

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Open Access



The coloniality of migration and integration: continuing the discussion

Giovanna Astolfo^{1*}  and Harriet Allsopp¹

*Correspondence:
Giovanna.astolfo.13@ucl.ac.uk

¹The Bartlett Development
Planning Unit, UCL, 34 Tavistock
Square, London WC1H 9EZ, UK

Abstract

The journal *Comparative Migration Studies* has published a series of articles engaging with critiques of migrant integration. This piece wishes to contribute to such discussion, reflecting back on early critiques of integration as a concept and as a process, and reviewing more recent publications. The aim is to widen the reflection on decolonising the field by including urban postcolonial and southern instances, as well as insights from two funded projects.

Keywords: Integration, Migration, Coloniality, Decolonising, Anti-colonial, Racism, Capitalism, Extraction

Introduction

In a provocation piece for invited commentators in the journal of *Comparative Migration Studies*, Schinkel (2018) argues against migrant integration contending that it failed both ‘as a political way to describe the process in which migrants settle, and as a concept in social science to analyse such processes’ (p. 2). Schinkel continues that monitoring integration is a form of neocolonial knowledge ‘intricately bound up with the contemporary workings of power’ (p. 1). Underlying such critique, there is a problem with a certain idea of society as an ‘entity with an identity, and as an order with a border in effect positioning social science into the role of border control’ (p. 7). In this sense, integration as a concept in migration studies and policy and a practice of doing research reproduces securitarian and inherently racist discourses that currently criminalise rather than manage migration.

Schinkel’s provocations sparked wide discussion within academia. Responding to his call, scholars have pointed at how the concept of integration is harmful (Favell, 2019; Meissner, 2019). Others have engaged in a defence of the frame of integration, asserting its applicability as an analytical tool by filtering it through alternative critical lenses or by suggesting that its problematic policy-research nexus does not prevent development and application of independent, non-normative analytical concepts (Klarenbeek, 2019; Peninx, 2019). At least, others propose, integration should be examined critically, as a governance technique, or in relation to its opposite, disintegration, rather than abandoned it altogether (Hadj-Abdou, 2019; Hinger & Schweitzer, 2021). Abandoning integration

could 'forego a broader debate and institutionalisation of integration' leaving its definition entirely to policy makers (ibid). Such different positions have been captured in Saharso's (2019) piece in the same journal.

Despite the heated academic discussion, much funding schemes and funded policy-driven research on urban refuge and housing in the European Union (EU) continues to be framed by the idea of integration, mirroring the complexity of the debate as portrayed in the *Comparative Migration Studies* journal, but also retaining the problematicity highlighted by Schinkel and colleagues. A level of hopefully constructive critique is, however, growing from inside such research practice, as the result of the encounter, we argue, with decolonial methodologies.

The use of decolonial approaches in the field of migration has gained attention recently (see Achiume, 2019; Arat-Koc, 2020; Collins, 2022; Favell, 2022; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2020; Grosfoguel et al., 2015; Mayblin & Turner, 2021; Schinkel, 2022). Mayblin and Turner (2021) for instance have shown how decolonial scholarship, employing concepts offered by southern scholarship, offers a vantage point from which to approach several fields, including migration. The extension of the decolonial project to the so called global north seems necessary when dealing with the translocality and relationality of migration that simultaneously defies and reinforces the north/south/east constructs. Yet, this is not without ethical concerns, including the possibility to become 'just another fashionable set of words and concepts that will become grist for the same old knowledge-mill, underwriting and perpetuating the same old colonial processes of absenting, exploiting and, ultimately, forgetting the Indigenous people on whose material conditions it was first based' (Noxolo, 2017, p. 344). Noxolo argues that when the decolonial project 'is transported beyond grounded struggles over the experience of colonisation,' it 'runs a serious risk of dilution and domestication' (ibid.). Keeping this in mind, here the approach is employed in the attempt to disrupt and challenge bounded perspectives and categories of migration and migrant behaviour that determine the way migrants are othered and included/excluded through our dominant knowledge structures, policy and humanitarian practices.

Drawing from two different funded research projects, and humbly engaging with the important provocations started by Schinkel, our commentary wishes to strengthen the connection between a critique to migrant integration frameworks with decolonial approaches emerging from southern urban theories, to contribute to the wider reflection on 'decolonising the field'. Intended as a work of 'delinking' and 'decentring' in the formulation by Latin American scholars (Mignolo, 2007), the decolonial project is a broad endeavour of queering, challenging and changing how, from where and by whom knowledge is produced and reproduced. Within the field of migrant integration this has pedagogical and practical implications. It implies both developing and using different frameworks for discourse, policy driven research and practice, while undoing current ones, as well as teaching migration in a different way (Tuley, 2020).

Two projects

The position from where we write is that of two white researchers who have worked on urban displacement in the global south-east from different disciplinary perspectives. More recently, we have been involved in projects that examine different responses to

migration across EU urban spaces and the different strategies put in place by migrants to navigate and learn the city. Both projects, with different funding, examine practices that support migrants and refugees settlement and housing.

The first project, called European Platform for Integrating Cities, EPIC,¹ ran between 2019–2022 and was aimed at establishing a learning platform for and by local authorities, NGOs, CSO and migrant-based organisations in seven European countries (Portugal, Spain, Italy, Croatia, Greece, Poland, Germany). The aim of the platform was to co-produce, analyse and confront ‘situated’ and people-centred knowledge on migrant practices of ‘integration’ in selected cities; to facilitate and support intra- and inter-regional knowledge exchange as well as capacity building to build a knowledge ecosystem that can sustain and continually enrich new knowledge; and finally to promote research translation into people-centred policy that address migration and integration through socio-economic development programmes within the built environment.

The second project, called HOUSE-IN,² ran between 2020–2022 and was centred on the housing challenges of forced migrants. It brought together urban researchers, practitioners and policy-makers of five different countries. The aim was to shape a cross-European exchange on practices of migrants’ access to housing and social inclusion; and to co-design innovative strategies, that operate at a higher level than housing policy and are based on a vision of structural change, to address inequalities in existing housing systems. The HOUSE-IN case studies were Leipzig (Germany), Lund and Helsingborg (Sweden), Riga (Latvia) and Vienna (Austria).

Both projects involved large consortia of NGOs, CSOs, and municipalities, with fewer academic institutions, in the process of developing policy-relevant research to feed practice through the development of pilot projects and sets of strategies. The first project set off to employ migrant integration as both a framework and the main project objective. It had strong emphasis on (economic) metrics of integration, in particular related to job and housing access; on the measurability of integration through quantitative indicators; and on good practices to encourage integration. The second project set off to employ the framework of integration in a more nuanced fashion, as related to secure housing, but still retaining much of the problematicity of considering integration either an end goal, an outcome or a pre-requisite for a fulfilling life.

In both projects we initially struggled with the use of integration as a term and way of knowing. While some organisations shared the same discomfort, others did not. Coming from urban postcolonial, southern and feminist studies, and approaching the institutional framework of European academic research, we were disconcerted by the permanence of coloniality within much of the discourse around integration and within the policy and funding frameworks that guide research. While there was a shared in principle agreement that to reduce one’s complex life trajectory into metrics of integration—or any other framework that would involve the control, management and

¹ EPIC is a Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) funded project (PI Camillo Boano; co-Pi Giovanna Astolfo; co-I Harriet Allsopp; <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/development/research-projects/2023/feb/refugees-and-politics-urban-space>; <https://epicamif.eu/epic-project/>).

² HOUSE-IN is an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and JPI funded project (PI Annegret Haase; UK Pi Giovanna Astolfo; UK co-I Harriet Allsopp; link: [https://jpi-urbaneurope.eu/project/house-in/#:~:text=The%20HOUSE%20IN%20project%20consortium,at%20the%20housing%20integration%20intersection](https://jpi-urbaneurope.eu/project/house-in/#:~:text=The%20HOUSE%20IN%20project%20consortium,at%20the%20housing%20integration%20intersection;); <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/development/research-projects/2023/feb/refugees-and-politics-urban-space>).

racialisation of othered bodies—is obnoxious, the very term and concept of integration always kept bouncing back in the subtext. Resembling the notion of informality as employed in the global urban souths—the term seemed so deeply rooted in the discourse, and consequent life-world representations, to make it overly resistant to critique and change, despite its lack of intellectuality and high level of simplism, or perhaps precisely because of that, as Schinkel (2018) argues.

Our critique toward the use of an integration framework was perceived by some organisations as a form of removing purpose from the research itself. This led us to think that the problem with integration is also—but not only—that it is constructed as an affirmative concept (e.g. a positive outcome of migration), hence separated from its coloniality and racism, uncritically accepted, and even valued. *If not on integration, what shall we focus on?* Alternatives are not lacking, but why they do not sink in? Possibly, other concepts—and scholarship offers a vast repertoire as examined below—tend to complexify society and problematise difference, to a point that it makes it very difficult to be framed by those ‘essentialising’ tools like policy and within the very tight space where humanitarian organisations operate. How to support them then?

As part of our research practice, we undertook a work of undoing that took different forms, from writing to engaging in conversations with urban inhabitants, project partners and colleagues to reflect on positioning and reflexivity. Many practice partners find themselves trapped within complex bureaucratic machines, shortage of funding, and restrictive regulatory frameworks. We have worked toward co-producing forms of reflexivity starting from discursive constructions and practice. We have tried to open up spaces for discussing, criticising and ultimately undoing methods and terminologies. We have started searching for other words to add to a collective glossary. The collective glossary emerged from discussions among participants in search of words that were better grounded in embodied experiences, that were working for different cultural, knowledge and linguistic settings. We have also questioned what it means to inhabit those words.

Within this collective learning and capacity building process, and in the attempt to address the above question *If not on integration, what shall we focus on?* we have been faced with the choice of whether to develop an alternative framework, to research against integration, or to discard the discourse on integration altogether, that is, to avoid completely any form of engaging with its discourses/assumptions on how migrants settle, or unsettle, in the city, and make home. We have taken both avenues.

In the first project, borrowing from scholarship that frames migration and un/settlement as a form of urban encounter, and as a relational, emplaced and embedding practice, we employed a framework that thinks migration and integration otherwise, through a counter-hegemonic way of understanding and learning from migrants struggles, putting forward counternarratives of refugees’ lives in the city. Specifically, we have referred to it through a definition of inhabitation (Boano, 2021) as a ‘relational feminist practice constituted by multiple incremental and transformative formal and informal encounters between people, places, institutions and services that are developed to endure and maintain life ...ultimately the result of complex daily strategies of learning, navigating and governing a city’ (Boano & Astolfo, 2020, p. 555).

This understanding has helped us move beyond pre-set categories to recognise the centrality of all inhabitants and include own assessments (Astolfo et al., 2021, p. 6). Such

an approach is not too different from what Schinkel proposed, that of 'ecologies,' referring to a social science 'interested in what happens to migrants when they move, and to what happens in the larger social ecology of their movement' (p. 13). In this sense, in the first project, we worked toward exploding the concept of integration into components that would describe, rather than prescribe any life. Our survey employed 'metrics' to qualify the kind of interactions and transactions happening between migrants and urban spaces. Those metrics, which ended up being also lenses for analysis, were: knowledge, participation, networks, plans, security and belonging. We chose them for being qualitative (and unquantifiable), open, nuanced, interconnected, and for the possibility to be interpreted in non-predictable ways. 'Knowledge' could refer to how people learn to navigate urban services; how language is either a barrier or an enabler to gain access to the right to the city; how cultural heritage moves across the city and is passed on by different groups. 'Plans' repositioned all assumptions around migration as a process with an outcome, emphasising political subjectivity, and connecting migration with space and time (future). 'Networks' was aimed at understanding and tracing patterns of care, solidarity and exploitation. These metrics/lenses were a deliberate departure from standardised migration categories and, instead, centred learning from the intersectionality of urban living, made room for self-definition and multiple identities and omitted questions around origin/destination, thus avoiding survey clustering bias and revealing in-between conditions, (the resident foreigner and the foreigner practitioner, for example).

These metrics were by no means exhaustive of the complexity of the encounter between migrants and the city, but offered an alternative entry to such complexity. They were meant to allow people to position themselves as they wanted to, and to be able to construct their own truths and articulate their relation with the city. The side goal was to expose the normativity of integration, as a concept that not only does not apply to the residents (see Schinkel's concept of 'dispensation from integration') but that does not apply to refugees either. It also gave us a better idea of the migrant right to the city. Its communication however was not always easy, either 'too academic,' or 'too political.' Sometimes it felt as if we were dealing with a mere semantic issue with no tangible consequence nor possibility to be rooted in practice, while colleagues suggested focusing more on the function rather than the wordplay. Again, those working on the ground are pressured by financial limitations and surrounded by a climate of hostility. Responding to large arrivals with very limited support from regional and national levels, and within a situation already exacerbated by years of austerity, produces frustration and exhaustion to the point that issues of terminology, frameworks and reflexive approaches are quickly deprioritised and discarded.

Nevertheless, and given the fact that language is the site of both dominance and resistance (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1994) this approach helped us to reflect on de/anti-coloniality in research methods, especially in the use of surveys, and their challenges (Berg & Sigona, 2013; Buhr, 2018a, b; Hall, 2012; Vertovec, 2007). It was an attempt to move away from the binarism of integration, and all its entangled paradoxes, and see if we could just learn and talk about people and their relation with the right to the city.

In the second project we took a different approach. Instead of critically examining the integration framework at a distance, we discarded it altogether, focusing instead on racist structures of power and inequality within the housing sector. This approach went

more in the direction of what Favell (2019) suggested, meaning that the discourse and policy on integration should be completely reframed as a discourse and policy around urban equality. The underlying concept is that we are all urban dwellers, we all live in cities, and we all learn to access them—except that that learning and the levels of access are differentiated based on privilege, capitals, status and networks (see also Astolfo et al., 2021, p. 53). Henceforth, within this project we examined straightaway the core problems with refugee housing justice: racism and coloniality, looking at housing as ‘multiple modes of dwelling and inhabiting’ (Powell & Simone, 2022, p. 838).

In order to do so, we shifted the focus of our work away from the housing-integration nexus that initially framed the project. This nexus centres on secure housing as core element to integration (see Bolzoni et al., 2015 amongst others). While we did not have an interest in exploring this hypothesis, we opted for examining barriers to achieving housing equality instead. In particular, and grounding on city findings, we focused on racism and discrimination in housing including the normalisation of discriminatory practices (e.g. discrimination by landowners toward renters) and double standards in policy. The latter have become particularly evident following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. While the mobilisation to welcome Ukrainian refugees showed how housing is an infrastructure of care and solidarity for some, it also showed that it can be very colonial and discriminatory for others, especially for those refugees from Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East who historically and in present days have not been welcomed by open borders and open homes (Astolfo et al., 2022). We drew empirical insights especially from the post socialist cities of Leipzig and Riga, but also from Vienna, and our own precedent research in in Brescia, Calais and Athens, to evidence the uncomfortable narrative of the coloniality of housing refugees, that encompasses state racism, everyday discrimination and the disempowering role of humanitarian welcoming practices, accommodation schemes and integration policies. This is now part of a paper and a set of policy information briefs conceived to support better practices at the local level, but also and especially to pave the way for further needed research and policy change.³

Reflecting back on both projects, their challenges and mixed outcomes, we have come to the conclusion that different frameworks, or no frameworks, to talk about people moving are equally hard to be reflected in practice. Researching against integration requires deeper efforts in addressing structural issues around how knowledge is produced, transmitted, used. EU policy and research programmes and funding retain a strong emphasis on integration as a measurable outcome, as our first project shows. In turn, humanitarian everyday practice reflects terminology and meanings used in policy and funding, perpetuating their violent discriminations, as we encountered in both projects. Not only the public discourse remains toxic, but also the day-to-day one, through racialised and gendered routines. While some institutions and organisations embed a critical and reflexive approach into their practice, others find it extremely difficult to do so, especially when so much energy is diverted to fighting against limited budgets, and lack of political recognition. Even more so in the case of organisations that deal with far

³ Part of the findings are collected in a paper titled *Migrant housing struggle, discrimination and coloniality. Beyond integration toward urban equality in post-socialist Leipzig and Riga* which was submitted to a peer review journal. The paper is co-authored by Harriet Allsopp, Giovanna Astolfo, Annegret Haase, Karlis Laksevics, Anika Schmidt, Bahanur Nasya. At the time of writing the policy information briefs are undergoing peer review.

right politics, overt racism and oppression, and highly restrictive border policies. The absence of reflexivity, the consequent risk of whitewashing, and 'white innocence' (Wekker, 2016) within those white-led municipalities and organisations are hard to address and challenge. It would require an active, collaborative, committed, long term effort of regular undoing, unlearning and delinking to achieve some sort of change. It would take time, energy and will not provide any quick solution to the broad challenge of, for instance, housing refugees. The solution driven approach is per se part of the problem.

The projects we have been involved with taught us about the difficulty of research translation, especially in terms of translating academic preoccupations into practice... but, in the absence of significant top-down structural change, through engaging with other academics and with practitioners and communities, incremental shifts in perspective and practice can be achieved.

With Schinkel (2018), we will continue to advocate 'to actively work against, the existing imagination about what happens when people move and settle in another country' (p. 9).

While this commentary cannot offer a solution, or a conclusive argument, it wishes to continue engaging with the work of undoing, and working against pre-set forms of imagination, even if it is complicated, contradictory, frustrating and often very contested. To do so, this paper continues by providing a quick overview of early critiques of integration as a concept and process and, via Schinkel's critique and a coloniality lens, it connects integration to broader questions of power and inequality and of challenging, undoing and reimagining.

A quick overview

The current critiques of migrant integration are not novel. Indeed, integration policy, practice and conceptualisation has come under continuous scrutiny and critique, developing over time and in response to inadequacies of the asylum reception and integration processes, observed and experienced. The language of classic assimilation prominent in the 1920s and the policy paradigm originating in the post-war era produced discriminatory practice criticised and rejected through civil rights movements. Assimilation morphed into multiculturalism, which suffered a political backlash in the 1990s and early 2000s when politicians claimed it encouraged 'separateness' between communities. This was echoed by academics who argued that multiculturalism leads to parallel societies and ultimately marginalisation, radicalisation and conflict (Heath & Demireva, 2014). This broad critique of multiculturalism, what Schinkel (2018) terms *multiculturealism*, led to policy interventions and instruments limiting immigration, imposing standards and prerequisites for inclusions and citizenship—measures of so-called integration.

Multiple reconceptualizations and redefinitions of integration against different backgrounds and frames of analysis have mark attempts to respond to major shifts in thinking and moments, such as the so-called migration 'crisis' of 2015: efforts to understand, analyse and fix the 'broken system of reception' (Betts & Collier, 2017). Movements away from rigid unidirectional, or indeed binary, notions of integration continue. Even as a 'two-way' relational process, however, integration is widely recognised as an unequal one, comparable to assimilation. While assimilation was also described by Gordon (1964) as a mutual process, it was contextualised by a static dominant culture and

society. Integration similarly creates distorted conceptualisations of ‘society’ as homogenous, immobile and non-migrant (Schinkel, 2018, p. 10). It is rigged in favour of the ‘host society’ against the migrant, the outsider. For members of that ‘society’ belonging and inclusion is unquestioned—what Schinkel calls ‘dispensation of integration’ (Schinkel, 2017, 2018).

Integration policies have concentrated around reception, categorisation and release, establishing a legal status framework and the institutional environment for migrants, and for host/guest, refugees/migrant migrant/citizen distinctions (Astolfo et al., 2021, p. 12). Numerous scholars have critiqued this as an incomplete policy framework creating situations of exclusion and limbo for those experiencing it (Hamlin, 2021; Karatani, 2005; Marchetti & Franceschelli, 2018; Scalettaris, 2007; Zetter, 2007). In most cases the onus is placed on migrants to integrate, at will, leading to migrant blame for integration failures (Camilo, 2010). Its terminology and policy frames integration as something that is, essentially, a top-down process, and a ‘colonial’ concept, as discussed below in more detail.

Attempts to situate current practices within and across time and space have added historical and geographical context and critical perspectives that resists the ‘largely myopic, ahistorical, and isolationist responses that governments and media have developed to migrant arrivals in the global North’ (Berg & Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, p. 2). Responding to top-down international and national policy directives and integration frameworks, critiques have stressed the importance of place and migrant agency at the micro-level as a way of highlighting the multi-dimensional nature of integration and everyday encounter as a site of integration (Askins, 2015; Astolfo et al., 2021; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015, 2016; Platts-Fowler & Robinson, 2015). This work attempts to shift focus onto and recognise the role and opinions of migrants (Phillimore, 2012) and to understand place as mediators of social exclusion and/or inclusion (Spicer, 2008), a perspective often lacking from policy.

Superdiversity, put forward by Vertovec (2007) became a popular concept for analysing immigration and ethnic diversity. The lens has been characterised as one that describes ‘an exceptional demographic situation characterised by the multiplication of social categories within specific localities’ (Wessendorf, 2014, p. 2). In terms of integration, superdiversity has been used to take account of changes to migration processes and receiving societies. While, as a concept, integration developed around ‘traditional’ migration, or when migrants settled permanently in countries characterised by a ‘dominant’ host population, increased fluidity and diversity within receiving societies requires a reconceptualisation of integration in terms of superdiversity. (Grzymala-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2018). The framework has been employed and debated widely, across disciplines and to various ends, as shown by Vertovec’s overview (2019) and it is not without problems or critiques. Alexander (2018) has referred to the ‘empty empiricisms of superdiversity’ (p. 1044). Schinkel (2018) and Ndhlovu (2016) also contend that superdiversity rests on the same foundations as integration: ‘namely, the tendency to homogenize cultural and social groups,’ an ‘uncritical embrace of elitist neoliberal conceptualizations of culture and identity’ (p. 28) and an immobile distinct society (Schinkel, 2018, p. 10). Against this, Meissner (2019) asserts that ‘Schinkel’s benchmark of furthering “the complexity with which the discipline grasps the social world” (2018:10–11) is a core principle

in thinking through and with superdiversity' (p. 3). For Schinkel, however, superdiversity does not remedy integration's flaws.

Responses to Schinkel largely converge on and acknowledge three central problematics with the concept of integration: the 'society'/'immigrant' binary that creates a permanent continuous space/gap between the two; they agree that 'the central role of the nation-state as the sole democratic space for decision-making and identity-building is problematic' (Graef, 2019, p. 9) and, national integration, 'an absurd anachronism' (Favell, 2019); and the entanglement of the social sciences in the reproduction of asymmetrical power relations. While in these critiques 'integration' presents as an obstacle to equality, inclusion and belonging, the question that continues to be debated, is whether or not 'integration' is inherently flawed in its tenets and if so what is the way forward or, if it is possible or, indeed, useful to salvage some analytical value from the concept.

Alternative conceptualisations of integration include those of Hadj Abdou (2019), Saharso (2019) and Graef (2019) who argue for more weight to be given to non-national levels and dimensions of social system management, for example viewing cities, not the nation-state, as spaces of membership, residency and inclusion and for 'writing the local, regional, and supranational into it as additional paths of thinking about conviviality' (p. 16). Spencer and Charsley (2021) propose a non-normative conceptualisation of integration, while Skrobanek and Jobst's (2019) formulation of 'liquid integration' rejects static understandings of society. Engaging with the debate sparked by Schinkel's work, Klarenbeek (2019) agrees that 'conceptualizations and operationalizations of integration can be problematic', but rejects the suggestion that there is no way to think of integration outside this problematic discourse. She introduces the concept of 'relational integration' as an analytic tool that surmounts Schinkel's argument that 'integration' exempts 'non-migrants', and places migrants outside society. Yet as an analytical tool this remains linked to nation-state boundaries, to difference, and citizen/migrant distinctions arising from state-centric understanding of membership, identity and migration—premises at the centre of Schinkel's critique. While Klarenbeek's 'relational integration' may help narrow inequalities/gaps between host/migrant it is not clear how it can 'overcome the boundary of proper/improper membership in a polity, which builds on more than equal rights (and is not necessarily crossed by formally acquiring citizenship, either, as other resources are often denied)' (Graef, 2019, p. 8).

While convergence on the problematics of the society/migrant binary, the normativity of the concept and the centrality of the nation-state (or methodological nationalism) is common, few offer radical alternatives to 'integration'. The question of what is beyond 'integration' remains open, especially in terms of practice and policy, but it also reflects in research. Do we focus on what next steps are possible: a project that 'in the very least allows thinking about what happens if immigrant integration is no longer accessible as an object of analysis' (Meissner, 2019, p. 6). Or concentrate on influencing the social sciences, extending the debate into mainstream academia and "nationalised" spheres of state knowledge production, confronting normative state-centric and nationalist underpinnings of integration 'on their own terms' (Favell (2019) p. 8/p. 1). Or is the answer for social scientists 'write against integration', not to remedy its failures. (Rytter, 2018). Schinkel himself frames the central dilemma within the debate in relation to racism: 'The question is ultimately whether we want to make

resources available for racist modes of relating to migrants and their children, or for alternatives' (Schinkel, 2018, p. 16). We return to some aspects of racism and alternatives in the next section.

That racism and integration are closely embedded, is addressed by Sebastiani and Martín-Godoy (2020) who point to specific connections between the apparatuses of 'multi-level governance' of integration and the functioning logics of racism, and thus question the transformative potential of integration policies. This connection is such that racism is depoliticised through integration itself. Instead integration becomes responsible for a 'civilising and disciplinary programme aimed at *correcting* the presumed deficiencies in ethnically marked populations' ((Maeso, 2015, p. 53): a rationalisation that 'depoliticises racism by constantly shifting the focus to the presumed characteristics of the 'other', re-enacting white-privileged notions of nationhood' (ibid). Thus, even within its critiques, integration measures are often thought of as useful 'recipes' against racism, or even as its opposite. Terms such as 'diversity', 'participation', 'active citizenship', 'interculturality' used in conjunction with integration are not often subject to problematisation (Sebastiani & Martín-Godoy, 2020) and are broadly adopted, along with their antonyms, in popular and political discourse around migration.

Indeed, it is argued that racial meanings and inequalities in the present are produced by bordering, and immigration controls and citizenship restrictions themselves (De Noronha, 2019, p. 2419). Rather than existing a priori, according to Fox et al (2012), racial distinctions are 'the contingent outcome of immigration policy, practices, and processes' (p. 692), including security. Referring to the United Kingdom, they argue that 'the state's immigration policy, ... exhibits features of institutionalized racism that implicitly invokes shared whiteness as a basis of racialized inclusion' (p. 681). Racialisation meets criminalisation within border regimes, as De Genova (2013) shows. Borders are enacted in a 'border spectacle', that establishes 'migrant "illegality" as a self-evident "act", generated by its own supposed act of violation' (p. 1182), that of mobility. From this focus on illegality and exclusion, embedded in asylum regimes that disproportionately disqualify asylum seekers, and 'convert them into 'illegal' and deportable 'migrants', subsequent inclusion (and integration) becomes a form of subjugation in itself (ibid). The securitisation of migration also, can be examined as a 'discourse through which relations of power are exercised' and as 'racism's most modern form' (Ibrahim, 2005, pp. 163–164), which connects with integration in attempts to protect 'socio-political cohesion' (Karyotis, 2007, pp. 1–2), and to position cultural homogeneity as a 'stabilizing factor' (Huysmans, 2000, p. 753). '[T]he protection and transformation of cultural identity is one of the key issues through which the politics of belonging and the question of migration are connected' (ibid p. 762).

Looking at the race-migration nexus, Erel et al (2016), provide a framework for understanding the conceptualization of race and for how it is ignored within migration scholarship. They argue that approaches that eschew race and racialization analytically, present racism as external to ('post-racial') European identity, and deny the necessity of anti-racist approaches to migration. Race, racialisation and othering, in this sense, stand out as (inadvertently?) embedded within policy and practice and in scholarship around migration, demanding the critical reflection on underlying (colonial) power structures and knowledge systems.

The decolonial project and migration

There is agreement in the academic literature that integration and migration stand on a nation-state centred vision of society rooted in the trinity state/territory/sovereignty and sustained by specific workings of power: colonial and racial capitalism. This means that integration is—always—colonial and racist. It is colonial in its origins—as it was developed toward the end of the ‘formal’ colonial empires to ‘protect’ white EU society from mixed blood colonial subjects (Schinkel, 2018; Sharma, 2020). It is also colonial in the way that it maintains and reproduces binary distinctions between she who is welcomed, and cared for, and he who welcomes and cares for, in current practice and policy. Finally, it is racist in the sense that it perpetuates colonial categorisation of subjects as superior/inferior, more or less human, and allocates them to the ‘zone of being’ or the ‘non-being’ (Fanon, 1952, 1963; Mbembe 2003; Maldonado-Torres, 2008, Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

Migrant integration is a form of ‘present-day colonialism that works to reimpose the idea of European hegemony over “other” racialized groups’ (Gill, 2020, p. 5). In this sense, integration cannot be understood nor addressed without understanding the notion of coloniality (Mignolo, 2000; Quijano, 2007) intended as the long *durée* of colonialism, and the permanence of its manifestation in today’s power asymmetry, racial difference and inequality. Coloniality is the tenacious survival of colonial effects and divisions and it ‘is still the most general form of domination in the world today’ (ibid p. 170; see also Stoler, 2016). Coloniality continues to define ‘culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns’ (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 243). And, we argue, it is maintained in the management and knowledge production of migration and integration. ‘We breath coloniality all the time and everyday’ (ibid).

If migration is to be understood as produced by coloniality, in turn policy, research and discourse on integration are, from a coloniality lens, regarded as the panacea for a problem that is created by the same colonial powers. With other words, colonial powers produce the problem (migration) that they claim to address (integration). In parallel, integration, and the bodies of knowledge that sustain it, including policy and funded research, work toward maintaining the power imbalance, and a colonial and raced form of dominance.

Coloniality of power is increasingly discussed in relation to migration as several recent studies suggest (Carver, 2019; De Sousa Santos, 2007; El-Enany, 2020; Mamdani, 2018; Mongia, 2018; Picozza, 2020; Schinkel, 2018; Tuley, 2020; Vanyoro et al., 2019). Schinkel (2018) examines how integration, and consequently migration, are a colonial produce, practised in colonial contexts to assess the morals of Europeans of mixed blood; to check people suitability to white society as a basis for citizenship; to catalogue them as part of different ethnic traditions, or to restrict migration. ‘Just to be clear, then: yes, measuring immigrant integration is a thoroughly neocolonial practice’ (p. 12). Schinkel also points at how the lack of reflexivity and positionality, whitewashing, racism and ‘white innocence’ (Wekker, 2016) are the core problem in doing research. He locates this in ‘power asymmetries that in turn help shape the raced classifications and ethnic taxonomies of researchers’ and points to the ‘very whiteness of the research community’ (Schinkel, 2018, p. 12), arguing that we need to be re-educated to understand effects of whiteness

and the fact that it is ‘reproduced by the off-hand, instinctive denial of its very existence’ (ibid).

In a similar vein, coloniality is perpetuated through institutions, and terminology (Vanyoro et al., 2019). ‘[R]esearchers have to see themselves as part of (in our case) migration governance systems. Scholars do not simply speak truth to power; but are part of these power constellations by making sense of the world in a certain way and by producing knowledge that is always shaped and formed in a context of power’. Within our two projects we have experienced the same limitations—from the whiteness of the research and practice community, to the lack of critical self-reflexion, and to the difficulty in recognising that not being racist is not enough.

Tuley (2020) argues that the concept of migration and integration is also fraught by selective amnesia as it elides colonial histories, such as the fact that those who are now called migrants were once citizens of the empire—and this, the author argues, is a gap in reading migration together with studies of coloniality and empire. She borrows from Bhabra (2017), to argue that ‘the failure to address the colonial histories of Europe’... ‘enables the dismissal of the postcolonial and multicultural present of Europe and the associated populations whether they come as migrants or as people seeking refuge and asylum’ (p. 396).

Returning to integration itself, the notion of coloniality helps to locate integration, as well as migration, within histories of colonialism. It recognises that ‘migrants do not arrive in an empty or neutral space, but in metropolitan spaces that are already ‘polluted’ by racial power relations...already informed and constituted by coloniality’ (Grosfoguel et al., 2015, p. 641). In its ‘othering’, its binaries, its securitisation and racialisation of borders, through its implication in racialized capitalism and exploitation, integration is very much a structure of contemporary colonialism, upheld by ‘sanctioned ignorance’ (Spivak, 1999) within the field of migration studies, within border and security regimes within humanitarianism and migrant management. Within structures of racialized capitalism. Recognising this is an act of decolonialism. But it does not, cannot stop there.

Decoloniality

‘.decoloniality refers to efforts at rehumanizing the world, to breaking hierarchies of difference that dehumanize subjects and communities and that destroy nature, and to the production of counter-discourses, counter-knowledges, counter-creative acts, and counter-practices that ... open up multiple other forms of being in the world. (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p. 10).

The urgency of calling to disrupt webs of coloniality embedded in knowledge production and practice of migration and integration is evident. Decolonising means to get rid of hierarchies and power structures, to embrace many perspectives especially those who are excluded. For Mignolo (2007) decolonising means ‘delinking’, or unlearning the ‘associated dispositions and values’ instilled by the dominant colonial regime. This is not an easy endeavour. As we have explained at the beginning, institutions, NGOs and researchers work in very limited spaces. Nonetheless, it is important to embrace exercises of decolonisation ‘for the coloniality of power lies in always assuming that we are right without interrogating our own actions as individuals’ (Vanyoro et al., 2019). In

this sense, decolonising means engaging in a deep reflexive attitude, as Schinkel himself suggests, when dealing with migration and integration. The long tradition of feminist human geography offers a vast repertoire on reflexivity, from remaining alert to the (re) surfacing of normative language, ideologies and approaches; to reflecting on how the beliefs of the researcher/practitioner influence the research/work, and viceversa; how to maintain epistemic humility, while continuously scrutinising knowledge production and challenging racism. Institutions and individuals have knowledge, power and agendas to pursue. They are embedded in power relations and tend to reproduce those relations. Attempting a decolonial project, means constantly reflecting upon and challenging how knowledge, position and relations are produced to silence some groups and voice others, to create and constitute difference, to racialise certain bodies over others. Decolonising also means to challenge and/or abandon certain frameworks. In our projects we have attempted at both—to challenge in the first one, and to abandon in the second one, as explained earlier.

This is nothing new. Decolonial projects—even before the decolonial turn and scholarship—have been present throughout history (Mignolo, 2007). Many alternative frameworks for migration research have been developed that could themselves be seen as decolonial projects, and should be taken in much consideration. Schinkel (2018) has widely advocated for the development of such alternatives, as well as for the abandonment of the notion of integration altogether. Responding to his provocation, Favell (2019) has suggested that operationalising a decolonial agenda hinges on confronting mainstream academia, as ‘co-producers in this production of power and domination’ (p. 8). His prepositions involve a breakdown of theoretical normative underpinnings of the concept of integration, its methodological nationalism and whiteness. It offers a deconstruction of the mainstream ‘on its own terms’, to recognise and better understand how categorisation of international migration and mobility and bordering are used by sovereign nation-states to sustain social hierarchies and power structures. In doing so, Favell attempts to broaden the conversation and reflection on a critical decolonial perspective, beyond the ‘comfortable terrain of critical race and whiteness studies’ and its allied fields (p. 1). In a similar vein, Dahinden (2016) proposes to ‘de-migranticize’ migration and integration research through a threefold strategy. She argues that ‘it is possible to disembed this field of research from the migration apparatus by clearly distinguishing between common-sense and analytical categories in research, articulating migration theory more closely with other social science theories and re-orienting the focus of investigation away from “migrant populations” towards “overall populations”’ (p. 2208). The suggestion is indeed very simple, and yet extremely complicated, if not risky—as it might neglect degrees of vulnerability, and reinforce patterns of privilege.

Connected to postcolonial studies, focusing on migrant led narratives, postmigration has recently gained traction as a notion that addresses transformations and struggles unfolding in contemporary cities. The concept is useful to de-essentialize the discourse on integration and challenge assured principles in the field of migration (Geonkar et al., 2021, p. 17). Drawing on an ongoing self-reflexive debate in German migration research, Romhild (2017) discusses new approaches in critical migration research that aim to broaden perspective and reverse its viewing direction. From the perspective of its ethnicized and racialized ‘margins’, the naturalized ‘centre’ can be explored as being part of a

postmigrant, postcolonial space of cultural dynamics and social struggles. Extending its scope in this way, beyond its conceptual limits, migration research would be cosmopolitanized and turned into a general study of cultural and social realities crossing ethnic and national bounds. Bromley (2017) examines issues related to arrival, struggle and belonging 'in an effort, not to define postmigrancy and postmigration as such, but to speculate upon the possibility of opening up new cultural and imaginative futures' (p. 44). According to him, postmigration goes beyond the guest/host logic and language to open new possibilities and 'fresh cultural horizons drawn out of difference and distance' (ibid). In this sense, Bromley concludes, '[m]igrancy may still figure in the narratives but as something to be exceeded, gone beyond' (ibid). In this sense, postmigration links to other attempts to confront coloniality, by challenging academic and political instrumentalizations of migration that designate migrants as 'Others,' distinct from a majority society.

Feminist critique to migrant studies have rejected notions of integration and inclusion and have placed their interest in those transformative relations between people, places and institutions, driven by individual choices and collective constraints that allow for building an urban basis. The attempt has been to decolonise the notion of integration by unlinking it from structures of power and privilege, policy and disciplinary language and categories. Ethics of care, collective and radical care have been employed to rethink human and more than human relations. While care is referred to as 'an affective connective tissue between an inner self and an outer world... and as a critical survival strategy' (Hobart & Kneese, 2020, p. 2), it is also recognised that dominant paradigms of care are connected to its humanitarian function and shaped by neo-liberal practices that make care work invisible. Within migration management and integration rhetoric, humanitarian care produces differentiation and exclusions. Pertinent to this context is Miraftab et al (2019) description of care as having been used as an alibi for super-exclusion and a demonstration of the need for different functions of care, including as 'transformative solidarity'—in lieu of a short-term humanitarian care which does not go above the individual and does not address historical and structural problems. Instead, radical care will have elements that critique this and move beyond categories of deserving: it is inter-scalar, not temporal and emergency driven. 'Radical care can present an otherwise, even if it cannot completely disengage from structural inequalities and normative assumptions regarding social reproduction, gender, race, class, sexuality, and citizenship' (Hobart & Kneese, 2020, p. 3). Similarly, Dowler et al (2019) call for a 'radical care praxis that challenges the on-going devaluation of human subjectivity; recognises the persistence of institutional racism, sexism, heteronormativity' (p. 36). Bringing a radical collective care perspective to relations and biases constructed by migration studies offers an avenue for envisioning and employing an otherwise, an alternative to neoliberal coloniality.

In other works of reflexive reframing, migration and integration have been reframed as a form and practice of urban encounter (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015, 2016), as a relational practice (Latimer & Munro, 2019) extremely subjective and non-normative (Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015; Grzymala-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2018) emplaced (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2016; Phillimore et al., 2017; Wessendorf, 2014) and embedding (Ryan & Mulholland, 2015), as a form of inhabitation (Boano & Astolfo, 2020) intended as transformative encounters that are developed to endure and maintain life. All these conceptualisations focus, to a certain extent, on the affective relations, coping mechanisms, and

bottom-up strategies that make up people's urban survival and thrive. They are premised upon the idea that we live in cities, we learn how to access them—their services, jobs and housing provisions, depending on different levels of privilege. In this sense, they all point in one direction: toward rethinking the discourse, practice and policy on integration as a discourse and policy around urban collective life, equality and justice. Urban equality, based on Young and Fraser, offers a framework based on several elements: spatial and social justice, knowledge co-production, positionality and collective care (Yap et al., 2021) that could replace the idea of integration in policy.

In terms of broader structural decolonisation of migration and, therefore, removing the need for 'integration', various proposals addressing state-centred liberal capitalist thought have been put forward. Decolonising, whilst also avoiding coloniality itself, however, is not a straightforward task. For example, intrinsic to colonial regimes, migration governance, integration policy and othering are borders. Do we advance a radical, or utopian, 'No Borders' argument (Anderson et al., 2009), as a practical political project to combat coloniality. Or is it more pragmatic to concentrate on the decolonisation of borders themselves, (Mbembe, 2018, Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Mayblin & Turner, 2021) unsettling assumptions around citizenship and membership that maintain and order racial capitalism. Rethinking them and challenging the way classical liberal capitalist thought, 'managed mobility' and border security contains racialized bodies within 'carceral landscapes' (Mbembe, 2018). Drawing on precolonial African imaginings of borders, as by definition designed to be crossed, Mbembe (2018) presents mobility, and thus migration, as the driving force of transformation and change, with wealth in people trumping wealth in things. Denaturalising the nation-state and liberal capitalism as the reference for understanding politics (and migration), and accessing alternative archives of thought and language offers a means of decentring European knowledge and understanding migration, and integration, differently.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper we have drawn on literature addressing coloniality with a focus on 'integration' as a policy, practice and an area in which academic knowledge and theorisation enmesh with them inextricably. It is not an attempt in itself to offer a solution, rather it is an engagement with the work of undoing, and a work against preset forms of imagining. It is part of a much broader effort, on multiple scales and processes, of decolonisation. Through its focus, it is an attempt to address 'sanctioned ignorance' (Spivak, 1999) inherent within 'integration' imaginings, and to draw out the coloniality of 'integration', its racism, nation-state centrism, and divisiveness.

Coloniality as a lens can illuminate discriminatory power structures and dynamics at play, often lost within discourses of integration and of host societies and migrant differentiation. Coloniality is also useful as a means of reconnecting 'integration' to broader questions of power and inequality shaped by history of colonialism and maintained within its continuing formations within knowledge production of migration and integration. Decoloniality disrupts webs of coloniality and can frame 'integrations' 'humpty dumpty' moment (Hall, 1990), dismantling a broken system, but also raising questions about how to move forward, how to translate decoloniality into practice, structures and institutions. Whether we adhere to it or not, the concept of

‘integration’ and all it entails remains embedded within policy-driven research and practice. How to challenge and abandon it as a framework and reconstruct how we ‘talk about people moving’?

Alternative frameworks exist, yet they hardly come about in funded research programmes and policy. As we have seen in our research, they are hard to put into practice. There is agreement that tenets of integration entail a negative, normative and discriminatory instance—the inability of a person to conform to society or place, yet integration as incorporation into codes and spaces permeates the practice of NGOs and CSOs and reflect onto funded research programmes too. In this light, integration continues to be discussed as a one way process, in the absence of a more radical epistemic challenge unfolding. Similarly, even if scholars and beyond converge on the fact that integration implies a nation-centred vision of society, humanitarian practice still reproduces divisive, ‘othering’, racialised and ultimately dehumanising dynamics.

Tuley (2020) and Schinkel (2022) argue that if we are to take decolonization seriously we should dismantle migration studies. This is to say, to dismantle the full system of thought and knowledge production around migration given it is grounded on colonial principles. This is not the only problem with the work of dismantling, delinking and undoing. There is a risk that decolonising becomes co-opted (Moosavi, 2020) and a mere buzz-word (Tuley, 2020). Similarly, Sharma (2020) articulates that ‘Struggle becomes a reflection of the problem it aims to address, forever turning into its mirror opposite, and the “Postcolonial New World Order” becomes a permanent condition at the end of history’. She refers to struggles for liberation that, if happening within nation-states, can mirror struggles for sovereignty. In this sense, natives are colonial constructs, that come into being only when the settler arrives, building what Congolese philosopher Mudimbe calls the ‘colonial library’ (2021). There is, with other words, a pressing need to decolonise decolonisation. Operating within mainstream knowledge and power structures and policy and frameworks that cling to colonial concepts and practises, are we still reproducing that coloniality of power, even while we champion decoloniality and seek to apply a decolonial framework? This is certainly something to be mindful of and to avoid. But from a position, constrained by those structures, there remains a pressing need to challenge, undo, unsettle, and claim and open space for alternative reference points and knowledges.

While this paper has addressed coloniality of integration and migration governance more broadly and has tried to highlight frameworks and lenses for research that navigate and challenge colonial constructs, it has not shied away from the complex challenges to unravelling and undoing coloniality. From the space we are given and from that which we encroach upon or create for ourselves, we hope that even incremental works of decolonising policy, practice and knowledge around migration, mobility, settling and living can be meaningful, whether they involve a critical self-reflection, holding a mirror to others or a direct challenge to dominant assumptions and practices of the global north, a conscious de-centring and upsetting of nationalist methodologies or an assertion of alternative methods and ontologies. At the very least we can employ decolonial methodologies to refuse, and work against, the positioning of the ‘social science into the role of border control’ (Schinkel, 2018, p. 7) and all that that entails.

Abbreviation

EU European Union

Acknowledgements

The article is the outcome of several iterations and conversations between the authors. An earlier, much less developed version, was included in the DPU Working Paper number 208 titled “Unsettling integration”. It can be found at <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/development/research-projects/2021/jan/refugees-and-politics-urban-space>.

Author contributions

The different sections of the present paper are attributed as follows: GA has written the “Introduction” and the section “1. Two projects”; HA has written the section “2. A quick overview”; GA has written the section “3. The decolonial project and migration” with contributions from HA; the conclusion has been written by HA with contributions from GA.

Funding

This paper develops from reflections from the ESRC (Economic Social Research Council) / JPI funded project HOUSE-IN www.ufz.de/house-in led by Annegret Haase (UFZ); and from earlier projects, including the AMIF (Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund) project EPIC <https://epicamif.eu/> led by ALDA (European Association for Local Democracy).

Availability of data and materials

Not applicable.

Declarations**Competing interests**

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Received: 5 September 2022 Accepted: 14 June 2023

Published online: 05 July 2023

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