sociological science

Intergenerational Social Mobility Among the Children of Immigrants in Western Europe: Between Socioeconomic Assimilation and Disadvantage

Mauricio Bucca,[a,b] Lucas G. Drouhot[c]

a) Pontificia Universidad Catolica de Chile; b) Utrecht University

Abstract: Are Western European countries successfully incorporating their immigrant populations? We approach immigrant incorporation as a process of intergenerational social mobility and argue that mobility trajectories are uniquely suited to gauge the influence of immigrant origins on life chances. We compare trajectories of absolute intergenerational mobility among second generation and native populations using nationally representative data in seven European countries and report two major findings. First, we document a master trend of native–immigrant similarity in mobility trajectories, suggesting that the destiny of the second generation — like that of their native counterpart — is primarily determined by parental social class rather than immigrant background per se. Secondly, disaggregating results by regional origins reveals heterogeneous mobility outcomes. On one hand, certain origin groups are at heightened risks of stagnation in the service class when originating from there and face some disadvantage in attaining the top social class in adulthood when originating from lower classes. On the other hand, we observe a pattern of second-generation advantage, whereby certain origin groups are more likely to experience some degree of upward mobility. Altogether, these results suggest that immigrant origins per se do not strongly constrain the socioeconomic destiny of the second generation in Western Europe.

Keywords: immigration; assimilation; social mobility; second generation; social stratification; Europe

Replication Package: A complete replication package including all data and code is available at the following link: https://osf.io/4tjfq/?view_only=2894f243dc524ba8b12915 3e150715e3

IN spite of legal-institutional commitments to equal opportunity in many Western countries whose labor markets are dependent on immigrant labor, research suggests that foreign credentials (Zeng and Xie 2004), poorer access to social capital (Aguilera and Massey 2003), lower linguistic skills (Shields and Price 2002), discrimination (Hainmueller and Hangartner 2013), and other causes aggregate to produce lasting socioeconomic inequality between foreign-born and natives[1]. Such a disadvantage is part of the "immigrant bargain" - the willingness to relocate and work potentially undesirable jobs in order to safeguard better prospects for their children than what would have been possible in the origin country (Alba and Foner 2015, chapter 3). The true yardstick of immigrant incorporation lies then in the destiny of the so-called second-generation - the children of immigrants who were born, socialized and schooled in the country of destination (Crul and Vermeulen 2003). Members of the second-generation should be seen as successfully incorporating in their country of destination if their immigrant origins have, *ceteris*

paribus, little to no influence on their opportunities to accomplish their potential and desires as individuals (Alba and Nee 2003).

Multiple strands of migration scholarship in Western Europe have investigated this question in recent years. Thus far, scholars have largely focused on attainment gaps between the second generation and majority populations in schools, neighborhoods and labor markets (see Heath et al. 2008 and Drouhot and Nee 2019 for reviews). However, due to variation across assimilation outcomes and national contexts, there remains substantial ambiguity as to whether or not the second generation is generally closing the gap with natives or on a path of longer-term ethnic disadvantage. In this article, we rely on tools from the social stratification literature to conceptualize socioeconomic assimilation as a process of intergenerational mobility and provide new insights into this problem across multiple European countries. We argue that the conceptualization of assimilation in terms of parity in life chances with natives lying at the heart of neoassimilation (Alba and Nee 2003) and segmented assimilation theories (Portes and Zhou 1993) has a natural affinity — although one largely unrecognized by migration scholars so far — with the tools of social mobility research. Empirically, we address the following interrelated research questions: (1) Do the children of immigrants experience better, equal, or worse class attainment outcomes than natives of comparable class backgrounds? (2) How do these native-immigrant class attainment differences, or the lack thereof, vary across European countries? (3) How do these native-immigrant class attainment differences, or the lack thereof, vary by immigrant regional origins?

We answer these research questions with a comprehensive analysis of intergenerational class mobility in terms of "big classes," relying on the largest cross-national data source featuring a sample of second-generation adults we are aware of — the European Social Survey. In gauging the influence of ethnic versus class origins on life chances for the second generation after it has reached adulthood, we are able to formulate one of the most comprehensive, cross-country diagnostics of assimilation in Western Europe to date, although we remain limited by issues of statistical power for some minority groups for whom attainment gaps cannot be appropriately estimated. In what follows, we first discuss the central analytical importance of intergenerational mobility to the measurement of socioeconomic assimilation and formulate three mobility hypotheses: one of similarity in mobility trajectories between immigrant- and native-origin populations of the same social origins, one of second-generation advantage, and one of second-generation penalty in mobility. When considering major patterns across origin groups and countries, our results suggest a master trend of assimilation in Western European countries, whereby the second generation generally attains similar position given social origins when compared to those without a migration background. However, we document immigrant-specific patterns suggesting the second generation paradoxically experiences both higher downward and upward mobility among select groups in certain country contexts, thus underscoring heterogeneous mobility trajectories besides the relative absence of strong, systematic differences constituting the main tendency in our empirical results.

Do Ethnic Origins Trump Class Origins for the Life Chances of the Children of Immigrants? Approaching Socioeconomic Assimilation as a Social Mobility Problem

Although studying class mobility has a long tradition in sociological research, it has not been engaged with by migration scholars. Instead, the latter have studied socioeconomic integration by reporting attainment gaps on specific dimensions like education and labor markets (e.g., Heath, Rodon, and Kilpi 2008, Alba and Foner 2015, Drouhot and Nee 2019; for an important exception, see Li and Heath 2016). Yet, patterns of intergenerational class mobility offer a direct way to address influential theorizing in this field, in particular Alba and Nee's seminal conceptualization of assimilation into the mainstream, that is "that part of the society within which ethnic and racial origins have at most minor impacts on life chances and opportunities" (Alba and Nee 2003:12). Assimilation, a process of broad social convergence between immigrants and natives, is induced and signalled by equal opportunity for socioeconomic advancement among both populations (Alba and Nee 2003, Drouhot and Nee 2019, Nee and Drouhot 2020)[2]. Mobility trajectories and native-immigrant mobility gaps are significant because they reflect the combined, compounded influence of different institutional domains in which life chances are negotiated like schools, neighborhoods, and labor markets (Stuhler 2018). Class attainment in adulthood is thus a powerful yardstick insofar as it provides a summary, holistic measure — that is, it measures attainment *after* the second generation has gone through these different institutional domains shaping life chances. This is valuable given the existing ambiguity in the larger literature on the second generation, spread across various origin groups, destination countries, and assimilation metrics (Heath and Lee 2008, Drouhot and Nee 2019, Zhou and Gonzales 2019).

If ethnic origins shape the destiny of the children of immigrants in the destination society above and beyond the weight of class origins, it would suggest the absence of assimilation. The literature on Black–White inequality in the United States has long identified the signaling value of social mobility differentials to gauge the relative influence of race versus class in shaping the life chances of African Americans in the post–Civil Rights era (e.g., Duncan 1968, Wilson 1978, Hout 1984). Our contention in this study is that an analogous reasoning can be applied to the issue of assimilation among the children of immigrants in other contexts, such as Western Europe. To summarize our theoretical starting point, the size of a gap in mobility trajectories between immigrant- and native-origin population of similar class backgrounds offers a parsimonious, yet powerful measurement of the relative influence of ethnic origins on life chances.

Assimilation implies that social stratification by nativity and ethnic origins becomes supplanted by class dynamics and other nonethnic modes of differentiation, resource transmission, and inequality production over time and generations (Wimmer 2013). Understanding assimilation as the reduced significance of ethnic origins — and the dominant significance of social class background — on immigrants' life chances recognizes that socioeconomic origins determine the socioeconomic fate of individuals in all industrial, immigrant-receiving societies, albeit to varying degrees.

As such, assimilation, or the lack thereof, is not properly indexed by the mobility trajectories of immigrants alone but by comparison to the mobility prospects of natives of similar socioeconomic background. Importantly, an approach to assimilation in terms of social mobility would not strictly equate assimilation with immigrant upward mobility[3] or the attainment of middle-class status (Gans 2007). Rather, assimilation has taken place in a society if, for example, immigrant-origin individuals at the bottom are facing as impermeable barriers to social mobility as are lower-class natives. This point is crucial within segmented assimilation theory in its prediction of multiple "modes of incorporation" depending on the characteristics of the native majority and the immigrant populations under study: for disadvantaged immigrant families coming in contact with downtrodden racial minorities facing few opportunities for mobility, we may expect blocked mobility and socioeconomic stagnation at the bottom for the second generation (Portes and Zhou 1993, Portes et al. 2011)[4]. At the other end of the social ladder, assimilation would be signalled by the children of immigrants from upper-class backgrounds reproducing their social positions at the same rate as upper-class natives[5]. This is a point worth emphasizing: an approach that simply measures assimilation as immigrant upward mobility would be misguided in societies where such upward mobility is rare in the first place, and would equate immobility with a lack of assimilation when precisely the opposite would be true.

Under our definition, we acknowledge that a society may display substantial native-immigrant socioeconomic inequalities and still qualify as a case of assimilation as long as such disparities are the product of the intergenerational transmission of socioeconomic status and are unrelated to immigrant origins. For example, in a country that does not penalize immigrant origins, the children of immigrants might still attain lower social ranks than natives simply because, on average, the former may come from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds than the latter. Additionally, our mobility-based approach necessarily ignores the potential barriers to assimilation posed by the consolidation and interaction of ethnic origins and class position — for instance, if low-class positions and immigrant origins are heavily correlated and interact to create specific forms of stigmatization (Blau 1977, Drouhot and Nee 2019:189). Relatedly, we acknowledge that our approach here is resolutely structural, and says nothing about other dimensions and outcomes associated with assimilation, such as acculturation or acceptance by the ethnic majority. Lastly, we acknowledge that our study, like others in the social mobility traditions, is strictly descriptive. We consider mobility trajectories to reflect the aggregated results of myriad causal processes that we cannot observe directly.

Hypotheses for Intergenerational Social Mobility Among the Second Generation in Western Europe

Although a comprehensive assessment of second-generation attainment across all dimensions shaping mobility outcomes is beyond the scope of this article, we survey past relevant works (see Heath and Lee 2008, Drouhot and Nee 2019, Gonzales and Zhou 2019 for reviews) to propose three hypotheses on the social mobility out-

comes of the second generation relying on existing findings pertaining to mobility outcomes. For the interested reader, we provide a more in-depth discussion of the literature used in the formulation of our hypotheses in the online supplement.

Hypothesis I: Assimilation, Social Reproduction, and Similarity in Mobility Rates Between Immigrants and Natives

The first hypothesis is one of similarity in mobility rates between immigrant-origin and natives of comparable social origins. In Western European contexts, where equal opportunity is guaranteed under the law (Alba and Nee 2003), social class may trump ethnic origins in structuring inequality and opportunity for socioeconomic advancement. Empirical support for such a general dynamic of assimilation is found in the literature on education, whereby educational attainment among children of immigrants appears primarily determined by parental socioeconomic background rather than ethnic origins (in Germany: Luthra 2010; France: Brinbaum and Kieffer 2009, Ichou 2013; Sweden: Jonsson and Rudolphi 2011; UK: Ichou 2015, Wilson, Burgess, and Briggs 2011). A number of other studies suggest similar patterns in the transmission of labor market positions within immigrant families (Pichler 2011, Aparicio 2007, Meurs, Lhommeau, and Okba 2009, Hermansen 2016, Li and Heath 2016, Zuccotti 2015). The intergenerational transmission and reproduction of parental social status are virtually universal features of Western liberal societies (Causa and Johansson 2010, Duncan and Blau 1968, Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) — albeit with a moderating effect of the institutions (such as educational systems) shaping mobility in the context of reception (Crul, Schneider, and Lelie 2012). In its canonical version, the assimilation hypothesis states that natives and immigrants of the same class origins have similar socioeconomic attainment — that is, similar rates of social reproduction. For this hypothesis to hold true, two conditions must be fulfilled. First, the effect of social origin on social destination must be the same for both native and immigrant populations (i.e., the same rate of *relative* mobility). Second, above and beyond social class, no other factor related to nativity must determine the class attainment of individuals. The graphs in Panel **H1** of Figure 1 illustrate these two fundamental characteristics through the equality in the curves' slopes and the absence of vertical gaps between the solid lines, respectively. If both conditions are met, natives and second-generation immigrants of equal social origin would exhibit the same rates of absolute mobility.

Hypothesis II: Second-Generation Advantage in Absolute Mobility

Alternatively, the existing literature suggests another possible path for the children of immigrants — namely a *second-generation advantage* with respect to absolute mobility. Past work emphasizes that immigrant parents are often positively selected on unobserved — grit, optimism, and aspirations for status attainment (Kasinitz et al. 2008) — as well as observable traits — high rank in the educational distribution within the countries of origin (Ichou 2013, Feliciano and Lanuza 2017). There also exists strong evidence that the children of immigrants have higher educational ambitions and aspirations for attainment than natives of the same social origins (Fernandez-Reino 2016, Salikutluk 2016, Brinbaum and Kieffer 2009, Strand and

Winston 2008). Ethnographic research credits such immigrant optimism to a specific focus and "family mobilization" among immigrant parents whose own migration project is predicated upon the promise of upward mobility for their children (Zeroulou 1988). Recent studies based on historical census data in the United States provide the strongest evidence for such a second-generation advantage in mobility to date: among the earlier waves of Italian, German, and Irish migrant families, their U.S.-born children attained systematically higher education (Lowrey et al. 2021) and income (Abramitzky et al. 2021) than the children of natives of similar social origins.

The children of immigrants may therefore do better than what would be expected for natives of comparable social origins, which translates into better chances of absolute upward mobility. As shown by graphs in Panel **H2** of Figure 1, this hypothesis does not speak of patterns of relative mobility, which are measured by the strength of the origin-destination association within each group (the curves' slopes). Rather, the *second-generation advantage* hypothesis holds true as long as immigrants attain a higher social standing than natives of similar social origin but the theory does not incorporate expectations regarding whether or not the second-generation advantage varies by class of origin.

Hypothesis III: Perverse Openness and Second-Generation Penalty in Absolute Mobility

Finally, the *second-generation penalty* hypothesis reflects the opposite situation: despite immigrant optimism among their parents, the children of immigrants who are markedly different in virtue of their ethnic origins may suffer from prejudice, racism and related social penalties imposed by natives. A vast literature has used audit studies and other experimental designs to document sizeable hiring gaps based on national origins (Midtbøen 2014, Kaas and Manger 2012), being Muslim (Adida, Laitin, and Valfort 2016, Heath and Martin 2013, Di Stasio et al. 2019) and being of a darker phenotype (Polavieja et al. 2023, Pager, Bonikowski, and Western 2009). National origin-, religious- and race-based discrimination practices in hiring may thus stir the second generation towards blocked or downward mobility if they are widespread or high in magnitude. Zschnirt and Ruedin's (2016) meta-analysis of 34 studies carried out between 1991 and 2015 in Western Europe and North America suggests that immigrant applicants have to send three applications for every two applications sent by otherwise similar natives. A recent meta-analysis suggests similar barriers in terms of housing (Auspurg, Schneck, and Hinz 2019). As such, and albeit legal barriers to discrimination, opportunity hoarding from natives in access to quality neighborhoods and jobs may result in a blocked upward mobility among the children of immigrants. In a recent article, Kanitsar (2024) shows ethnic penalties in mobility at the second generation, although his analyses are highly aggregated by European regions of destination and do not differentiate by regions of origin.

According to hypothesis III, widespread discrimination results in class achievement gaps between natives and immigrants of similar social origins. Additionally, widespread discrimination translates into a decreased significance of social origins

for the socioeconomic attainment of the second generation: we may observe that the children of immigrants are less likely than natives to experience upward mobility if they come from the bottom and more likely to experience downward mobility if they come from the top of the social ladder. The graphs in Panel **H3** of Figure 1 convey these two ideas. As shown, the second-generation disadvantage comes from two simultaneous sources, namely the lower socioeconomic achievement of second-generation individuals with respect to natives of the same class origins (i.e., vertical gaps between curves) and a "perverse" form of egalitarianism with respect to mobility (i.e., a flatter slope for the immigrants' curve) (Duncan and Blau 1967:208-9).

Variation by Regional Origins and Countries of Destination

These hypotheses represent aggregate and ideal-typical scenarios. In practice, we may observe both general patterns as well as substantial heterogeneity once we disaggregate by origin groups and countries of destination. Expectations in this regard may be guided by theory. Surveying the literature of discrimination and ethnic hierarchies in Europe, it is clear that African-, Middle Eastern-, and Asian-origin populations concentrate the most disadvantage in audit studies (Zschnirt and Ruedin 2016, Polavieja et al. 2023) and research on ethnic penalties in educational, neighborhood, and labor market settings (Heath et al. 2008). Given these disadvantages and following basic principles of segmented assimilation theory (Portes and Zhou 1993), we may expect the Asian and Middle-Eastern and North African (MENA) origins to have worse mobility outcomes than the European-origin second generation and those with mixed backgrounds at comparable social origins. Following an analogous logic regarding heterogeneity by origins, we expect the second-generation advantage hypothesis to primarily apply to the European-origin and the mixed second generation. Note that the latter is a key tenet of neoassimilation theory (Alba and Foner 2015, Alba, Beck and Sahin 2017). By "mixed" here, we refer to immigrant-native unions within the respondent's ancestry, and effectively designate as "mixed" respondents with only one immigrant parent, for whom we expect better socioeconomic outcomes (Kalmijn 2015). We reason that the European-origin and mixed second generation may overachieve relative to its class of origin thanks to unfettered immigrant optimism — that is, without the ethnoracial barriers faced by the Asian- and MENA-origin groups.

Finally, we acknowledge that the mobility outcomes of the second generation may be shaped by the "integration context" (Crul et al. 2012) — that is, the specific features of educational and labor market institutions moderating mobility trajectories in the destination country. Existing studies point to two aspects: the intensity of tracking in the educational system on the one hand and the extent of welfare state redistribution on the other hand (Crul et al. 2012, Midtbøen and Nadim 2021, Beller and Hout 2006). Early tracking has been shown to hamper upward educational mobility among those at the bottom, and to have an amplified, negative effect on immigrant-origin students (Crul et al. 2012, Borgna and Contini 2014; Crul 2013; Jackson et al. 2012). Relatedly, past work suggests that an egalitarian welfare state is key for pushing immigrant mobility because it mitigates disadvantages associated
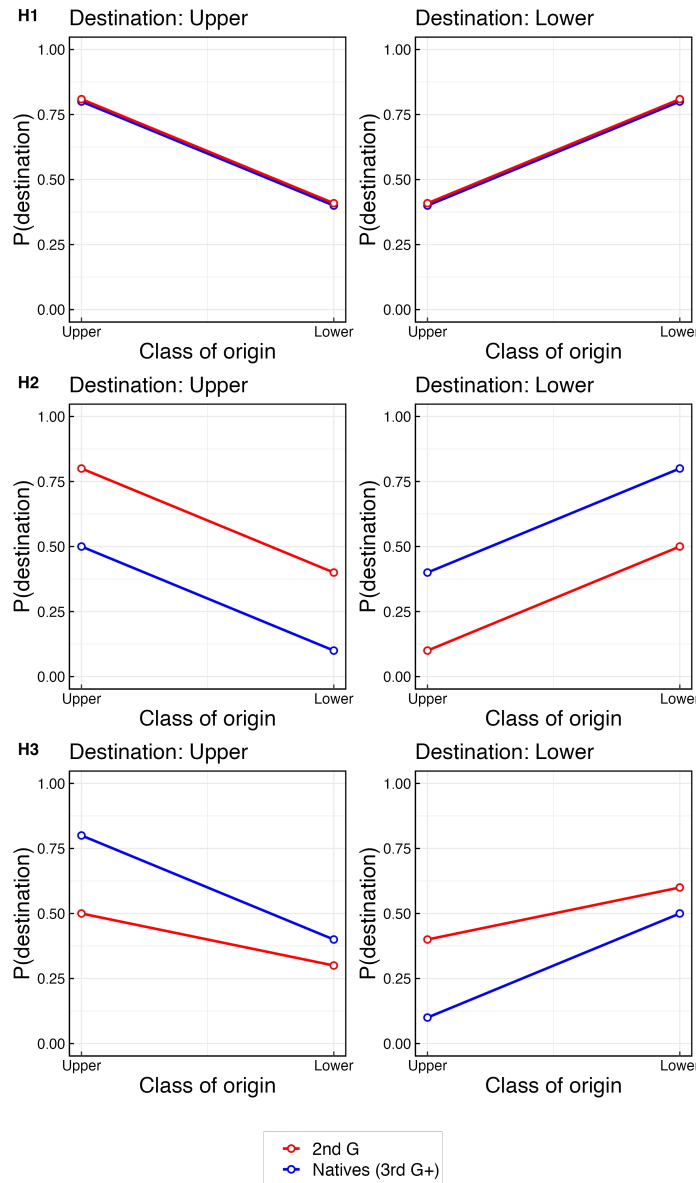
Figure 1: Stylized mobility hypotheses: in a hypothetical society we define two social classes: "Upper class" and "Lower class." Each graph panel is organized such that the first column represents an "Upper class" destination and the second column corresponds to a "Lower class" destination. The *x axis* represents parental class (class of origin), whereas the *y axis* shows the probability of offspring reaching a specific destination class (Upper or Lower). The blue lines illustrate the regression line for natives in a given country, and the red lines represent that for second-generation immigrants. The height of these lines indicates the probability that children from a specified social origin and nativity status will achieve a particular destination class. Consequently, the vertical gap between the blue and red lines in each chart shows whether natives and second-generation immigrants with the same class origin have equal or different probabilities of reaching a specified destination class. This gap is termed "residual class attainment gaps." Moreover, treating "Upper" and "Lower" as ordered categories, the slope of these lines reflects the strength of the association between the social standings of parents and children, typically referred to as *relative mobility* in mobility research.

with low parental socioeconomic background as well as immigrant-specific penalties related to lack of cultural capital and country-specific "cultural knowledge" (Midtbøen and Nadim 2022, Lareau 2015, Hermansen 2016). We may thus expect native-immigrant mobility gaps to be relatively lower in strong welfare states with comprehensive educational systems (e.g., Sweden, France) than those characterized by stronger tracking in secondary education (e.g., Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands) or weaker welfare redistribution (e.g., Great Britain).

Analytic Strategy

We conceptualize assimilation as an intergenerational mobility problem. Specifically, we contend that assimilation is achieved when only class of origin — and not nativity — shapes the class of destination of the children of immigrants and when they, therefore, enjoy parity in life chances with natives of the same socioeconomic background. Accordingly, our target quantities of interest are the probabilities of an individual in a given country (C) achieving a certain class of destination (D), conditional on her class of origin (O) and nativity (N), formally: $\mathbb{P}(D \mid O, C, N)$. Considered together, these probabilities characterize the patterns of absolute class mobility of natives and second-generation immigrants. We argue that class attainment, conditional on both nativity and class origin, is better suited to answer questions about socioeconomic assimilation than the raw difference in class attainment between natives and second-generation immigrants in a country because the latter conflates the former with the potentially uneven distribution of social origins between the natives and immigrants of a given country[6].

In particular, we are interested in evaluating the existence of residual class attainment gaps (RCAG), which we define as the difference in the expected probabilities of reaching a given social class of destination between second-generation (n') and native (n) individuals of the same social origin in a given country. Formally,

$$\text{RCAG}(D, O, C) : \mathbb{P}(D \mid O, C, N = n) - \mathbb{P}(D \mid O, C, N = n'). \tag{1}$$

We emphasize that these residual class attainment gaps should not be construed as causal effects of nativity; rather, we view them as indicators of various concurrent causal dynamics, in alignment with the descriptive purview of mobility research.

We use a multinomial logistic regression model to estimate the quantities of interest defined in our approach. In this model, the log odds of an individual reaching a particular destination class are defined as a function of her nativity, class of origin, country of residence, and other control variables. Although one could also derive these parameters from a log-linear model, we lean towards the multinomial logit formulation due to its straightforward interpretation. Furthermore, the multinomial logit model facilitates the inclusion of covariates related to class attainment — which in a log-linear setup would be overly challenging due to dimensionality and spareness issues — and sample weights so that our analyses are nationally representative for each country under study[7].

Regarding the functional form of our model, we include all main effects and incorporate two-way interactions for origin-country, country-nativity, and origin-

nativity. We intentionally omit the three-way interaction to avoid constructing a saturated model. Formally:

$$
\begin{aligned}
\log \frac{\mathbb{P}(D_i = j)}{\mathbb{P}(D_i = J)} = {} & \alpha_j + \sum_{m=1}^{N-1} \theta_{jm} N_{im} + \sum_{k=1}^{K-1} \gamma_{jk} O_{ik} + \sum_{l=1}^{L-1} \delta_{jl} C_{il} \\
& + \sum_{m=1}^{N-1} \sum_{k=1}^{K-1} \kappa_{jkm} O_{ik} N_{im} \\
& + \sum_{m=1}^{N-1} \sum_{l=1}^{L-1} \lambda_{jlm} C_{il} N_{im} \\
& + \sum_{k=1}^{K-1} \sum_{l=1}^{L-1} \zeta_{jkl} O_{ik} C_{il} \\
& + \vec{X_i}' \vec{\varphi} j
\end{aligned}
\tag{2}
$$

where $\mathbb{P}(D_i = j)$ is the individual probability of having class of destination j and $\mathbb{P}(D_i = J)$ is the probability of being a "Higher administrator and professional," which is set as the reference category J. In the right side of the equation, N is a dummy variable measuring nativity status and θ_{jm} is its effects on the log odds of achieving destination class j. When we fit this model pooling together second-generation populations of different regional origins, this variable has three categories $M = 3$: 2nd generation immigrant "full" (both parents are foreign-born), 2nd generation immigrant "half" (only one parent is foreign-born), and "Native" (3rd plus generation), with "Native" as the reference category. When we disaggregate by region of origin, this variable has six categories $M = 6$, detailed below, with "Native" serving as the reference category as well.

O is a variable indexing class of origin (with "Higher administrator and professional" as the reference category K) and γ_{jk} is its corresponding effect. Likewise, C is a discrete variable measuring country of residence (with "Germany" as the reference category L) and δ_{jl} corresponds to the effect of residing in country l on the log odds of achieving destination class j. $\vec{X_i}$ is a vector of control variables including gender, age, and survey year, and $\vec{\varphi}$ is the vector of their effects.

In the absence of interactions, θ_{jm}s measures whether second-generation individuals have a higher or lower log odd ratio of attaining a given destination class j relative to natives of the same social origin and country. Interaction terms κ_{jkm} and λ_{jlm} measure whether such immigrant penalties/premia are heterogeneous across social origins and countries, respectively.

If there were no interaction effects, γ_{jk}s would measure the effects of social origins on the log odd ratios of attaining a given class of destination for individuals with the same nativity status and country, thus characterizing the patterns of intergenerational class mobility. Interaction terms κ_{jkm} and ζ_{jkl} measure whether the origin-destination links are heterogeneous across nativity statuses and countries, respectively. Finally, the δ_{jl} coefficient terms account for the distribution of destination classes in different countries.

We perform further analyses to enhance robustness. Firstly, because the subsample of second-generation populations is significantly smaller than that of the

natives, we re-estimate our model using other, customized weights to balance the representation of both groups within each country. This procedure ensures that the trends within the native population do not predominantly drive the aggregate results.

Secondly, to ensure that our choice of functional form does not drive our results, we rely on the "relaxed Lasso," a variant of the Lasso regression proposed by Meinshausen (2007). This method allows us to fit a more complex functional form — such as three-way interactions among nativity, origin, and country — while preventing overfitting the data. Specifically, the regularization technique of the relaxed Lasso employs a two-step process. In the first step, predictors are chosen using the standard Lasso regression. The feature selection performed by the standard Lasso retains only the main effects and interaction terms significant for prediction, thus guarding against overly parameterized models. Given our focus, we aim to capture meaningful three-way interactions without resorting to a saturated model. For instance, attainment gaps between natives and immigrants might differ based on specific combinations of class of origin and country. In the subsequent step, once the relevant predictors have been selected, all coefficients of the chosen predictors are re-estimated without the ℓ_1 penalty, ensuring that the estimates are unbiased and better represent the underlying data relationship.

Data and Measures

Our study uses the European Social Survey (ESS), a biennial cross-sectional survey covering more than 30 European countries since 2002. The survey measures key dimensions of social life in Europe and is produced by and for academic researchers. The ESS is ideal for our research, providing harmonized data on respondents' occupations, nativity status, and their fathers' occupations, key for analyzing social mobility. We know of no other data set allowing for analyses of social mobility across different European countries with a large enough subsample of individuals who are children of immigrants.

We analyzed data from participants aged 16 to 65 in the 2008 to 2020 surveys (rounds 4 through 10), focusing on seven European countries with significant second-generation populations, namely Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, France, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Sweden. We exclude rounds 1 to 3 because the occupational group coding is incompatible with that used in later rounds. We specifically exclude respondents who are attending educational institutions at the time of the interview to prevent the misclassification of social class based on temporary occupations[8].

The main variables in our analyses are nativity and social class. Natives are defined as individuals born in the survey country with both parents also native-born (third-plus generation). In contrast, "second-generation" refers to those born in the survey country to at least one foreign-born parent. Our analyses distinguish between children with two foreign-born parents (2nd generation full) and children with only one foreign-born parent (2nd generation half). Table 1 details the distribution of the analytic sample by country and nativity. To analyze class attainment variations by regional origins, we categorize second-generation populations into

Table 1: Sample size by country and nativity (left panel) and sample size by country and regional origins (right panel).

	Nativity			Regional origins (2nd G full and half)				
	Native (3rd G+)	2nd G full	2nd G half	Asian	SS African	European	Mixed & Other	MENA
Belgium (BE)	6,127	368	528	11	56	595	25	209
Switzerland (CH)	4,219	432	686	42	10	964	57	45
Germany (DE)	13,059	493	980	62	13	1,128	76	194
France (FR)	7,007	448	697	29	64	569	47	436
Great Britain (GB)	7,412	328	474	178	40	417	142	25
Netherlands (NL)	6,639	195	385	196	14	194	93	83
Sweden (SE)	5,757	227	521	41	8	620	46	33

five regions: "Asian," "European," "Mixed & Other,[9]" and " Middle Eastern & North African" (MENA). Note that the Sub-Saharan African populations are too small to be studied separately in our analyses by regional origins, where we only present and interpret results when we have enough statistical power to do so. In all categories except "Mixed & Other," individuals are classified under a regional origin based on having both parents or one parent and a native-born other parent, originating from that region. Using fine-grained national origins categories is complicated by the variation in migrant national origins across destination countries. We therefore resort to this aggregate scheme because it is amenable to comparative analyses. These regional labels are broad but nevertheless useful: they encompass "low-status" groups across contexts (Alba and Holdaway 2011), such as the North Africans in France and the Netherlands on one hand, and the Turks in Germany and Pakistani in the United Kingdom and Scandinavian countries on the other, for instance.[10]

As for social class, given the relatively small sample size, we use a highly aggregated big-class scheme consisting of four categories: "Higher administrators and professionals," "Technical occupations," "Service occupations," and "Blue-collar occupations & Farmers." This categorization is based on ISCO-coded occupations, reflecting both the respondent's current occupation and their father's occupation when the respondent was 14. Details on the construction of our class categories are available in the online supplement.

When studying second-generation outcomes, first-generation immigrant selectivity can introduce additional challenges, such as properly measuring the contextual educational attainment of immigrant parents within the origin country (Ichou 2013, 2015). Our approach, however, sidesteps this challenge by focusing on the immigrant parents' class status in the host country, thus aligning it with the natives' class framework. A related concern is that first-generation immigrants may disproportionally work jobs for which they are overqualified, and therefore their occupational class might not be aligned with other forms of capital that are relevant for intergenerational transmission, such as educational attainment. However, our analysis — as illustrated in the online supplement — shows no significant

differences in the educational distribution between natives and first-generation immigrant parents in the same occupational class.

One limitation of our parental class measure is its focus solely on fathers' intergenerational influence. Despite well-established research underscoring the role of mothers and grandparents in intergenerational transmission (Hout 2018, Chan and Boliver 2013, Beller 2009), low female labor market participation rates in the parental generation preclude a broader definition of family origin in our study[11].

Results

We estimate these residual class attainment gaps through a multinomial logistic regression model describing the class of destination of individuals as a function of class of origin, country of residence, nativity status, and relevant covariates (age, gender, and survey year).

Analyses Aggregated by Countries and Generation

Figure 2 shows predictions derived from the estimated model (see regression coefficients in the online supplement). Specifically, it displays the predicted probabilities of attaining a destination class conditional on class of origin, nativity status, and country, while keeping age, gender, and survey year at fixed values.

Two findings emerge from this analysis: first, the class attainment of both natives and children of immigrants is markedly shaped by their class of origin, which is manifested in a clear class gradient whereby the probability of working a higher administration or professional occupation declines almost monotonically as we move down the class ladder, from children of higher administration or professional parents to those with parents in blue-collar or farming occupation. In addition, for children of higher administrators or professionals, the most probable outcome is to remain within the same occupational class as their parents or attain technical occupations, with a notably lower chance of entering other occupational classes. At the lower end of the class spectrum, the probability of working a blue-collar or farming occupation increases as we move down the class ladder, being the children of blue-collar or farmer fathers are the most likely to end up in blue-collar or farming occupations. Crucially, such a class gradient is not an artifact of our analytical approach. Rather, it emerges spontaneously as our modeling strategy does not enforce any predetermined order on the class categories.

Our results suggest that class of origin shapes the class of destination among children of immigrants with the same strength that it does for natives, which is evident from the similarity in the slopes of the red, orange, and blue curves in Figure 2. Substantively, this indicates that the intergenerational transmission of social class appears to operate under similar principles for both immigrant and native populations. The regression coefficients for this gradient are statistically significant at standard confidence levels. Moreover, the lack of significance in most higher-order interaction terms suggests that the class gradient's effect is consistent among both native and second-generation populations, and across different countries. (see online supplement).
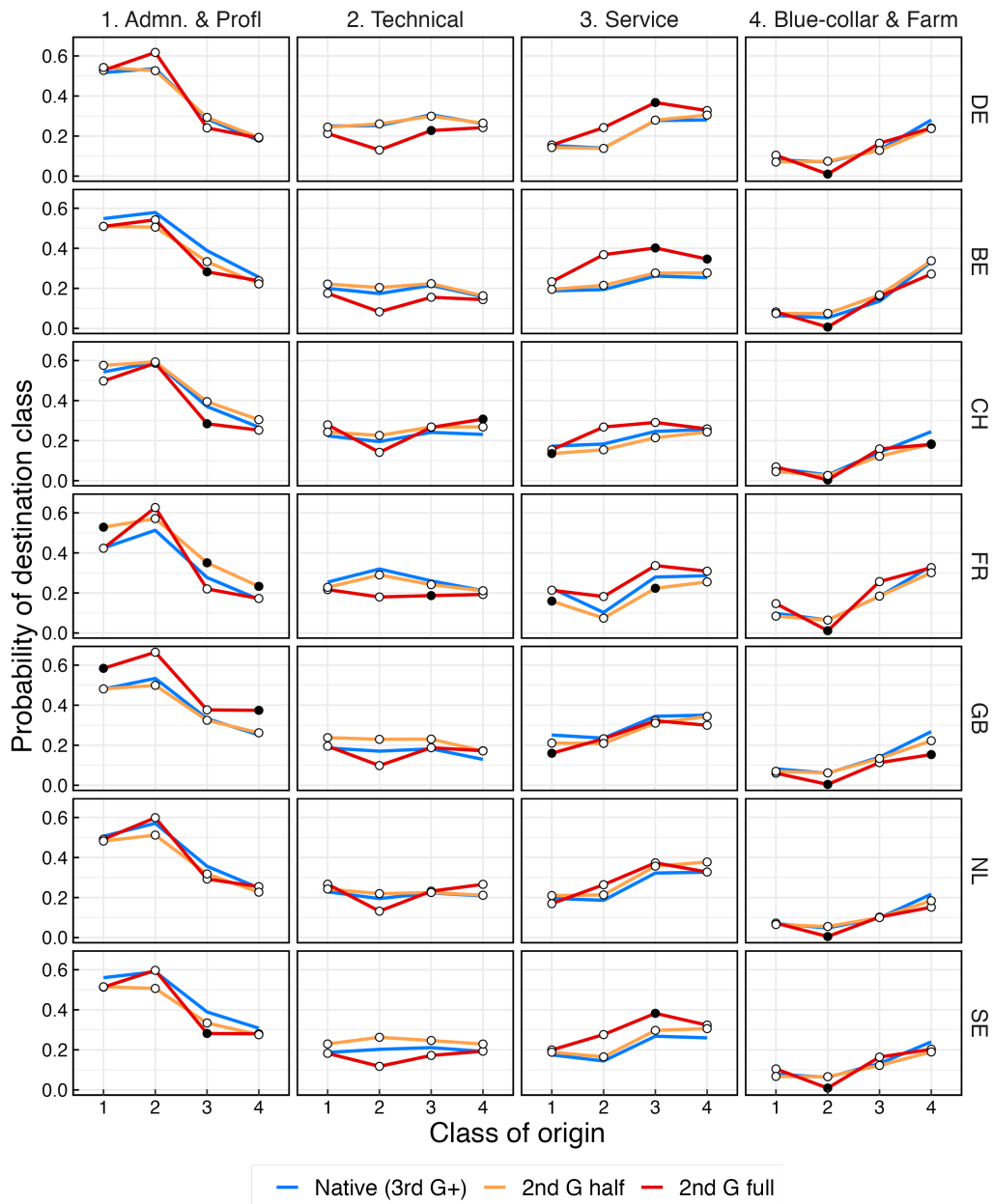
Figure 2: Probability of class destination by class of origins for native and second-generation individuals. Class of origin and destination take on the following values: "Higher administrators & Professionals" (1), "Technical occupations" (2), "Service occupations" (3), and "Blue-collar & Farming occupations" (4). Countries are: Belgium (BE), Switzerland (CH), Germany (DE), France (FR), Great Britain (GB), Netherlands (NL), and Sweden (SE). Each dot represents a predicted probability derived from a multinomial regression model. Black dots indicate a statistically significant difference at the 95 percent confidence level in the predicted probability of a particular destination class between second-generation and native individuals of the same class origins, highlighting a significant class attainment gap. Conversely, white dots signify that no statistically significant attainment gap exists. Statistical inferences conducted using the Bootstrap method.

Secondly and relatedly, we find little evidence of residual class attainment gaps: with few exceptions, native- and immigrant-origin individuals from the same class origin have nearly identical probabilities of reaching every destination class. This is visually evident in the relative absence of statistically significant differences (conveyed with bold, black dots for each point estimate) between immigrant-origin and native respondents. For example, the likelihood that a native professional's child will also become a professional ranges from approximately 40 percent to 55 percent, and the same figures hold for second-generation immigrants of the same class origin, regardless of whether they have one or two immigrant parents. Similarly, the probability for a child of a blue-collar or farmer parent to remain in the same occupational group hovers around 20 percent to 30 percent in all countries, regardless of whether the child's parents are both natives, only one is a native, or both are immigrants. We note that in three out of seven countries, the intergenerational reproduction of the service class seems to be more prevalent among the full second generation compared to natives. Additionally, and importantly, we note that those members of the second generation originating from the service class face statistically significant barriers to upward mobility in the administrative and professional class in Belgium, Switzerland, and Sweden, and mobility into the technical class in Germany and France.

In contrast, certain significant differences evoke a second-generation advantage rather than a penalty: in both Great Britain and France, the second generation (full in the former, mixed in the latter) has elevated probabilities of attaining the higher administrative and professional class compared to natives, both when they themselves originate from this class but also from other classes. Relatedly, those who originate at the bottom of the class structures have lower probabilities than natives to remain there in adulthood in all but two countries. We also note a consistently lower risk across countries for individuals of a technical class background to end up in the working class in adulthood. Overall, we do not document any clear cross-country difference along the lines we hypothesized regarding differences by welfare state or tracking systems. In fact, second-generation individuals in Sweden and France that come from the bottom of the class structure are as likely as natives to remain there in adulthood, whereas they have better prospects in other countries such as Great Britain and Switzerland. Such a finding precisely goes against theoretical expectations about country context emphasizing welfare state redistribution and comprehensive tracking systems such as that found in these two countries. At the top of the class structure and in all countries, second-generation individuals from administrative and professional origins tend to reproduce their class background in adulthood with similar or higher probabilities compared to natives of similar class backgrounds.

Collectively, these results point towards a predominant pattern of *assimilation as social reproduction* among the children of immigrant (hypothesis 1). This implies that social class plays a more significant role than ethnic origins in dictating inequality and opportunities for socioeconomic progression, resulting in similar levels of absolute intergenerational mobility between natives and second-generation immigrants. We note that mixedness does not matter in a consistent way across countries and mobility trajectories. Beneath this overall trend lies a nuanced picture: although

the heightened barriers to upward mobility into the top among those originating in the service class are evocative of a second-generation disadvantage (hypothesis 3), the better mobility prospects out of the bottom of the class structure for the second generation originating there and higher chances of reproduction at the top are both suggestive of a second-generation advantage (hypothesis 2). Two robustness analyses — equalizing subsample sizes by nativity status and applying the Relaxed Lasso technique for shrinkage and feature selection — corroborate these findings (see online supplement).

Our results suggest a lack of residual class attainment gaps. However, it is important to acknowledge that our statistical analysis might fail to detect such gaps even they existed. Specifically, we estimate that with a statistical power of 80 percent (the likelihood of identifying true residual class attainment gaps) and a significance level of 5 percent (the likelihood of not rejecting false residual class attainment gaps), only native-immigrant gaps exceeding 10 percentage points would be detectable in our analysis (see online supplement). We revisit this limitation in the conclusion.

Analyses Aggregated by Countries, Generation, and Regional Origins

How do these aggregate dynamics for the second generation vary by regional origins? Although the aggregate analysis indicates a prevalent trend of assimilation, employing broad immigrant categories based on generation only may obscure substantial heterogeneity. Indeed, a more detailed examination by immigrant regional origins offers additional insights. However, due to the limited sample size in certain regional origin groups, we prioritize reporting and interpreting results for group comparisons where any existing class achievement gap would need to be at at most 25 percentage points to be detectable by our analysis given the available sample sizes, with a power of 80 percent and a significance level of 5 percent (see online supplement)[12] (computations available upon request). This criterion precludes us from reporting findings regarding second-generation individuals of Sub-Saharan African origins, and limits interpretation of findings for immigrants of Asian, MENA, and Mixed & Other origins to specific countries where these populations are sizable. Figure 3 showcases these findings.

In agreement with prior observations, the disaggregated analysis confirms that class attainment among native and immigrant children of all regional backgrounds is similarly influenced by their origin class, as seen in the class gradients in the relationship between class origin and class destination across different regional origins. Yet, significant country-specific class attainment gaps for certain immigrant groups emerge, suggesting a mixture of relative advantages and disadvantages for some origin groups in some countries (regression coefficients and standard errors associated with these results in online supplement).

In Germany and Belgium, those of MENA origins originating from the service class have elevated probabilities to remain there in adulthood, and lower probabilities to experience upward mobility towards the administrative and professional class. The mobility patterns for those of European origins are more ambiguous. In France, the European-origin second generation originating from the top is more
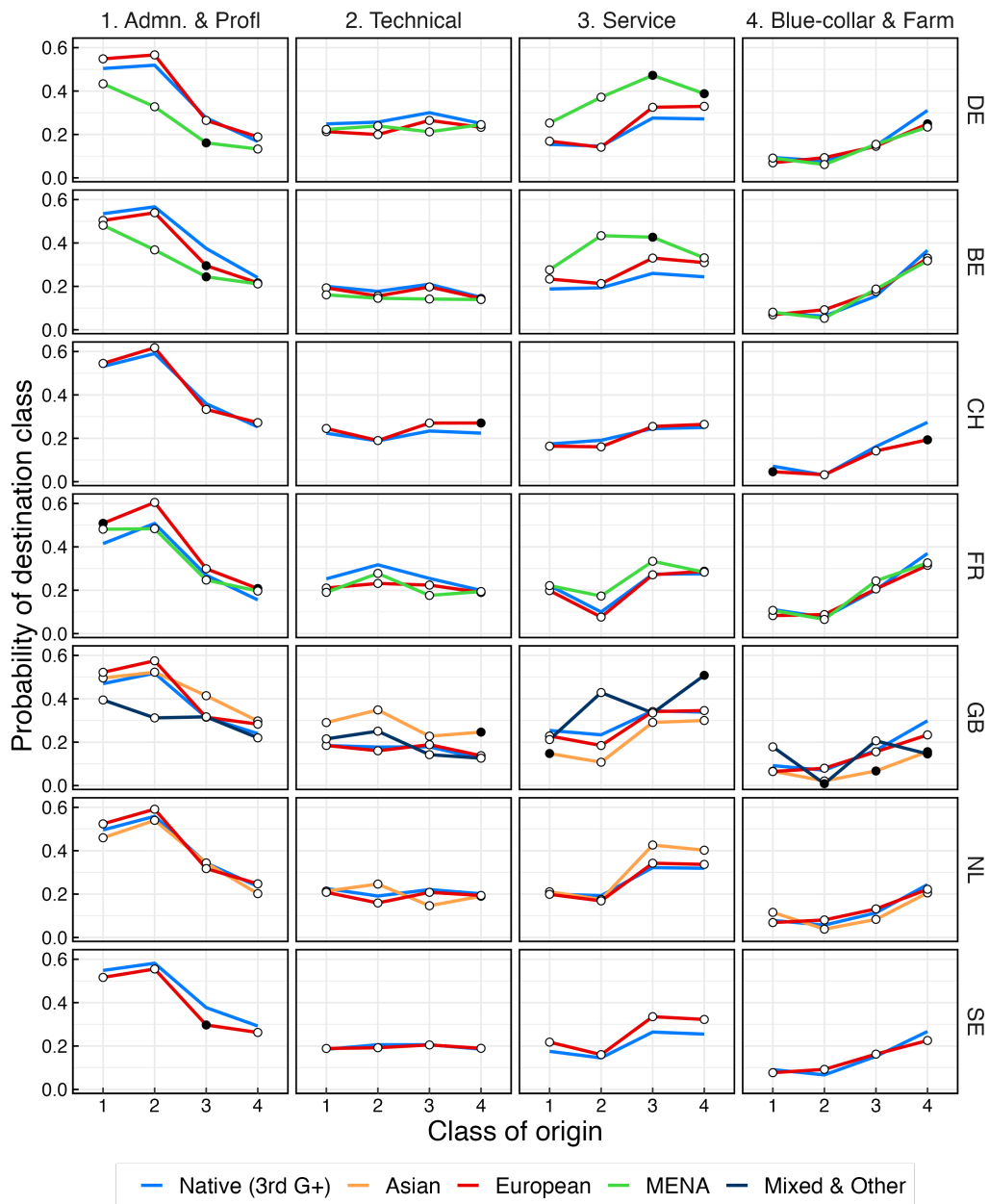
Figure 3: Probability of class destination by class of origins for natives and second-generation immigrants of different regional origins. Class of origin and destination take on the following values: "Higher administrators and Professionals" (1), "Technical occupations" (2), "Service occupations" (3), "Blue-collar occupations" (4), and "Farmers" (5). Countries are: Belgium (BE), Switzerland (CH), Germany (DE), France (FR), Great Britain (GB), Netherlands (NL), and Sweden (SE). Dots display predicted probabilities of having a given destination class derived from the multinomial regression model. Black dots indicate a statistically significant difference at the 95 percent confidence level in the predicted probability of a particular destination class between second generation immigrants of a particular region origin and native individuals of the same class origins. Conversely, white dots signify that no statistically significant attainment gap exists. Statistical inferences conducted using the Bootstrap method.

likely to reproduce its position than natives, and those originating from the bottom are also more likely than natives to experience extreme upward mobility to the top. In Switzerland, the second generation of European working-class origins is less likely to remain stuck and more likely to move into the technical class in adulthood, whereas those from the top are less likely to experience extreme downward mobility in adulthood. However, European origins convert into barriers to upward mobility to the top in certain cases: for instance, for those originating from the service class in Belgium and Sweden. In Switzerland, they have a higher probability to experience upward mobility in the technical class and a lower probability to remain stuck when originating from the bottom of the class structure (the latter being also true in Germany).

Asian origins favorably shape mobility patterns in Great Britain but have no influence in the Netherlands. In Great Britain, the Asian-origin second generation has a higher chance to experience upward mobility into the technical class from the bottom and lower chances to remain stuck there when originating from it. Additionally, Asian-origin individuals are less likely experiencing downward mobility from the service class to the working class, and from the administrative class to the service class.

Great Britain is also the only national context in which we can credibly estimate differences in mobility patterns from natives' among those of mixed status. Like their Asian counterparts, those of mixed status are less likely to remain stuck at the bottom when originating from there. The mixed second generation is also less likely to be downwardly mobile from the technical and into the working-class, and more likely to experience moderate upward mobility from the working class to the service class. Altogether, results for Asians and mixed populations in Great Britain suggest heterogeneity in these origin groups, as they experience certain advantages in mobility outcomes for certain combination of class origins and destinations.

Overall, our results reveal that, across all countries, second-generation immigrants from European countries generally mirror the class achievements of natives of equivalent social origins. The same generally applies to populations from Middle Eastern and North African countries — that is, the "low-status" origin groups in many European destination contexts. This is conveyed in our results by the relative absence of statistically significant immigrant-native differences (bold black dots) in our estimates, although we do find pointed penalties in mobilities for this origin group in Belgium and Germany. However, we find that in several countries under study, some origin groups have lower probabilities than natives to remain stuck in blue-collar occupations when originating from blue-collar backgrounds, which suggests a specific second-generation advantage in terms of mobility out of the bottom of the class structure. Europeans in Germany and Switzerland, and mixed and Asians in Great Britain are all significantly less likely than socially comparable natives to have working class jobs in adulthood. Conversely, we generally do not document higher probabilities among any second-generation origin groups to experience extreme downward mobility, from the administrative and professional to blue-collar classes. Together, these trends provide partial support to our second hypothesis about a second-generation advantage as well as our first hypothesis about social reproduction. Altogether, results disaggregated by regional origins

support the overall pattern of assimilation documented earlier (as seen in the absence of statistical difference between natives and immigrants across origin groups and countries) and reveal additional, contrasting dynamics of relative disadvantage and advantage for some origin groups in some countries.

Conservative robustness checks — re-estimating the model with equal representation of nativity groups and employing Relaxed Lasso constraints on the parameters — yield a highly comparable picture to the one previously described (see online supplement).

Discussion and Conclusions

In this article, we rely on the social mobility literature and assimilation theory to study immigrant incorporation as a process of intergenerational class mobility. Theoretically, we contend that intergenerational class mobility trajectories are uniquely suited to measure socioeconomic assimilation and the significance of immigrant origins on the second generation's life chances. Empirically, class mobility trajectories crystallize the combined influence of various stratification processes occurring in institutional domains such as schools, neighborhoods, and labor markets — all of which have been the subject of past research, with sometimes ambivalent accounts as to whether or not the children of immigrants are doing worse, better, or equally well compared to natives. As such, our comparative study of intergenerational class mobility outcomes among second-generation immigrants and natives allows us to pass a more holistic and durable judgment regarding the socioeconomic destiny of the second generation than most empirical studies to date. We report and discuss two key takeaways from our set of nationally representative results.

Assimilation as a Master Trend

On the aggregate, we document a clear and consistent pattern of second-generation assimilation across our seven countries. Immigrant origins *per se* do not shape the social destiny of the second generation — social origins do, as is the case in the native population. Simply put, being born of immigrant parents does not generally constitute, *ceteris paribus*, a significant source of disadvantage for socioeconomic attainment and social mobility when we consider the second generation as a whole across Western Europe. The similarity in mobility prospects among native- and immigrant-origin individuals of similar socioeconomic origins signals that "ethnic and racial origins have at most minor impacts on life chances and opportunities" (Alba and Nee 2003:12, Drouhot and Nee 2019).

These results extend and complement Li and Heath's (2016) study of majority and minority mobility in Great Britain, in which they document patterns of mobility among later-generation immigrants mirroring those of natives. Together, they depict a rather optimistic picture in which the legal provisions for equal opportunities at the core of various Western European nation-states have increased the costs of discrimination in nontrivial ways. They work to prevent certain ascriptive traits, like nativity and immigrant origin, from negatively affecting life chances. In 21st century Western Europe, social origins generally trump immigrant origins in

determining life chances among the second generation. The counterintuitive reality of assimilation is that the children of immigrants — a large share of whom grew up in a relative social disadvantage due to the socioeconomic composition of postwar migration flows — may find themselves in "equal misery" with natives from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, depending on how rigid social stratification in the country of destination is. Meanwhile, those originating from the top are as likely as comparable members of the native population to maintain their class background in adulthood.

In that sense, our substantive results depart from those of Kanitsar (2024), who, in a recent study using similar data but a different approach, documents origin penalties at the second generation. However, Kanitsar (2024) uses a highly aggregate country scheme and produces global indicator of second-generation differences that are not sensitive to either region of origins or class origin/destination combinations. Based on a more in-depth analysis of a select set of countries in which we study cross-class movement across all class origin and destination combinations, our results only show selective penalties at the second generation, along with patterns of second-generation advantage. Thus, a detailed look at second-generation patterns of mobility as a whole hardly shows systematic evidence of penalties and immigrant-specific barriers to mobility.

To be sure, our results do not lessen the importance of prior work pointing to significant barriers faced by the second generation — for instance, facing discrimination in access to jobs (e.g., Zschnirt and Ruedin 2016, Polavieja et al. 2023) as well as higher risk of unemployment (Heath et al. 2008, Li and Heath 2016) compared to similar natives. Rather, it suggests that these barriers are not strong enough to nullify the effect of parental socioeconomic background and disrupt the "normal" process of intergenerational status transmission as it has been described in canonical stratification research (Blau and Duncan 1967, Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Additionally, a master trend of assimilation as documented by our results at the aggregate level is not incompatible with the existence of other stratification processes maintaining immigrant-native inequalities at more granular levels, for instance *within* big classes and along other dimensions not studied here (e.g., income, or neighborhood quality). In other words, the "powerful undercurrent of assimilation" (Alba and Nee 2003:215) expressed by mobility patterns does not preclude discrimination in specific social fields. Rather, it indicates that discrimination is not strong enough to induce systematic immobility (or downward mobility among those originating from the top) across generation among immigrant families — unlike, for instance, systematic and institutional discrimination during the Jim Crow era in the United States (Duncan and Blau 1967).

Immigrant-Specific Advantages and Barriers: Heterogeneity in Mobility Outcomes at the Second Generation

Such an overall pattern of similarity in mobility between immigrant- and native-origin individuals notwithstanding, we document mobility outcomes that are specific to the second generation. This includes, first, pointed but important obstacles to upward mobility conditional on origins for some groups in some countries —

namely barriers to upward mobility towards the top for MENA-origin individuals in Germany and Belgium and Europeans in Belgium and Sweden. Overall, the analyses by regional origins revealed relatively few intergroup differences. However, it bears reiterating that we did not have enough data for certain groups — such as the Sub-Saharan and East African-origin second generation — to document potential attainment gaps among all origin groups in all countries. Indeed, results from our power analysis suggest that for some African-origin second generation populations, and given their sample size, we would need native-immigrant differences of more than 70 percentage points for it to be detectable, which is a strong indication of statistical underpower (see online supplement).

However, the earlier analyses aggregating second-generation respondents regardless of their regional origins are a more solid ground, and suggest certain barriers in access to the top classes (administrative and technical) among those originating in the service class, who relatedly are more likely to remain there in adulthood. There are also consistent barriers to upward mobility into the technical class among those originating from the working class. Together, these results may reflect context-specific patterns of elite social closure, whereby access to the top of the social structure is more likely to exclude lower-class minorities than lower-class natives, as well as discrimination in terms of skin color (Polavieja et al. 2023) or religion (Adida et al. 2016). These results may also revolve upon cultural capital and country-specific "cultural knowledge" non-native families may be less familiar with (Lareau 2015, Hermansen 2016). Future work investigating the ethnic dimension of elite social closure and the social experience of those achieving upper-class status will be increasingly important in understanding the determinants of strong forms of upward mobility among ethnic minorities (Midtbøen and Nadim 2022, Drouhot 2023, Crul et al. 2017).

Along with such immigrant-specific barriers evoking a limited "second-generation penalty," we also find evidence for a second-generation advantage in mobility out of the bottom of the class structure. Indeed, in the analyses disaggregating by social origins, we document lower probabilities to remain in blue-collar occupations in adulthood when originating from a blue-collar family for multiple origin groups — for instance Asians and mixed backgrounds in Great Britain and Europeans in Switzerland and Germany. We also noted that the European-origin second generation in France is more likely than natives to experience social reproduction at the top, and more likely to experience extreme mobility to the top from the bottom. We also saw heightened probabilities to experience moderate mobility into the service and technical classes from the bottom among some groups in Great Britain, Germany, and Switzerland.

As per our theorizing above, these results may well reflect immigrant optimism and the effect of unobserved variables specific to immigrants, such as a peculiar form of "grit" or parental pressure to achieve mobility (Kasinitz et al. 2008, Zéroulou 1988). Another promising explanation revolves around immigrant selectivity and measurement error of social status at origins: an occupation coded as lower class in the occupational scheme of modernized, postindustrial economies in Western Europe may actually be relatively higher in the class scheme of industrial or agrarian economies at origin. Additionally, some migrants may experience occupational

downgrade with migration, due to difference in labor market structures and issues in the recognition of foreign credentials.

In that line of reasoning, what matters is not social status in absolute but in relative terms, namely social standing within the occupational distribution (Ichou 2013, Feliciano and Lanuza 2017). Hence, parents originating from top classes at origin may legitimately wish to reproduce such top relative positions among their children at destination. Here, we do not have data on occupational status at origins, but it is possible that what we document as a second advantage may in fact be closer to a pattern of reproduction once social origins are measured correctly in the parental country of birth (Feliciano and Lanuza 2017). Indeed, recent research using such contextual attainment measures on educational selectivity among the first generation in Western Europe shows that most immigrants to Europe are positively selected (Engzell and Ichou 2019). Altogether, issues of selectivity may induce measurement errors at the first generation and thus lead to artificial "catch-up effects" at the second generation. The extent to which the pattern of second-generation advantage we documented here stems from unobserved class selectivity and measurement error among the parental generation should be the object of future research.

Limitations and Conclusion

In this article, we have offered a new perspective on immigrant assimilation relying on a social mobility approach, and allowing for one of the most comprehensive empirical descriptions of immigrant socioeconomic assimilation in Western Europe to date. In closing, a few remarks about certain limitations inherent to our research design are in order. Although we know of no other data set offering a large enough sample of second-generation, adult individuals across multiple countries, the ESS data we used here remain too small in scope to investigate mobility in a more granular fashion or among smaller origin groups. If immigrant- and native-origin individuals experienced different levels of mobility *within* our big classes, our research design would not be able to measure it. Studying immigrant intergenerational mobility between more detailed classes such as that from the Erikson-Goldthorpe-Portocarrero scheme or better yet, micro-classes (e.g., professions, Weeden and Grusky 2005) rather than big classes, represents an important challenge for future research. Relatedly, it bears repeating that the overall positive picture our analyses suggest does not preclude strong ethnic inequalities within big classes, or along other dimensions of socioeconomic assimilation. Future work could use more granular and comprehensive data (such as registry and administrative data) to study mobility patterns in socioeconomic dimensions other than class, such as income, as well as allow for heterogeneity by national origins, rather than the aggregate, and arguably coarse regional schemes we used here. More generally, the aggregate, relatively optimistic picture we uncover in this study will need to be confirmed with research on the emerging third generation. Mobility outcomes among the grandchildren of immigrants, and whether or not they experience a negative influence of immigrant origins on life chances, clearly constitute the next research frontier.

Notes

1 Throughout the manuscript, we use "native" to refer to the native children of native-born parents — the so-called third-plus generation.

2 It is implicit within both neoassimilation and segmented assimilation theories that such socioeconomic equality and immigrant mobility are *sine qua non* conditions for the occurrence of other dimensions like intermarriage, acculturation, and belonging (Gans 2007, Schachter 2016, Drouhot 2023). Here however, we refer to "assimilation" primarily as "socioeconomic assimilation," and do not study its relational and cultural aspects.

3 Throughout the manuscript, we use the terms upward and downward to designate trajectories of *absolute* mobility, that is, whether children are better or worse off than their parents in absolute terms, regardless of changes in their relative position in society (such as that measured by ranks in a class or income gradient).

4 Nevertheless, we acknowledge that segmented assimilation theory obviously diverges from our approach here insofar as it considers blocked mobility and the skrinking of life chances for disadvantaged non-White immigrant groups as part of the process of racialization and assimilating "downwards" — towards pre-existing, downtrodden racial minorities facing blocked opportunity for mobility. In other words, the *increasing* influence of racial and ethnic background on mobility outcomes in the context of reception is constitutive of assimilation within of the segmented assimilation framework — which directly clashes with our conceptualization of assimilation in terms of *decreasing* influence of ethnic origins on life chances. We think the latter is better adapted to the Western European context, as it has less been shaped by a historical pattern of racial stratification than the United States.

5 Conversely, children of upper-class immigrants primarily experiencing downward mobility and ending up alongside lower-class, second-generation members of the same immigrant group would signal a strong influence of immigrant — rather than social — origins in shaping life chances, and thus the absence of assimilation.

6 Formally, this relationship can be expressed as: $\mathbb{P}(D \mid C, N) = \sum_o \mathbb{P}(D \mid O = o, C, N)\mathbb{P}(O = o \mid C, N)$.

7 Our regression models apply sampling weights to correct for biases in selection probability, nonresponse, noncoverage, and stratification errors.

8 Our findings are robust, showing little variation whether these respondents are included or excluded, indicating that differences in educational attainment between second-generation immigrants and natives do not substantially affect our conclusions. Further analysis reveals that second generation immigrants aged 16 to 18 are 10 percentage points more likely to be enrolled in educational programs than their native counterparts (approximately 90 percent vs. 80 percent), a difference that notably vanishes after the age of 20. Detailed results are available upon request.

9 We group mixed respondents — those with only one foreign-born parents — with those of other origins for reasons of statistical power.

10 Note that contrary to the U.S. context where "Asian" in practice designates a large proportion of highly selected and skilled migrant groups such as the Indians, it has no equivalent in Western European contexts where Asian-origin populations entered Europe *en masse* through labor agreement destined to recruit unskilled workers to help with reconstruction efforts following World War II.

11 For instance, in the 2008 survey (round 4), 89 percent of respondents in our analytic sample could cite their fathers' occupation at age 14, compared to only 54 percent for their mothers. By 2020 (round 10), these figures were 88 percent and 65 percent, respectively.

12 The underlying logic to our choice here is that the smaller the true difference is, the larger the sample size that is needed to detect it. Minimally detectable differences that are small in absolute terms require larger sample sizes to provide reliable estimates of intergroup differences, indicating the importance of adequate data for detecting subtle effects.

References

Abramitzky, Ran, Leah Platt Boustan, Elisa Jacome, and Santiago Perez. 2021. "Intergenerational Mobility of Immigrants in the United States Over Two Centuries" *American Economic Review* 111(2) 580-608.

Adida, Claire L., David Laitin and Marie-Anne Valfort. 2016. *Why Muslim Integration Fails in Christian Heritage Societies*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Aguilera, Michael B. and Douglas S. Massey. 2003. "Social Capital and the Wages of Mexican Migrants: New Hypotheses and Tests" *Social Forces* 82(2) 671–701.

Alba, Richard, Brenden Beck, and Duygu Basaran Sahin. 2017. "The U.S. Mainstream Expands – Again." Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 9451(April):1–19.

Alba, Richard D., and Jennifer. Holdaway. 2013. The Children of Immigrants at School : A Comparative Look at Integration in the United States and Western Europe. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

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

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

Aparicio, Rosa. 2007. "The integration of the second and 1.5 generations of Moroccan, Dominican and Peruvian origin in Madrid and Barcelona." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33(7) 1169-93.

Auspurg, Katrin, Andreas Schneck and Thomas Hinz. 2019. "Closed doors everywhere? A meta-analysis of field experiments on ethnic discrimination in rental housing markets" *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45:1 95-114.

Beller, Emily. 2009. "Bringing Intergenerational Social Mobility Research into the Twenty-First Century: Why Mothers Matter." American Sociological Review 74(4):507–28.

Beller, Emily and Michael Hout. 2006. "Welfare States and Social Mobility: How Educational and Social Policy May Affect Cross-National Differences in the Association Between Occupational Origins and Destinations" *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 24 (4) 353-365.

Blau, Peter M. 1977. "A Macrosociological Theory of Social Structure." American Journal of Sociology 83(1):26–54.

Blau, Peter M. and Otis Dudley Duncan. 1967. *The American Occupational Structure.* New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Bourdieu, Pierre and Jean-Claude Passeron. 1977. *Reproduction in education, society and culture*. London: Sage.

Borgna, Camilla, and Dalit Contini. 2014. "Migrant Achievement Penalties in Western Europe: Do Educational Systems Matter?" European Sociological Review 30(5):670–83.

Brinbaum, Yaël and Annick Kieffer. 2009. "Les scolarités des enfants d'immigrés de la sixième au baccalauréat : différenciation et polarisation des parcours" *Population* 64(3) 561-610.

Causa, Orsetta, and Asa Johansson. 2010. "Intergenerational Social Mobility in OECD Countries." *OECD Journal: Economic Studies* 2010:33–76.

Chan, Tak Wing, and Vikki Boliver. 2013. "The Grandparents Effect in Social Mobility: Evidence from British Birth Cohort Studies." American Sociological Review 78(4):662–78.

Crul, Maurice. 2013. "Snakes and Ladders in Educational Systems: Access to Higher Education for Second-Generation Turks in Europe." Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 39(9):1–19.

Crul, Maurice and Hans Vermeulen. 2003. "The second-generation in Europe." *International Migration Review* 37(4) 965-986.

Crul, Maurice, Jens Schneider, Elif Keskiner, and Frans Lelie. 2017. "The Multiplier Effect: How the Accumulation of Cultural and Social Capital Explains Steep Upward Social Mobility of Children of Low-Educated Immigrants." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40(2):321–38.

Crul, Maurice, Jens Schneider and Frans Lelie (eds). 2012. The European second-generation Compared. Does the Integration Context Matter? Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Di Stasio, Valentina, Bram Lancee, Susanne Veit, and Ruta Yemane. 2019. "Muslim by Default or Religious Discrimination? Results from a Cross-national Field Experiment on Hiring Discrimination." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies.* Online first.

Drouhot, Lucas G. 2023. "Fitting in at the Top? Stigma and the Negotiation of Belonging Among the New Immigrant Elite in France." *International Migration Review*. Online first.

Drouhot, Lucas G. and Victor Nee. 2019. "Assimilation and the second generation in Europe and America: Blending and segregating social dynamics between immigrants and natives" *Annual Review of Sociology* 45 177-199.

Duncan, Otis Dudley. 1968. "Patterns of Occupational Mobility Among Negro Men." Demography 5(1):11–22.

Engzell, Per, and Mathieu Ichou. 2020. "Status Loss: The Burden of Positively Selected Immigrants." International Migration Review 54(2):471–95.

Feliciano, Cynthia and Yader R. Lanuza. 2017. "An Immigrant Paradox? Contextual Attainment and Intergenerational Educational Mobility" *American Sociological Review* 82(1) 211-241.

Fernández-Reino, Mariña. 2016. "Immigrant optimism or anticipated discrimination? Explaining the first educational transition of ethnic minorities in England" *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 46(B) 141-156.

Gans, Herbert J. 2007. "Acculturation, assimilation and mobility" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30(1) 152-164.

Hainmueller, Jens and Dominik Hangartner. 2013. "Who Gets a Swiss Passport? A Natural Experiment in Immigrant Discrimination" *American Political Science Review* 107(1) 159-187.

Haller, William, Alejandro Portes, and Scott M. Lynch. 2011. "Dreams Fulfilled Dreams Shattered: Determinants of Segmented Assimilation in the Second Generation." Social Forces 89(3):733–62.

Heath, Anthony F., Catherine Rodon and Elina Kilpi. 2008. "The second-generation in Western Europe: Education, Unemployment, and Occupational Attainment" *Annual Review of Sociology* 34 211-235.

Heath, Anthony and Jean Martin. 2013. "Can religion explain ethnic penalty in the labour market?" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36(6) 1005-1027.

Hermansen, Are Skeie. 2016. "Moving Up or Falling Behind? Intergenerational Socioeconomic Transmission among Children of Immigrants in Norway" *European Sociological Review* 32(5) 675–689.

Hout, Michael. 1984. "Occupational Mobility of Black Men: 1962 to 1973" *American Sociological Review* 49(3) 308-322.

Hout, Michael. 2018. "Americans' Occupational Status Reflects the Status of Both of Their Parents." Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 115(38):9527–32.

Ichou, Mathieu. 2013. "Différences d'origine et origine des différences : les résultats scolaires des enfants d'émigrés/immigrés en France du début de l'école primaire à la fin du collège" *Revue Française de Sociologie* 54(1) 5-52.

Ichou, Mathieu. 2015. "Origine migratoire et inégalités scolaires : étude longitudinale des résultats scolaires des descendants d'immigrés en France et en Angleterre" *Revue Française de Pédagogie* 191 29-46.

Jackson, Michelle, Jan O. Jonsson, and Frida Rudolphi. 2012. "Ethnic Inequality in Choice-Driven Education Systems." Sociology of Education 85(2):158–78.

Jonsson, Jan O. and Frida Rudolphi. 2011. "Weak Performance - Strong Determination: School Achievement and Educational Choice among Children of Immigrants in Sweden" *European Sociological Review* 27(4) 487-508.

Kaas, Leo, and Christian Manger. 2012. "Ethnic Discrimination in Germany's Labour Market: A Field Experiment." *German Economic Review* 13 (1) 1-20.

Kalmijn, Matthijs. 2015. "The Children of Intermarriage in Four European Countries: Implications for School Achievement, Social Contacts, and Cultural Values." Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 662(1):246–65.

Kanitsar, Georg. 2024. "The Same Social Elevator? Intergenerational Class Mobility of Second-Generation Immigrants across Europe." European Sociological Review jcae007.

Kasinitz, Philip and John H. Mollenkopf, Mary C. Waters, and Jennifer Holdaway. 2008. *Inheriting the City. The Children of Immigrants Come of Age*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Lareau, Annette. 2015. "Cultural knowledge and social inequality" *American Sociological Review* 80(1): 1–27.

Li, Yaojun Li and Anthony Heath. 2016 "Class Matters: A study of Minority and Majority Social Mobility in Britain, 1982-2011" *American Journal of Sociology* 122(1) 162-200.

Lowrey, Kendal, Jennifer Van Hook, James Bachmeier, and Thomas Foster. 2021. "Leapfrogging the Melting Pot? European Immigrants' Intergenerational Mobility across the Twentieth Century." Sociological Science 8:480–512.

Luthra, Renee Reichl. 2010. "Assimilation in a new context: Educational attainment of the immigrant second-generation in Germany" ISER Working Paper Series, No. 2010-21, University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER), Colchester.

Meurs, Dominique, Bertrand Lhommeau and Mahrez Okba. 2009. "Document de travail 182: Emplois, salaires et mobilité intergénérationnelle" Paris: Institut National d'Etudes Démographiques.

Meinshausen, N. (2007). Relaxed Lasso. Computational Statistics & Data Analysis, 52(1), 374-393.

Midtbøen, Arfinn H. 2014. "Discrimination of the second-generation: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Norway" *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 17(1) 252-272.

Midtbøen, Arnfinn H., and Marjan Nadim. 2022. "Navigating to the Top in an Egalitarian Welfare State: Institutional Opportunity Structures of Second-Generation Social Mobility." International Migration Review 56(1):97–122.

Nee, Victor and Lucas G. Drouhot. 2020. "Immigration, Opportunity and Assimilation in a Technology Economy" *Theory & Society* 49(5): 965-990.

Pager, Devah, Bart Bonikowski and Bruce Western. 2009. "Discrimination in a Low-Wage Labor Market: A Field Experiment" *American Sociological Review* 74(5) 777-799.

Pichler, Florian. 2011. "Success on European labor markets: A cross-national comparison of attainment between immigrant and majority populations" *International Migration Review* 45(4) 938-978.

Polavieja, Javier G., Bram Lancee, María Ramos, Susanne Veit, and Ruta Yemane. 2023. "In Your Face: A Comparative Field Experiment on Racial Discrimination in Europe." *Socio-Economic Review* mwad009. doi: 10.1093/ser/mwad009.

Portes, Alejandro, and Min Zhou. 1993. "The New Second Generation: Segmented Assimilation and Its Variants." The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 530(1):74–96.

Salikutluk, Zerrin. 2016. "Why do Immigrant Students Aim High? Explaining the Aspiration-Achievement Paradox of Immigrants in Germany" *European Sociological Review* 32(5) 581-592.

Schachter, Ariela. 2016. "From 'Different' to 'Similar': An Experimental Approach to Understanding Assimilation." *American Sociological Review* 81(5) 981–1013.

Shields, Michael A. and Stephen Wheatley Price. "The English language fluency and occupational success of ethnic minority immigrant men living in English metropolitan areas" *Journal of Population Economics* 15: 137-160.

Strand, Steve and Joe Winston. 2008. "Educational aspirations in inner city schools" *Educational Studies* 34(4) 249-267.

Stuhler, Jan. 2018. "A review of intergenerational mobility and its drivers." Technical report, Joint Research Centre. Publications Office of the European Union.

Weeden, Kim A. and David B Grusky. 2005. "The Case for a New Class Map" *American Journal of Sociology* 111(1) 141-212.

Wilson, Deborah, Simon Burgess and Adam Briggs. 2011. "The dynamics of school attainment of England's ethnic minorities" *Journal of Population Economics* 24 681-700.

Wilson, William Julius . 1978. The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wimmer, Andreas. 2013. *Ethnic Boundary Making, Institutions, Power, Networks*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Zeng, Zhen, and Yu Xie. 2004. "Asian-Americans ' Earnings Disadvantage Reexamined: The Role of Place of Education." American Journal of Sociology 109(5):1075–1108.

Zéroulou, Zaïhia. 1988. "La réussite scolaire des enfants d'immigrés. L'apport d'une approche en termes de mobilisation." *Revue française de sociologie* 24(3) 447-470.

Zhou, Min, and Roberto G. Gonzales. 2019. "Divergent Destinies: Children of Immigrants Growing Up in the United States." Annual Review of Sociology 45(1):383–99.

Zschnirt, Eva and Didier Ruedin. 2016. "Ethnic discrimination in hiring decisions: a meta-analysis of correspondence tests 1990–2015" *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42(7) 1115-1134.

Zuccotti, Carolina V. 2015. "Do Parents Matter? Revisiting Ethnic Penalties in Occupation among second-generation Ethnic Minorities in England and Wales." *Sociology* 49 (2) 229–251.

Mauricio Bucca: Department of Sociology, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile.
E-mail: mebucca@uc.cl.

Lucas G. Drouhot: Department of Sociology, Utrecht University.
E-mail: l.g.m.drouhot@uu.nl.