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COMMENTARY

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Considering Power and Institutional Change in the Study of Migration's Impact on Non-Migrants: Commentary on Schut & Crul (2024) and Keskiner et al. (2024)

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Abstract

Schut and Crul (2024) and Keskiner et al. (2024) bring much-needed attention to migration's impact on host societies. They investigate Dutch non-migrant parents' responses to migration-related issues that arise in their children's schooling, highlighting the diversity of those responses. Future analyses should move beyond individual analyses to understand broader social changes, how group-level status shapes institutional responses to migration, and the role that systemic racism or Islamophobia may play in shaping individual and institutional responses to migration. This requires empirical analyses that incorporate participant observation in specific institutions (for example, schools), and attention to organizational decision-making.

Keywords

assimilation; critical race theory; education; Europe; international migration; parenting

Global migration raises a fundamental question: How do people and societies change as a result of human movement across international borders? Scholars of migration have spent considerable energy considering how migrants themselves change as a result of living in new places. The resulting studies have identified myriad factors that shape those changes: the new home's welfare state provisions (see, for example, Fox, 2012), immigration and citizenship policies (for example, see Menjívar & Abrego, 2012), racial systems (for example, see Haney-López, 1996), and education systems (for example, see Warikoo, 2011); a migrant's level of education (for example, see Lan, 2018), knowledge of the dominant language, and co-ethnic community resources (for example, see Portes & Rumbaut 2001); and more. While early models of immigrant integration assumed a cohesive "mainstream" society into which migrants would assimilate, scholars have long discarded that simplistic framing. Portes and Zhou (1993) acknowledged the different "segments" of American society

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into which migrants assimilate (see also Gans, 1992). But acknowledging diversity in society is not sufficient to understand migration-related social changes, because non-migrants and society itself also change as a result of migration. As such, this volume makes a critical contribution, particularly given the ubiquity of international migration in the world today: Approximately 280 million people live in a country other than the one in which they were born (Natarajan et al., 2022).

Two scholarly developments have pushed the discussion of migration's impact beyond migrant communities themselves: neo-assimilation, and critical race scholarship. In the neo-assimilation tradition, Richard Alba and Victor Nee have encouraged scholars to conceptualize migration-related change as two-way (Alba & Nee, 1997). They define assimilation as "the decline, and at its endpoint the disappearance, of an ethnic/racial distinction and the cultural and social differences that express it" (p. 863). Alba and Nee (1997) empirically study assimilation by examining the extent to which differences between immigrant groups, their children, and non-migrant groups persist or decline over generations. Tomás Jiménez furthers our understanding of neo-assimilation by investigating the impact of migration on non-migrants in his study of three communities in California. He finds that both migrants and non-migrants change over time, and describes a process of "relational assimilation": "back-and-forth adjustments in daily life by both newcomers and established individuals as they come into contact with one another" (Jiménez, 2017, p. 11). Jiménez shows that relational assimilation happens in diverse types of communities, cutting across class and race.

The articles in this thematic issue (Waldring et al., 2024) lie within the neo-assimilation tradition, emphasizing, like Jiménez, the side of assimilation that has received relatively scant attention: how non-migrants change. They consider what non-migrants do when faced with difference. Do they feel a sense of group threat? Do they seek ways to adapt in response to group differences? Under what conditions do they accept and even embrace diversity? Crul et al. (2024) outline four factors that shape non-migrants' responses to "becoming a minority": (a) attending a mixed school; (b) having an immigrant partner; (c) participating in activities that involve both migrants and non-migrants; and (d) having a child who attends a diverse school. The articles by Schut and Crul (2024) and Keskiner et al. (2024) take a deep dive into the fourth factor to understand what happens when cultural differences arise in the deeply personal domain of children's schooling in the eyes of non-migrant parents. In doing so, both articles go beyond studies that analyze the choices families make about where to live and send their children to school, to understand the *consequences* of where children live and attend school. Together they show variation in responses to diversity, even among adults of the same social class living in the same city. While some show signs of assimilation, others push back.

Schut and Crul (2024) discuss progressive middle-class non-migrant parents who made a deliberate choice to send their children to Amsterdam schools in which they are a racial minority. While the parents value the diversity of their children's schools, sex education emerges as an issue that divided the non-migrant and (Muslim) immigrant communities of their schools. Some parents responded with "confrontation," using their social position to push for their desired form of sex education to continue in their children's schools despite opposition from migrant families. One of these parents insisted she would "stand up for my own rights." Others expressed beliefs that over time their fellow parents would "catch up" to their modern perspective. Like the confrontational parents, they are clear-eyed in their view that theirs is the superior perspective, but they take a patient, collaborative approach to getting their fellow parents to their perspective rather than a confrontational one. Finally, a third group of parents simply advocated a "compromise" approach by moving some aspects of sex education to their homes, out of the schools, to maintain community cohesion.

Keskiner et al. (2024) analyze interviews with a broader set of parents—middle-class parents in Amsterdam and working-class parents in Tilburg, a medium-sized city, asking similar questions about responses to diversity in their children's schools. The authors find that while most parents do not report diversity to be the main factor determining where they live (indeed, many of the working-class parents were living in social housing assigned to them), it does play a minor role in school choice. Some middle-class parents distanced themselves from neighbors who seemed to prefer sending their children to more distant schools so they could be in a setting with more non-migrant families. Those with less interaction with migrants, both in childhood and as parents, took an "idealist" position, embracing diversity with less interaction, and sometimes rethinking their perspectives when confronted with forms of difference, such as in native language usage among fellow parents. "Pragmatists," on the other hand, experienced more diversity in their quotidian lives but critiqued what they viewed as a lack of migrants' assimilation related to language usage and religion. These were working-class parents in Tilburg. Finally, other working-class parents took a "realist" position, seeing diversity as a lived reality without judgement. Their lower-status class position along with growing up in diverse communities may have facilitated a stance that treats migrants on more equal footing compared to other parents' stances.

Schut and Crul (2024) and Keskiner et al. (2024) both find that middle-class non-migrant progressives in Amsterdam feel empowered to decide how community relations should and will emerge. That finding resonates with my own study an ocean away, in a well-off suburban community on the east coast of the United States (Warikoo, 2022). In that study I found that white non-migrant parents embraced the concept of "diversity" in their community while simultaneously using their status position to advocate for school policies that protect their children's status position over that of their Asian American peers. This included de-emphasizing academic competition by eliminating class rank when Asian American children were outperforming white students academically and were rapidly growing in number in the school district.

Going forward, scholars of migration would do well to heed these scholars' attention to the impact of migration on non-migrants. In addition, I want to suggest pushing this move further, to understanding not only individual-level change, but also broader social changes that happen through migration (for an example of this see Foner, 2022). For example, do status hierarchies shift when migrant-background children outperform non-migrants in school, or do non-migrants find ways to maintain their position at the top of the status hierarchy (see Jiménez, 2017; Warikoo, 2022)?

In my own study described above, I found that white non-migrant parents much more frequently had their desires for school changes enacted, in part because they shared a cultural perspective with school leaders, most of whom were white middle class; at the same time, many Asian migrant parents felt ill-equipped to advocate for their positions, and those who did advocate generally were not successful in their campaigns (Warikoo, 2022). I conclude that social institutions such as schools can reinforce the racial order, thereby maintaining white privilege, by responding positively to the cultural repertoires of non-migrant families over those of migrant families. Similarly, after reading the two articles in this thematic issue, I was left with questions about structural change. Did the schools in Schut and Crul's (2024) study eventually adapt their sex education curriculum, or not? What factors might shape that adaptation (or lack of it)? In Keskiner et al.'s (2024) study, given some parents' frustrations with non-dominant languages being spoken in the community, did schools respond by providing translation, providing Dutch language classes, encouraging the dominant language only, or something else entirely? These inquiries will go even further in helping us understand the

impact of migration on society at large, not just on individuals of migrant and non-migrant backgrounds. They require deep inquiry into school communities, beyond individual interviews with parents.

Overall, scholars of neo-assimilation would also benefit from incorporating more ideas from critical race studies. Critical scholars have questioned the basic frameworks of assimilation theory (both old and new) that, they suggest, take for granted extractive foreign policies that propel international migration, an unequal racial order that migrants encounter when they arrive (Jung, 2009; Romero, 2008), and, more broadly, international borders that disadvantage residents of the global south (Agarwala, 2022; Favell, 2022). They also question the assumption that agency for assimilation lies predominantly with migrants themselves (Treitler, 2015). As Kim (2023) describes it with respect to Asian Americans and the US racial order, we must understand Asian Americans in an "anti-Black" social context. Scholars in this tradition ask us to take seriously how policymaking, the social construction of racial meanings, unequal power relations, and more together shape international migration and its impact. Taking inspiration from this scholarship, the studies in this thematic issue might further ask: How is "Dutch sex education" defined, and what assumptions about Muslim migrant communities shaped the development of that curriculum? Drawing from scholars like Abu-Lughod (2002) they might also question the assumption that Islam drives "non-modern" ideas about sex education, and further unpack the sticking points non-migrant parents identified in the two papers. And, stepping beyond non-migrant parents' perspectives, they might critically examine whose voices are heard and acted upon by school leaders and policymakers in those communities and beyond. These analyses would nicely round out the papers by placing parent perspectives into further context.

More broadly, scholars of migration should consider how migration-related social processes are changing, especially given the rise of nationalism around the world and increasing climate change-driven migration. What do global political movements and climate change portend for how migrants, non-migrants, and community cultures, institutions, and policies respond to and change as a result of migration? The next generation of immigration scholars should address these urgent questions that are shaping our shared world.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Natasha Warikoo is Stern Professor in the Social Sciences, Department of Sociology, at Tufts University. A former Guggenheim Fellow, Warikoo studies beliefs about meritocracy, admissions, affirmative action, and racial equity, and the cultural processes that perpetuate inequality in education. She released two books in 2022: *Race at the Top: Asian Americans and Whites in Pursuit of the American Dream in Suburban Schools* (University of Chicago Press) and *Is Affirmative Action Fair? The Myth of Equity in College Admissions* (Polity Press).