second-Generation Belonging in the Netherlands." In *Fear, Anxiety, and National Identity: Immigration and Belonging in North America and Western Europe*, edited by Nancy Foner and Patrick Simon, 147–168. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Vasquez, Jessica. 2011. *Mexican Americans Across Generations: Immigrant Families, Racial Realities*. New York: New York University Press.

Vasquez, Jessica. 2014. "The Whitening Hypothesis Challenged: Biculturalism in Latino and Non-Hispanic White Intermarriage." *Sociological Forum* 29: 386–407.

Verkaaik, Oskar. 2010. "The Cachet Dilemma: Ritual and Agency in New Dutch Nationalism." *American Ethnologist* 37: 69–82.

Vertovec, Steven. 2007. "Super-Diversity and Its Implications." *Ethnic and Racial Studies.* 30: 1024–1054.

de Volkskrant. 2016. "Overheid Schrapt 'Allochtoon' per Direct uit Vocabulaire." November 1.

Wang, Wendy. 2012. *The Rise of Intermarriage: Rates, Characteristics Vary by Race and Gender*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.

Wessendorf, Susanne. 2014. *Commonplace Diversity: Social Relations in a Super-diverse Context*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.