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Comment: 'Neighbourhood attachment in ethnically diverse areas:
The role of interethnic ties'

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Abstract

While unearthing patterns and regularities in data, a recent article by Górný and Torunczyk-Ruiz (2013) falls short of explaining the observed patterns. This comment augments the article in this regard. The considerations that are brought to bear here on the article relate to preferences and self-selection; to human, social, neighbourhood-specific, and political capital; and to attachment to a neighbourhood, and preference for diversity.

Keywords

ethnic diversity, human capital, neighbourhood attachment, neighbourhood-specific capital, political capital, preference for diversity, self-selection, social capital

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Introduction

What causes or motivates different levels of integration, assimilation, and attachment is one of the questions at the frontier of social science research. A recent article by Górný and Torunczyk-Ruiz (2013), henceforth G&TR, on attachment adds an empirical perspective to recent analytical articles (Stark and Dorn, 2013, on assimilation; Stark and Jakubek, 2013, on assimilation and integration) and, as such, broadens the scope of research on these topics and the associated policy perspectives.

Drawing on 2009/2010 data for six European cities, G&TR look at the strength of attachment to a neighbourhood as a function of the ethnic mix of the neighbourhood, and come up with two main findings.

First, and in general, the more ethnically heterogeneous a neighbourhood is, the weaker the attachment. Second, this general inverse relationship masks interesting variations: natives who have interethnic ties are just as attached to the neighbourhood when it is more ethnically mixed; and migrants in a neighbourhood who have no links with other ethnic groups are also just as attached to their neighbourhood when it is ethnically mixed. The first of these two main findings essentially informs us that ethnic mixture is not conducive to retention or, put differently, heterogeneity is conducive to out-migration.

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The second finding informs us, however, that ethnic mixture need not crowd out neighbourhood attachment. These findings are valuable also because theory alone cannot inform us whether the taste for variety is stronger than the taste for homogeneity, though simple reasoning could suggest that by the very nature of their engagement in migration, migrants are likely to be more tolerant of ethnic diversity than natives.

While unearthing patterns and regularities in data is a good thing, the truly captivating issue is what *explains* the observed patterns. Here, I find the G&TR article wanting. The purpose of this brief comment is to augment the article in this regard.

The considerations that are brought to bear here on the article relate to preferences and self-selection; to human, social, neighbourhood-specific, and political capital; and to attachment to a neighbourhood, and preference for diversity.

Preferences and self-selection

It is reasonable to assume that living in a neighbourhood to which one is attached is preferable to living in a neighbourhood from which one is detached. However, a preference for attachment does not necessarily map onto a preference for similarity; whether people prefer to have neighbours similar to or different from themselves is an empirical question. Evidence from economics (Luttmer, 2005, and references provided therein) suggests that similarity is preferable to dissimilarity. A branch of social-psychological inquiry, namely, research on relative deprivation and reference groups, helps predict this empirical finding: on average, there is more relative deprivation, and hence more resentment and thereby weaker attachment, in a heterogeneous neighbourhood *as a reference group* than in a homogeneous neighbourhood *as a reference group*. A widely deployed measure of an individual's relative deprivation is

the fraction of those in the individual's reference group who have more of a desirable good than that individual, times the mean excess quantity of the desirable good. (For a recent brief foray into the twin concepts of relative deprivation and reference groups, see the appendix in Sorger and Stark, 2013.) Given this measure, there is more aggregate relative deprivation (the sum total of the levels of relative deprivation of the individuals who constitute a neighbourhood) in the case of a neighbourhood in which the quantities of the individuals' desirable good (say units of income) are {7,8,9}, such that aggregate relative deprivation is 4/3, than in the case of neighbourhood quantities {7,8,8}, such that the aggregate relative deprivation is 2/3; more than in the case of neighbourhood quantities {8,8,9}, such that the aggregate relative deprivation is 2/3; and more than in the case of neighbourhood quantities {q,q,q} where the aggregate relative deprivation is nil. Seen this way, the finding that, in general, the more heterogeneous a neighbourhood, the weaker the attachment is aligned with a standard social-psychological preference structure, and with the received social-psychological perspective of distaste for relative deprivation (concern at having a low relative income).

How do people react when they experience relative deprivation? A body of work in economics on the migration response to relative deprivation informs us that the inclination to resort to migration increases with aggregate relative deprivation (cf., for example, the evidence in Stark et al., 2009). Therefore, a neighbourhood with more aggregate relative deprivation is likely to generate more out-migration than a neighbourhood with less aggregate relative deprivation. (New empirical research (Vernazza, 2013) even suggests that relative deprivation plays a more powerful role in migration churn than income differentials; even though interstate migration in the USA confers substantial rises in absolute income, the trigger

for migration is relative deprivation (low relative income), not low absolute income.) The implication is that in terms of the nature or the characterisation of a mixed neighbourhood, once relative deprivation-induced compositional adjustments have taken place as those who prefer homogeneity leave while those who favour diversity stay, the make-up of a neighbourhood by types is revised. Thus, it is no longer appropriate to speak of 'natives' in a neighbourhood; the correct term to use is 'natives with a taste for diversity', in which case the finding concerning 'natives' reported by G&TR loses much of its bite. Migrants too can improve the match between their preference for diversity and their place of residence by engaging in onward migration. Another way of looking at the same issue is to refer to a neighbourhood in a time-dependent manner, acknowledging dynamics: a 'mature' neighbourhood is more likely to consist of residents with homogeneous attachment preferences than a 'young' neighbourhood.

In sum: the story seems to be not 'a different meaning that a diverse setting has for natives and for migrants' (G&TR: 1) but, rather, the self-selection of both natives and migrants acting on their preferences. In other words, what is of interest is the heterogeneity in attitudes of natives and migrants alike, not, or not only, the ethnic diversity of the neighbourhood.

Human, social, neighbourhood-specific, and political capital

True to their mission, G&TR do touch on the topic of onward migration from a neighbourhood but here, too, the causality that they propose is wanting: it need not hold that weak links with a neighbourhood (little attachment to the neighbourhood) explain onward migration. Rather, the expectation or plan to engage in follow-up migration could weaken the incentive to invest in

neighbourhood-specific capital, whether human, social, or interethnic. A dislike of ethnic diversity promotes human and social capital investment that makes moving out appealing, remaining in the neighbourhood unproductive. Thus, the chain of causality is richer than the direct link 'a weak intensity of attachment bringing about migration'; an intervening capital variable is involved.

There is an additional angle to the human capital perspective. We could reason that in terms of neighbourhood attachment, natives and migrants are inherently different: on average, if not by definition, natives have lived in the neighbourhood for a long time, migrants for a relatively short while. The opportunity cost of onward migration for natives who have presumably amassed considerable location-specific human capital is higher than the corresponding cost for migrants with meager location-specific human capital. To this could be added the differential abilities of natives and of migrants to mobilise and exert political pressure for the ethnic make-up of their neighbourhood to be modified in accordance with their preferences for diversity. In 2013, residents in the southern part of Tel-Aviv successfully lobbied the government not to allow migrants from the Horn of Africa to live in that neighbourhood. The ownership of location-specific human capital, and the capacity to muster political capital, help explain why the ethnic make-up of a neighbourhood is more likely to be in line with the preferences of natives than with the preferences of migrants.

Attachment to a neighbourhood, and a preference for diversity

There is also a measure of asymmetry in revealed preferences that could lead to the prediction that migrants are more tolerant of ethnic diversity than natives. Literally by definition, migrants can be perceived as

people who exhibit a tolerance of ethnic diversity. Of course, there are many reasons why some people migrate while others stay put, and tolerance of diversity may not even be a particularly important characteristic. Nonetheless, on average, migrants can be expected to be less averse to ethnic diversity than natives, and to be more inclined to accommodate others than natives. The very act of (voluntary) migration attests to this proclivity. Interestingly, even here heterogeneity in preferences can play a role: migrants can exhibit different levels of taste for ethnic diversity, such that migrants who care little about the ethnic mix of a neighbourhood are more inclined to settle in an ethnically diverse neighbourhood than migrants who care more. In that case it is not migrants as such who exhibit the attachment attitude reported by G&TR but, rather, migrants with a specific taste or preference.

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