

The Setting Sun : Immigration Policy, Race Relations and Multiculturalism in Post-Colonial Great Britain

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THE SETTING SUN:
IMMIGRATION POLICY, RACE RELATIONS AND MULTICULTURALISM IN POST-
COLONIAL GREAT BRITAIN

FLORA MACIVOR LAMOUREUX
UNDER THE DIRECTION OF PROFESSOR GILLES LEYDIER

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INTRODUCTION

It has long been said that “the sun never sets on the British Empire.” With territories on every continent and an empire that encompassed, at its peak, one quarter of the world’s population and of the world’s land surface, this statement can be taken quite literally. Asians, Indians, Africans, Europeans; white, red, black or yellow, all races and ethnicities were united under the common title of “British subjects.” But since that glorious era of *Pax Britannica*, the situation in Britain has shifted. Today, Britain’s borders have receded, and they are now closed to all but the most qualified immigrants. Inside the country, policies of “race relations” or “multiculturalism” attempt to unify a people as diverse as the former Empire once was. But unlike in centuries past, the diverse population of today’s Britain does not have the luxury of spreading across the globe. With a total surface area of less than 250,000 square kilometers, the British have been forced to come face to face with their country’s diversity – sometimes with explosive results.

On July 7th, 2005, just before 9:00am, the London public transportation system was rocked by four suicide bombings. Three simultaneous explosions struck the subway system, and a fourth only a quarter-hour later targeted a double-decker bus. Fifty-two people were killed, nearly 800 were injured, and the entire country of Great Britain stood still in shock. Thanks to surveillance videos, the four bombers were quickly identified as Mohammad Sidique Khan, Shehzad Tanweer, Germaine Lindsay, and Hasib Hussain. Three of the four had links to Pakistan, and all four were Muslims. At first glance, these events that have come to be known as the London Subway Bombings seemed to be just another episode of the East-West, Orient-Occident, Christian-Muslim conflict that has been sweeping the globe.

But the young men who targeted the trains and the bus did not fit the typical image of Muslim extremists. All four were raised in Britain, and three of the four were born there. The fourth, Germaine Lindsay, was born in Jamaica and converted to Islam only in 2000.¹ All four were studious and had attracted little negative attention in school or in their social lives. They were previously unknown to police and had never before been investigated for any anti-British activity. Upon closer analysis, these attacks seem more a product of internal British conflicts between whites and minorities than of a global East-West opposition. Although the perpetrators were not white, these men could have been the image of twenty-first century Britain: products of the Empire, come to England for new opportunities and a brighter future, the former colonizer and the former colonized together and equal.

But this is not the situation in Great Britain today. Despite the opportunities and the supposed equality offered by modern British society, Muslims and others of South Asian

¹ “7 July Bombings: London Bombings In Depth,” BBC News, BBC, Web, 3 May 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/uk/05/london_blasts/investigation/html/introduction.stm.

descent remain segregated.² They live in separate communities, lead separate lives and earn less than their British compatriots. Some feel so frustrated as to take to violence to make their voices heard. What is it about British society that frustrated these young men to such an extent? What transformed them from British students, British citizens, and British subjects into terrorists? What has led to this social exclusion of South Asians in modern Great Britain?

My desire to study this subject was born following the London Subway Bombings in 2005, but my interest is not limited to the bombings themselves. Following the attacks, a wave of racism – specifically anti-Islam, but a racism that could be transferred to anyone with a vaguely South Asian appearance – swept the United Kingdom. The widespread and virulent response against a community that has been linked to Great Britain for so many centuries came as a surprise. How could a former Commonwealth people be targeted and isolated so easily? As I began to research this subject, I realized that there was a larger question that demanded an answer: what role does the British Asian community play in contemporary Great Britain, and how did it arrive there?

This is the question at the center of my project. In order to formulate a response, I intend to examine every aspect of the lives of South Asians in Britain: their integration or assimilation into the British population, the formation of ethnic enclaves or ghettos, the social and judicial statute of South Asian immigrants, the British perception of South Asians and British Asians' self-identification, and in general, their place in contemporary British society.

My thesis project takes a longitudinal look at the interactions between South Asia and Britain, for the roots of the relationship between Great Britain and the Indian subcontinent run deep. Trade routes between the two countries date from the early 17th century, with political control beginning in the mid-18th century and increasing through the 1900's. India was the crown jewel in the British Empire: a major source of income, a picture-window for smartly dressed and well-spoken subjects, a collection of British outposts among tropical jungles and native dwellings. But the relationship between the two civilizations has never been simple. South Asians and British have always remained separate, both on the subcontinent and in the British Isles. During the colonial era, the British government set the precedent that their South Asian subjects would remain a community apart, despite verbal promises of equality and citizenship. Even the most well-educated and successful South Asians remained subordinate to the British, and the social, cultural, and economic divides between the two groups were wide.

Following the Second World War, Great Britain suffered from serious labor shortages in its attempts to rebuild its economy and become competitive with new economic rivals. The government called upon the Commonwealth to provide workers, and tens of thousands of South

² Throughout this essay, I will use the term "South Asian" to refer to anyone from the Indian subcontinent, regardless of race, religion, or ethnicity. "British Asian" will be used to mean anyone of South Asian descent who is a British citizen. In my discussions of specific issues for Muslims, I will specify "Muslim" or "Muslim South Asians."

Asians answered the call. With the arrival of so many immigrants to the United Kingdom, the relationship between South Asians and British was forced to evolve. However, many elements of the colonial power dynamic carried over. The British government and population viewed South Asians as a health risk, as an unwelcome invader to their territory. Many South Asians were forced to confront overt racism for the first time in their difficult transition from colonial subjects to citizens. The 1950's and 1960's were an important time for the definition of British immigration policy, specifically regarding the Commonwealth; it is my hope that a study of immigration policy in this period will help determine the roots of British public opinion regarding South Asians.

In recent years, the public and political opinion towards South Asians has softened, but the population remains separate from white Britons. Can this exclusion be attributed to Britain's colonial history?

In fact, what does it mean for an immigrant group to be "excluded" from its host country? The answer to this question is not as simple as it may seem. Governments and academics alike have sought to define immigrant "integration" for decades, but the issue seems more pressing than ever today. In recent years, some of the world's major immigrant groups – Mexicans in the United States, Turks in Germany, North Africans in France, Moroccans in the Netherlands, and especially South Asians in Great Britain – have been accused of "failing" to integrate.³ But integration is not an end result, a quantifiable destination that a government can identify for its immigrants. The classic view of integration defines it as a linear, progressive insertion of immigrant groups into "mainstream society," implying adherence to a nation's "common values, practices and language."⁴ It is a gradual process that takes place on both individual and collective levels.

However, definitions of integration vary. Some countries, such as France or the United States, have emphasized the importance of "assimilation" – which implies that immigrants or minority groups abandon their cultural practices in order to become a part of their host country. In Great Britain, though, more emphasis has been put upon the ideals of multiculturalism, which permits immigrants and minorities to keep their ethnic differences while becoming active participants in the host country's activity. No matter the ideal espoused by a country, the ultimate goal is to have minorities that are integrated without violence or upheaval.

How can one judge if immigrants are integrated or excluded? There are a number of characteristics generally accepted in studies of integration or assimilation. Educational statistics and academic qualifications make up one element, as do employment rates, average salaries,

³ Maurice Crul and Mark Thompson, "The Second Generation in Europe and the United States: How is the Transatlantic Debate Relevant for Further Research on the European Second Generation?" *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 33.7 (September 2007): 1025. Print.

⁴ R. Alba and V. Nee, "Rethinking assimilation theory for a new era of immigration," *International Migration Review*, 31.4: 826-74, in Crul and Thompson, 1028.

and general labor-market activity.⁵ But less quantifiable aspects must also be investigated. Culture, ethnic or religious identity, citizenship, and even race come into play when discussing integration.⁶

It is important to note that integration can vary over time, and is not always linear. Sometimes a first generation of immigrants can assimilate fairly well into their host country's culture, but their children find themselves excluded. A number of sociologists have studied this phenomenon, with different results. In the United States in particular, immigration specialists have developed a rather pessimistic outlook on the future of second-generation, American-born immigrant children. H. Gans advanced the concept of "second-generation decline."⁷ Portes and Zhou proposed the theory of "downward assimilation," in which second-generation immigrant youths assimilate, not into mainstream culture, but into "the urban underclass."⁸ Waldinger and Perlman called this same phenomenon "second-generation revolt."⁹ Whatever the terminology, later generations face a distinct set of challenges that their elders may never have imagined.

So how can one evaluate the level of integration of South Asians in modern Great Britain? The answer to such a question is complicated by the incredible diversity of South Asians themselves. They do not constitute a seamless, uniform "community" as such; they come from different countries, different religions, and different cultures; each individual lives his own unique experience in Great Britain. Analysis is also complicated by changing notions of citizenship and belonging in modern Europe: definitions of "identity" are fluid and evasive, frontiers are modified and erased.

In Great Britain itself, the changing definition of "nation" has played a particularly significant role in determining immigration policy. Originally, Great Britain – and the entire British Empire – was conceptualized along a "civic" definition of nationhood. Based on the ideals of liberty, equality and individual freedoms, the civic nation, in theory, considered all its citizens equal. This ideology permitted Britain to magnanimously bestow citizenship on all her colonial subjects, for example, or to avoid Commonwealth immigration restrictions for as long as she did.

But faced with the disintegration of the Commonwealth and domestic economic crises, Britain's definition of "nation" changed. From the 1950's to the 1970's, British thinking gradually evolved from a civic to an ethnic definition of nationhood. The wave of political racism and the rise of restrictionist immigration policies that continue to this day can be

⁵ Crul and Thompson, 1026.

⁶ Ibid., 1027.

⁷ H. Gans, "Second-generation decline: scenarios for the economic and ethnic futures of the post-1965 American immigrants," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 15.2: 173-192, in Crul and Thompson, 1028.

⁸ A. Portes and M. Zhou, "The new second generation: segmented assimilation and its variants among post-1965 immigrant youth," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 530.1: 74-98, in Crul and Thompson, 1028.

⁹ R. Waldinger and J. Perlmann, "Second generation: past, present, future," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 24.1: 5-24, in Crul and Thompson, 1030.

attributed to the ideological shift, which defined national belonging by ancestry and race instead of simply by citizenship.

Today, the South Asian minority in Britain finds itself in a difficult position. It is confronted by the contradictory policies of strict immigration controls and generous, color-blind race relations encouraging equality and discouraging discrimination. Government discourse shifts regularly between multiculturalism, allowing ethnic groups to keep their cultural markers, and integration, which encourages them to blend into the greater British population. Young British Asians are torn between family loyalty to their parents' countries of origin and their own ties to Britain, the country where they are born and raised. And British Muslims have their own set of concerns, such as how to live in the religious minority in an overwhelmingly Christian country. I hope to touch upon all of these difficulties in the following chapters.

I will begin by giving historical context to the relationship between Britain and the Indian subcontinent with a discussion of the colonial era. This first section will highlight the first exchanges between South Asians and British, the rapports established between the two countries, and the impressions sent back to the United Kingdom. Next, I will continue chronologically with the arrival of the first South Asian immigrants to the Great Britain. The first arrivals came looking for work, and were welcomed onto British soil with the expectation that they would soon return to their home country. These first South Asian immigrants were often victims of government mismanagement, intentional or not, and I will examine how these precedents set in the 1950's and 1960's continue to influence contemporary immigration policy. This discussion will also encompass the laws and legislation enacted to control Commonwealth, and South Asian, immigration. The economic recessions that struck Britain in the 1960's and the fuel crisis of the 1970's led to an immigration policy that was much less welcoming to Commonwealth workers, a situation that was complicated by the end of the British Empire and a cooling-off of relations between India and the United Kingdom. I will finish with a brief look at immigration's role in British politics, and how major political figures and parties have negotiated with voters regarding immigration.

Finally, a third chapter will discuss the particular situation of Muslims in Great Britain. The majority of British Muslims are of South Asian origins, and as a result any discussion of Islam in Britain implies South Asians. I will investigate the challenges that their religion could create, living as a minority in a Christian country, and also the British public opinion regarding Muslims. Do South Asian Muslims live differently than other British Asians? Do they suffer from greater discrimination or racism than Hindus or Sikhs? These are the type of questions that inform my third chapter. Muslims merit a separate chapter of their own due to particular restraints of their religion, as well as the rise of Western anti-Muslim sentiment following the terrorist attacks of 9/11/2001 in the United States and 7/7/2005 in London.

I do not aspire to arrive at a definitive conclusion, stating that “yes, South Asians are integrated” or “no, South Asians are excluded.” But I hope that by investigating the characteristics of integration discussed above – culture, religion, ethnicity, employment and citizenship, immigration policy and laws – from the broadest range of sources possible, this essay will present a balanced, effective discussion of South Asian integration, or exclusion, in Great Britain.

The sources I have consulted over the course of my research are varied. I have attempted to study the representation of British Asians in popular culture by reading novels and watching films that discuss the place of immigrants in Great Britain. The works of writers such as Zadie Smith or M.Y. Alam, among others, have helped set the scene and provide a contemporary artistic interpretation of the state of affairs for British Asians. Regarding contemporary race relations in Britain, I have consulted the websites and pamphlets of a number of cultural and religious organizations for the advancement of British Asians, as well as recent news articles from *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*, or *The Daily Mail*. The great majority of my research, however, is based upon academic studies and articles. I was lucky to be exposed to some of the most well-respected academics working on immigration, such as Gary Freeman, Mark Thompson, or Christian Joppke. These three writers in particular were extremely helpful in developing an ideological framework for approaching this subject, especially Joppke’s work on multiculturalism. I also derived a large portion of my statistics from sociological studies of minority groups in Britain, mainly recent studies focusing on integration or discrimination. Philip Lewis’s sociological work *Young, British and Muslim* provided the basis for the majority of my third chapter, and I could not discuss my sources without mentioning Paul Foot’s excellent *Immigration and Race in British Politics*, which was essential in establishing the historical perspective on the arrival of South Asians in Britain.

Although there exists a wealth of sources concerning immigration and South Asians in Britain, I hope that this work will fill the gap between sociological studies and historical works. Too often, the sociological sources I consulted analyzed a specific set of data without connecting their results to the reality of contemporary Great Britain. And historical sources, on the other hand, examined the situation of British Asians from a political perspective, discussing government policies without revealing the actual daily realities for British Asians themselves. This piece aims to show both the political and social challenges to South Asian integration in Britain, from colonial times to the present.

THE FIRST BRITISH ASIANS: A HISTORY

Before discussing the contemporary issues surrounding South Asians in Great Britain, it is necessary to investigate the historical context of their arrival in the country. The first contact between Britain and India dates back to the 17th century, when the East India Company began establishing trade outposts throughout the subcontinent. The company had been granted a monopoly on trade with India, sending twenty to thirty ships per year between Europe and South Asia.¹⁰ But the disintegration of the Mughal empire and competition between France and Britain on the subcontinent pushed the British to become politically and militarily involved in Indian affairs. By 1765, Britain had begun official rule over Bengal, and her reign was soon to extend over the entire Indian subcontinent.¹¹ The colonial relationship between the two countries would last nearly two centuries.

Many elements of the relationship between South Asia and the United Kingdom were determined during the colonial era. In the half-century since the end of the British Empire, the “colonizer vs. colonized” power dynamic has been difficult to escape. British colonial policy has continued to inform the treatment and the public attitude towards South Asians, even three generations after the end of colonialism. This became evident with the arrival of the first wave of South Asian immigrants in Great Britain following the Second World War, and in the following waves of immigration throughout the 1960’s and 1970’s. As Crul and Thompson declare in their study of second-generation immigrants, “the ex-colonial relationship always brings in a complicated amalgam of both positive and negative influential factors.”¹² The positive include shared language, education, and history; the negative include, most notably, pre-existing racial stereotypes. The lasting effects of the colonial era mean that a thorough investigation of colonial history is necessary to understand the contemporary situation of British Asians.

This section will examine in detail the historical context of South Asian immigration to Great Britain. It will begin with a discussion of the colonial era, including colonial segregation, the British colonial attitude, and eventually a more thorough discussion of British colonial policy and their conceptualization of South Asians. Through my investigation into India under the British Empire, I hope to discover the bases of the complicated British-South Asian relationship that continues today.¹³ Following this, I will also look at the arrival of the first South Asians in Britain. From the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act to the welcome

¹⁰ Peter Marshall, “The British Presence in India in the 18th Century,” BBC British History in-depth, BBC, Web, 24 February 2010, http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/empire_seapower/east_india_01.shtml.

¹¹ *Idem*.

¹² Crul and Thompson, 1034.

¹³ The partition of India occurred in 1947, virtually at the same time as the dissolution of the British Empire in India, so there is no discussion of “Pakistan” during the colonial era.

received by the Kenya and Uganda Asians, I believe that the history of early South Asian immigration will help to illuminate the contemporary situation of British Asians.

I. The Colonial Era and Early Immigration

The “divide and rule” theory

Even in the early years of the British Empire, British colonial authorities kept their subjects at a distance by using what some have called the “divide and rule” theory.¹⁴ In order to govern their colonies efficiently, the British imposed artificial social hierarchies on the local population, often creating a small native elite that helped the British to keep the broader population in line. In what has also been called “trustee imperialism,” indigenous chiefs were left in charge of native institutions, while British governors supervised the colonial infrastructure.¹⁵ The dual systems of governance meant that colonial subjects and colonizers rarely mixed, but it also meant that Indians were not forced to assimilate into British culture. Instead, they kept their own, non-anglicized culture. In the words of British political scientist Sir Ernest Barker, speaking about British colonies in Africa, “The African native... had better be left an African, but aided to become a better African.”¹⁶

Although applied in nearly all Commonwealth countries, the “divide and rule” theory was perhaps most visible in the British colonies of East Africa, such as Kenya and Uganda. In their territories in Africa, the population was divided into three major groups: Africans, the indigenous people; Indians, colonial subjects who went to Africa to help the British in their colonizing mission; and the British, the governing class.

British law set up a complicated system that kept the three groups separate. Under colonial law, Africans did not have the right to enter into trade. Asians did not have the right to own land. The British in Africa, however, had no restrictions. In effect, these laws imposed social functions onto each race. Africans worked as peasants, toiling over small plots of land. Asians in Africa worked as shop-keepers, artisans, or sometimes petty bureaucrats – but they were mainly known as retailers. And the Europeans living in Africa were bankers, government authorities, and the social and political elite. These differences informed all aspects of life in Africa: family, school and church were all racially exclusive. Asians attended a government-sponsored Indian secondary school, and went to Indian mosques or temples.¹⁷ According to

¹⁴ Mahmood Mamdani, *From Citizen to Refugee: Uganda Asians come to Britain* (London: Frances Pinter Ltd., 1973. Print), 15.

¹⁵ Christian Joppke, “Multiculturalism and Immigration: A Comparison of the United States, Germany, and Great Britain,” *Theory and Society* 25.4 (August 1996): 480, *JSTOR*, Web, 21 March 2010, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/591882>.

¹⁶ Ernest Barker, *The Ideas and Ideals of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 155, in Joppke, 480.

¹⁷ Mamdani, 16.

Mahmood Mamdani, an Indian who was raised in Uganda, “the era of colonialism politicized race, tribe and religion.”¹⁸

Segregation in colonial cities

British colonization of the Indian subcontinent brought with it major changes for the native population. One of the more visible aspects of the colonization project was the construction of cities in the colonies. These cities were intended to be modern, European urban centers that combined British citizens, colonial subjects, and often immigrants from other countries. But despite, or perhaps because of, their diversity, colonial cities were often very segregated. This segregation can be attributed to three principal factors. First of all, the linguistic diversity found in the cities, both among European settlers and between Europeans and indigenous people, prevented significant cultural exchange. Secondly, the religious and ethnic diversity among the colonized peoples themselves also prevented integration. Finally, an intentional structural segregation was created purposely by the British to “erect legal and physical barriers between the ruler and the ruled.”¹⁹ This structural segregation reflected accurately the administrative and social segregation imposed by British immigration policy, to be discussed in the following pages.

The novel *A Passage to India*, the seminal colonial work by E.M. Forster, contains a description of the divisions in the colonial city of Chandrapore in its very first pages. He details the misery of the land where the Indian residents live: “The streets are mean, the temples ineffective.... So abased, so monotonous is everything that meets the eye, that when the Ganges comes down it might be expected to wash the excrescence back into the soil.”²⁰ But he contrasts this panorama with the relative wealth of the neighboring British: “Inland, the prospect alters.... On this second rise is laid out the little Civil Station, and viewed hence Chandrapore appears to be a totally different place.”²¹ Although Forster’s novel is fictional, his description is most likely a realistic portrait of colonial segregation. The author made multiple visits to India and also wrote well-respected non-fiction works about his visits.

This segregation in colonial cities, surprisingly, continued even after the period of decolonization. The elimination of ‘ruler’ and ‘ruled’ did not eliminate the corresponding disparities between British and indigenous people in South Asia, showing just how entrenched segregation was. The inequalities established on the Indian subcontinent followed British and South Asians alike to Great Britain, contributing to the exclusion of South Asians in modern British society.

¹⁸ Mamdani, 15.

¹⁹ A.J. Christopher, “Urban Segregation Levels in the British Overseas Empire and Its Successors, in the Twentieth Century,” *Transaction of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series* 17.1 (1992): 95, *JSTOR*, Web, 1 March 2009, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/622639>.

²⁰ E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (London: Penguin Books, 1979. Print), 3.

²¹ *Idem*.

The British colonial attitude

The British intellectual attitude towards their colonies also provides valuable insight into the origins of the separation between British and South Asians. According to historian William B. Cohen, Great Britain, like France, conceived their colonies and colonial subjects as children. Common discourse in the 18th and 19th centuries often referred to India as a child, to her need to be educated and raised in the British way. From this parent-child dynamic, one could infer that British policy towards India would reflect the treatment of British parents towards their own children. Cohen advances this idea in his 1970 article “The Colonized as Child,” which analyzes British child-rearing customs and applies them to colonial policy.²²

The results of his research are striking. In Victorian times, for example, British custom was for parents to send their children away to school at the age of six and to only see them during school vacations. The assumption behind this custom was that adults and children were inherently different, and should remain separated as much as possible.²³ This mindset is clearly reflected in the segregation between British and South Asians in India. Cohen himself makes reference to the “proverbial aloofness” between the British and their colonial subjects, much like the distance guarded between British parents and children.²⁴ Intermarriage between South Asians and British was strongly discouraged, and cohabitation, while permitted, was not encouraged. This was because British colonial policy, unlike French policies, did not imagine an eventual merging of cultures. Their ultimate goal for their colonies, as for their children, was independence, not integration.²⁵ As a result, they stayed as separate as possible from their imperial possessions, a separation that would remain in place even as former colonial subjects arrived in Great Britain.

This separation was encouraged by the inherent belief, shared by both the British public and the colonial government, that colonial subjects were irredeemably strange and foreign. However, the sentiments of other-ness were not expressed in terms of race or ethnicity. It was virtually never stated officially that certain subjects were different because of their race or religion.²⁶ As a result, there was never any open discussion of cultural differences between the British and their foreign subjects in the Commonwealth.

²² William B. Cohen. “The Colonized as Child: British and French Colonial Rule,” *African Historical Studies* 3.2 (1970): 427-431, *JSTOR*, Web, 25 March 2009, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/216227>.

²³ *Ibid.*, 429.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 430.

²⁵ *Idem.*

²⁶ Anne Wilson, “‘Mixed Race’ Children in British Society: Some Theoretical Considerations,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 35.1 (March 1984): 44, *JSTOR*, Web, 6 April 2009, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/590550>.

History of immigration to Britain

Britain, traditionally, has shown herself as a country of welcome for immigrants. For most of the 19th century, there were little or no restrictions regarding immigrant entry into Britain. Two minor acts requiring immigrants simply to register upon entry into Britain were put into place in 1826 and 1836, but even these were later repealed.²⁷ The burgeoning British economy and migration of her citizens to other countries led to a need for workers that was eagerly filled by foreign immigrants.

But the economic crises of the late 1800's caused a shift in the welcoming attitude among immigration authorities. Unemployment, poverty, and the mistreatment of workers across England – immigrants and natives alike – led to a wave of unionism and strikes among workers. This was compounded by the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Russian and Polish Jews, fleeing the anti-Semitism of Tsarist Russia. From 1875 to 1914, approximately 120,000 Jews arrived in Britain, many having fled their homes with nothing but the clothes on their back.²⁸ The arrival of so many immigrants during a time of economic recession, combined with latent anti-Semitism in Britain itself, contributed to unrest among workers and ordinary citizens alike.

The Conservative government under Arthur Balfour, Prime Minister from 1902 to 1905, tried to quell the unionist uprising by blaming immigrants for the suffering of all workers, despite evidence to the contrary. Statistics prove that the immigrant population actually posed very little risk and cost little for the British population. In 1903, only 0.69% of the British population was comprised of aliens, compared with 2.66% in France.²⁹ Less than 4% of aliens were living on poor relief, a lower percentage than that of the native population. Additionally, British doctors reported seeing no signs of infectious diseases among aliens. But these statistics did not stop the Conservative government from shouting the dangers of unchecked immigration. In 1902, Conservative Member of Parliament William Evans-Gordon made a rousing speech that may well be the first example of British anti-alien propaganda. He said:

“Not a day passes but English families are ruthlessly turned out to make room for foreign invaders.... It is only a matter of time before the population becomes entirely foreign.... The rates are burdened with the education of thousands of children of foreign parents.... The working classes know that new buildings are erected not for them but for strangers from abroad; they see notices that no English need apply placarded on vacant rooms; they see the schools crowded with foreign children and the very posters and advertisements on the walls in a foreign tongue....”³⁰

The language used by Evans-Gordon is strikingly similar to that borrowed by anti-immigrationists focusing on Indian and Pakistani aliens in the second half of the 20th century.

²⁷ Paul Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965. Print), 83.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 86.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 88.

Buoyed along by such incendiary language, the British government eventually passed the Aliens Act of 1905. This act was the first time immigration restrictions had been enacted in Britain, and was the first step towards the next century's resistance to immigrants and foreigners. The 1905 Act targeted mainly destitute immigrants or criminals seeking to enter the country. However, the Act did not specifically target Jews, and retained the right of immigrants to seek political asylum in Britain.

The government went a step farther 15 years later with the passing of the 1919 Alien Restriction Act. This Act, which was actually a series of amendments to an earlier act, was signed into law soon after the resolution of the First World War and targeted mainly Germans living in Great Britain. The Act was pushed into law by a wave of anti-German sentiment that arose during WWI and manifested itself by violence and racialism. German immigrants were interned in what were essentially concentration camps; shopkeepers refused to serve German women, even those married to British men; and dachshunds were found murdered and disemboweled in the streets. According to historian Paul Foot, the war itself was the cause of this violent reaction to Germans: he wrote, "War and the threat of war breed racialism."³¹ In any case, the 1919 Alien Restriction Act took previous immigration controls farther than ever before. According to the Act, any alien could be refused entry into the United Kingdom at immigration officers' discretion; aliens were not allowed into the country for more than three months if they did not have a Ministry of Labour work voucher or proof of private income; and any alien could be deported if the Home Secretary or the courts "deem it conducive to the public good."³²

This wide-ranging law granted the government more control than ever before on who could enter and remain in the country. And, ostensibly, it was effective. The inter-war years saw very few immigrants entering Great Britain, and statistics for 1926 show a negative total for immigration – more people left the country than entered that year. But the Alien Restriction Act of 1919 was not the only explanation for the drop in immigration; the global economic depression of the late 1920's was also to blame. During these difficult years, conditions in Britain were just as bad as elsewhere in the world. According to Paul Foot, "In conditions of overall hopeless slump, there is no drive, no motive or mass migration."³³

But the decrease in immigration did not quell anti-alien sentiment. Indeed, growing anti-Semitism in Britain led to more and more overt racism in the country. The 1920's and 1930's saw an increased discussion of "race" in the contest of anti-Semitism, and to talk of preserving the English and Scottish "races." W.P.C. Greene, a MP from Worcester, said in a speech in February 1925, "It is absolutely essential to preserve the purity of our race and to

³¹ Foot, 103.

³² Ibid., 107.

³³ Idem.

prevent contamination with the riff-raff of Eastern Europe, the stiffies of the Mediterranean and the dead beats of the world.”³⁴ As was the case with Evans-Gordon in 1902, this speech is eerily similar to those pronounced against Indians and Pakistanis in the 1960’s and 1970’s.

II. The First “British Asians”: 1945-1968

The post-war period

Following the end of the Second World War, the economic situation in Great Britain changed dramatically. It quickly became evident that the country was suffering from a serious labor shortage, and that its domestic labor force was not sufficient to rebuild and restart the country’s industries. But the government was hesitant to reach out to foreign workers. Still fearful of the kind of widespread unemployment that had plagued the country throughout the 1930’s, the government and the population were reluctant to recruit aliens.³⁵

In the August 1945, a Labour government was elected into power. Labour had a history of being pro-immigration, or at least was the traditional defender of immigrants’ rights in Great Britain. However, these positions were those defended by Labour while in the opposition. In power, the party showed itself every bit as strict as Conservatives against aliens.³⁶ In 1945, it was the Conservative Party in opposition that pushed for a more welcoming policy towards immigrants. Conservative Peter Thorneycraft said of the Labour Party in November 1946, “I find something a little contemptible about a party which preaches internationalism abroad and yet takes every step to prevent free men from coming here to work.”³⁷ In 1947, Britain was struck by a fuel crisis that was a direct result of a lack of labor “in the pits.”³⁸ For the first time, the Labour government found itself obligated to acknowledge the labor shortage and to seek out foreigners to fill jobs.

In the new economic climate of the 1950’s, Britain found itself burdened by the same immigration controls that had been put in place to protect its weaker economy in the first half of the century. The labor shortage was the greatest problem facing the country, but restricted by the 1905 and 1919 Alien Acts, the government could not effectively welcome enough foreign labor to fill the gaps. In 1951, King George VI declared in his King’s Speech, “The serious shortage of labour, particularly of skilled labour... has handicapped production in a number of industries.”³⁹ In order to bring in foreign labor without being obligated to repeal the Aliens Act, the government turned its attention to the Commonwealth. British colonial policy had always

³⁴ Foot, 110.

³⁵ Ibid., 116.

³⁶ Ibid., 115.

³⁷ Ibid., 116.

³⁸ Ibid., 117.

³⁹ Ibid., 124.

extended automatic citizenship to all Commonwealth subjects, so as citizens, immigrants from the Commonwealth were not subject to the same restrictions as other foreigners.

But this is not to say that Commonwealth immigrants were welcomed with open arms in Great Britain. Even in the early 1950's, signs of resistance were evident. In May 1950, Colonial Secretary James Griffiths published a report concluding that even limited colonial immigration could be dangerous to the peace and stability of the British Isles. As a result, a ministerial committee was formed, seeking to control "coloured immigration."⁴⁰ The committee was not successful in enacting any legislation, but the tone was set. Just months later, in January 1951, the British government declined to enact anti-racial discrimination legislation, their official justification being that it would be too difficult to enforce and "merely gestual."⁴¹ These two decisions, while often overlooked, set the stage for the British government's attitude towards immigration in the following decades.

The Arrival of South Asians in Britain

Despite their long shared history, the first major waves of immigration from South Asia to Britain were not until the early 1950's. During this period, immigrants from Commonwealth countries enjoyed privileged status upon entry into Great Britain. Until 1952, they could enter the country virtually without restrictions.⁴² Additionally, once in the country, they were not controlled, contrary to non-Commonwealth immigrants to Britain.⁴³ These privileges were linked to the civic model of nationhood that had long governed British colonial policy. The civic nation, also known as liberal nationalism, is based upon the ideals of liberty and individual freedoms. In Britain, the conceptualization of Great Britain as a civic nation evolved from its long struggle against Catholicism and the absolute monarchy.⁴⁴ This model meant that being "British" was defined purely by citizenship, and that all members had equal rights; Commonwealth residents, as citizens, faced no immigration controls and were, ostensibly, equal to whites upon entry.

Many of the first Commonwealth arrivals were drawn into manufacturing, one of the industries hardest hit by the labor shortage, and there were joined by newly-arriving Indians, Pakistanis, and Bengalis. Work was the common denominator for early South Asian immigrants to Britain: the first arrivals came to fill jobs left vacant by the British, and later waves came seeking it as economic conditions in their home countries worsened with the fall of

⁴⁰ David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain, 1945-1951* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007. Print), 520.

⁴¹ *Idem.*

⁴² Oscar Gish, "Color and Skill: British Immigration, 1955-1968," *International Migration Review* 3.1 (1968): 20, *JSTOR*, Web, 31 March 2009, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3002179>.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁴ Joppke, 477.

the British Empire in Asia.⁴⁵ But at least at first, the government did not discourage the arrival of work-seeking South Asians. The British government had an advantage in using Commonwealth immigrants as laborers: since these workers had not been officially “recruited,” the government had no obligation to aid them upon their arrival, to find them housing, or to provide transportation to the cities where they would be working.⁴⁶

The British response to these first colored workers has been described as “suspicious and interested.”⁴⁷ Especially in industrial areas, white workers staged numerous strikes and protests against the promotion or employment of Commonwealth workers. However, such protests were quickly calmed when immigrant workers arrived and integrated themselves into workers’ unions. Their involvement in the unions showed that they were just as invested as their white counterparts in efforts for higher wages and better conditions.⁴⁸ Commonwealth workers were often well-liked and well-respected in their work atmospheres. The Labour Exchange manager of Smethwick, a city near Birmingham, proclaimed in 1955,

“Coloured labour from the Commonwealth is greatly easing the labour shortage. The labour turnover among these immigrant workers is lower than the average, and firms formerly hesitant about employing them are now doing so to a considerable degree.” The report went on to cite the “valuable contribution [coloured] labour is making towards industrial output.”⁴⁹

But despite their importance and their integration into the British workforce, immigrant workers were treated with much less respect outside the factory. The white population viewed South Asian immigrants with resentment, a sentiment that manifested itself in overwhelming racism. In 1956, a survey of 1,000 whites in Birmingham revealed just the extent of this racism. 985 of the 1,000 individuals interviewed said that they would not welcome a colored person in their house as a lodger, and 64% said that they believed that colored people were inherently less intelligent than whites.⁵⁰ Anti-immigration politicians, such as Conservative MP Cyril Osborne, accused incoming immigrants of belonging to a criminal underclass, of being the sick or the lazy of “underdeveloped” Commonwealth countries, or of being in Britain simply to take advantage of the welfare state.⁵¹

Although these complaints were unjustified, this does not mean that the arrival of the Commonwealth immigrants did not cause certain amounts of turmoil in Great Britain. It is important to note the sheer volume of immigrants who came to Britain in the 1950’s, as well as

⁴⁵ Suzanne Model and Lang Lin, “The Cost of Not Being Christian: Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims in Britain and Canada,” *International Migration Review* 36.4 (Winter 2002): 1067, *JSTOR*, Web, 16 April 2009, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4149492>.

⁴⁶ Foot, 126.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 129.

the degree of immediate social change that was forced onto the country. The influx of Commonwealth workers began in earnest in 1953, when 2000 immigrants from the West Indies arrived in Britain. From 1953, immigration built every year through 1961. In 1955 there were 27,000 immigrants from the West Indies, 6,000 from India, and 1,800 from Pakistan; in 1961 66,000 West Indians, 24,000 Indians and 25,000 Pakistanis entered the country for a total of 125,400 colored Commonwealth immigrants in just one year.⁵²

Naseem Khan, the daughter of Indian and German immigrants who was already living in Britain, described the 1950's as a "bombshell."⁵³ She describes Indians and Pakistanis arriving in waves, overwhelming poor neighborhoods that once had been Irish or Italian enclaves. For her well-to-do family – her father had come to London in the 1930's to become a surgeon – the arrival of so many poor, uneducated workers was a threat. She describes the sentiments shared by the few Indian professionals who had built their lives in Britain: "Overnight all their hard-won respectability with their stockbroker mock Tudor houses, award-winning roses and public school children was put in jeopardy."⁵⁴

Even if the British government did not, at first, place restrictions upon Commonwealth immigrants, this should not be taken to say that immigration between England and the Indian subcontinent was not controlled. At first, the Indian government itself limited migrations by granting passports to only the wealthy and well-educated elite, such as Naseem Khan's father. In 1960, however, the Indian Supreme Court declared this practice unjust and it was abolished. But controls in India did not end with this decision. The Indian government continued to control exits by limiting access to foreign currency. As a result of this policy, Indians with friends or family already in Great Britain had more opportunities to leave the country, since their contacts in the United Kingdom could send them money.⁵⁵ This interdependence among South Asian immigrants to Britain created the basis for close-knit, interconnected communities of British Asians upon their arrival in the British Isles.⁵⁶

The "myth of return"

Philip Lewis describes the mentality of the first South Asian immigrants to Britain in the first chapter of his 2007 book, *Young, British and Muslim*. This first wave of immigrants came to Britain without the intention of staying. Limited by work voucher restrictions, they expected to work for a few months, to send money back to their families, and then to be

⁵² Foot, 126.

⁵³ Tim Smith, *Asians in Britain* (Stockport: Dewi Lewis, 2004. Print), 6.

⁵⁴ Idem.

⁵⁵ Model and Lin, 1067.

⁵⁶ It is important to note the use of plural – "communities" – in this phrase. As will be discussed later in the essay, the South Asian community as a whole is in fact quite diverse and not at all unified. However, specific families, relatives, and religious or ethnic groups within the South Asian community often display an interdependence and interconnectedness that has its roots in these early policies.

replaced by a relative. Lewis explains, “Most saw no need to develop a good knowledge of the language and culture of their neighbours, sustained as they were by the myth of return.”⁵⁷

Not expecting for their stay in Great Britain to be permanent, immigrant workers did not invest in their communities or socialize in British society, further contributing to their isolation. They often rented small apartments that functioned as barracks: filled with bunk beds and little furniture, men who worked the night shift slept there during the day, then their bed were filled with day workers while they worked at night. This multi-occupation of apartments and houses often created sub-par living conditions among immigrants.⁵⁸ They suffered from poor living conditions, and often malnutrition as well. In 1955, a physician in the Birmingham borough of Smethwick reported a disproportionate number of cases of tuberculosis among South Asian immigrants in Smethwick, something he attributed to their poor diet and living conditions.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, the poor living conditions and health problems among immigrants aroused not sympathy, but disgust from the white British population. Commonwealth immigrants were often cited as a health risk for the country, and this contributed to anti-immigrant discourse over the next decades.

This “myth of return,” as it has been called, was still a subject of discussion in 1985, when the government-commissioned report on minorities in British schools, the Swann Report, defined and discussed the effects of the myth. The report states,

With some ethnic minority communities, especially some Asian groups, the sense of having an alternative to life in this country has tended to be taken further and constitutes what has been described as a ‘myth of return’ – many of the original immigrants believed that after a period of work in this country they would return to their countries of origin. Much of the evidence which we have received has suggested that this myth of return may also have helped to sustain these first immigrants in the face of some of the worst manifestations of overt racism.”⁶⁰

Even today, the myth of return remains prevalent in immigrant communities. The “myth” is omnipresent in heavily ethnic communities, with many workers sending money to the Indian subcontinent for family members, and more well-to-do immigrants even having homes built in the villages where they were born. Even for families that are well established in Britain, the myth of return can be a “fall back position” when confronted with racism or severe discrimination.⁶¹ In the 1985 film *My Beautiful Laundrette*, directed by Stephen Frears, one Pakistani woman says that she considers Karachi her home. She laughs at the idea that she

⁵⁷ Philip Lewis, *Young, British and Muslim* (London: Continuum, 2007. Print), 18.

⁵⁸ Foot, 128.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 13.

⁶⁰ Michael Swann et al., *The Swann Report (1985): Education for All* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1985), 20, *The History of Education in England*, Web, 12 April 2010, www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/swann.

⁶¹ Ibid., 21.

might be at home in Britain, saying, “How could anyone ever call this funny little European island home?”⁶²

The Commonwealth Immigrants Act

Throughout the 1950’s and 1960’s, South Asian immigration to the United Kingdom experienced unprecedented growth. Indian immigration in 1961 was four times what it had been in 1955 and 1956; in 1962, it had grown to six times the rate of 1955 and 1956. Increases in Pakistani immigration during the same period is even more striking: twelve times more entries in 1961 than in 1955-1956 and fully twenty-five times more in 1962.⁶³ But decreased Indian control over exits and the increase in Commonwealth immigration led England to put in place her own anti-immigration legislation. The first major step came in 1962 with the enactment of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act.

Introducing immigration restrictions for Commonwealth residents was a proposition that ran contrary to centuries of British political beliefs. But the civic model of nationhood, for so long the governing force in Britain, began to lose momentum following the Second World War. Facing “the triple challenge of economic and geopolitical decline and potentially huge post-colonial immigration” in the decades following the war, the civic model was abandoned in favor of an ethnic model of nationhood.⁶⁴ In the ethnic model, belonging is determined not solely by citizenship, but by ancestry and birth.

It was not easy to let go of the civic model. Inspired by nostalgia or, as some have claimed, the negative example of Nazi Germany, Labour and Conservatives alike clung to the old ideals. Conservative Henry Hopkinson, at the time Minister of State for Colonial Affairs, said in a speech in 1954,

“In a world in which restrictions on personal movement and immigration have increased we can still take pride in the fact that a man can say *civis Britannicus sum* whatever his colour may be, and we can take pride in the fact that he wants and can come to the Mother Country.”⁶⁵

The shift to the ethnic model of nationhood has also been explained by the “decline of the Commonwealth ideal.”⁶⁶ When the New Commonwealth countries did not support Great Britain in the Suez Crisis in 1956, the British Empire as a whole was forced to admit just how superficial Commonwealth bonds had become. The mismanagement of the Suez Crisis also undermined Great Britain’s position as a superpower. In the words of Christian Joppke, “The

⁶² *My Beautiful Laundrette*, Mainline Entertainment, 1985, DVD.

⁶³ Gish, 24.

⁶⁴ Joppke, 477.

⁶⁵ Z. Layton-Henry and Paul B. Rich, editors, *Race, Government, and Politics in Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1986), 86f, in Joppke, 478.

⁶⁶ Foot, 190.

reality of a country in decline undermined the noble Commonwealth idealism of the political elite.”⁶⁷

Conservative support for immigration restrictions

In the 1950's, the Conservative Party took the lead in calling for immigration control. Even while Labour praised the economic stimulus provided by foreign workers and the important contributions of Commonwealth laborers, Conservatives capitalized on anti-immigrant sentiment in the population to garner votes. This anti-immigration position is somewhat ironic, since to a great extent, the “immigrant problem” was a result of Conservative policies and management since the party arrived in the majority in the elections of 1951. In their 13 years in power, the first 13 years of major Commonwealth immigration to Great Britain, the Conservatives made no concerted effort to aid immigrants in their arrival and integration into British society. The question of integration was tossed from ministry to ministry, office to office, without being attributed to any specific government department. Paul Foot describes this Conservative mismanagement: “No one knew whether the immigrant problem was a matter for the Colonial Office, the Home Office, the Housing Ministry, the Education Ministry, the Ministry of Pensions, the Ministry of Health, or, for that matter, the Arts Council. No one took responsibility.”⁶⁸ Among all these organizations, none were qualified or equipped to deal with the “immigrant problem.” As a result, any attempted measures were inefficient, and the Conservative Party took advantage of this inefficiency to highlight the so-called “dangers” of Commonwealth immigration.

The Conservative fight for immigration restrictions did not start out well. As late as April 1961, the government's official stance was firmly against immigration controls. Regarding a proposition by Conservative MP Sir Cyril Osborne to limit Commonwealth immigration, David Renton, Under-Secretary at the Home Office, said firmly that the Government refused “to contemplate legislation which might restrict the historic right of every British subject, regardless of race and color, freely to enter and stay in the United Kingdom.”⁶⁹ And in May 1961, the government sent a circular to every MP stating definitively that there would be no immigration control legislation for at least 12 months.

But these public statements regarding immigration control may have had unexpected effects. The increasing talk of controls – even if only to say that restrictions would not be put in place – incited more and more immigrants to come to Britain. This increased sense of urgency came from the belief that Commonwealth residents needed to hurry to get into the country before restrictions were put in place. Paul Foot describes the situation in one industrial town, Smethwick, near Birmingham:

⁶⁷ Joppke, 478.

⁶⁸ Foot, 133.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 135.

“Frantic letters to families and relations went from the immigrant community.... ‘Come at once,’ ran the letters. ‘Sell everything and get your passage money. This is surely the last chance of ever getting here!’ Whereas such letters had previously contained careful surveys of the jobs and housing situation... now all caution was flung aside.... What mattered was to get to the country before the Government barred the door.”⁷⁰

This rush to enter the country is reflected in entry statistics. In the first nine months of 1961, the number of Commonwealth immigrants entering Britain was more than double the figure for the entire year of 1960.⁷¹ And unfortunately, the increase in immigration statistics gave anti-immigration Conservatives only more motivation to push for restrictions. In October 1961, despite government declarations to the contrary, the Conservative Party conference agenda included forty resolutions concerning immigration – 39 of which called for restrictions.⁷² Compared to this statistic, there were only twenty resolutions concerning education, and only the same number, forty, concerning the Common Market.⁷³

The economic recession that began in 1961 only contributed to the Conservative campaign for immigration restrictions. This period of deflation and depression struck all of Britain, fostering anti-immigrant sentiment among the working class, among whom Conservative anti-immigrant claims resonated more than ever. Responding to this shift in the public opinion, the Queen’s Speech of October 31st, 1961 promised, “Legislation will be introduced to control the immigration to the United Kingdom of British subjects from other parts of the Commonwealth....”⁷⁴ This promise is in direct contradiction to the promises made just six months before in the circular sent to all British MP’s.

This anti-immigration stance soon became the Conservative battering ram. One campaign leaflet for Wyndham Davies, a Tory candidate in Birmingham in 1964, showed an image of the area with an arrow pointing to the city center and the words: “300,000 immigrants: this *could* happen if you Vote Labour.”⁷⁵

Labour opposition to immigration controls

In general, it can be said that the Labour Party was much more supportive of Commonwealth immigrants than their Conservative counterparts. For example, in July 1962, a Labour M.P. for East Islington named Eric Fletcher fought successfully to prevent the deportation of a Jamaican girl convicted of shoplifting. And although, according to Paul Foot, “most Labour groups contained one or two members anxious to adopt an anti-immigrant posture,” the party discouraged any sign of overt racialism.⁷⁶ Labour was also the only party to

⁷⁰ Foot, 15.

⁷¹ Ibid., 135.

⁷² Ibid., 136.

⁷³ Ibid., 136.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 138.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 145.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 164.

ask questions regarding integration: how could immigrants best be integrated into society after their arrival in Britain? Questions like this were unfortunately ignored by most Conservative politicians at the time.

Labour did not mince words in their support of unlimited immigration. On September 29, 1958, the Labour Party issued a formal public statement declaring, “We are firmly convinced that any form of British legislation limiting Commonwealth immigration into this country would be disastrous to our status in the Commonwealth and to the confidence of Commonwealth peoples.”⁷⁷ During the 1959 elections, immigration was not even discussed by Labour candidates. The next time the issue arose was in February 1961, when Conservative M.P. Sir Cyril Osborne proposed a measure limiting immigration. Again, Labour spoke out against control of Commonwealth immigration. On June 2, 1961, the secretary to the Parliamentary Labour Party wrote to Osborne personally, “The Labour Party is opposed to the restriction of immigration as every Commonwealth citizen has the right as a British subject to enter this country at will.”⁷⁸

But as more and more immigrants arrived and Conservatives continued to spread anti-immigrant propaganda, despite Labour’s best efforts, British public opinion turned towards support of immigration controls. A November 1961 Gallup Poll indicated that despite Labour outcry against it, 62% of the British population supported a proposed bill to introduce immigration controls – the first draft of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act.⁷⁹ As a result, Labour’s stance began to evolve as well. Donald Chapman, a Labour MP for Birmingham, remained staunchly anti-control, but he admitted that “his stand against control was not popular.”⁸⁰ The support for the proposed Commonwealth Immigrants Act was so overwhelming that Labour resistance began to seem futile. Says Foot, “So inevitable was the passing of the Bill that all [Labour] could do was to make it slightly more tolerable to the immigrant.”⁸¹

Impact of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act

The 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act was a landmark piece of legislation that changed the face of British immigration. It limited those who could enter the country to students, wives and children under 16 years old joining family members already in the country, holders of British Ministry of Labour vouchers, and “persons of independent means.”⁸² The admission of this last category, the independently wealthy, reveals the clear slant of the 1962 act against lower-class job seekers. Even the Ministry of Labour vouchers were biased: priority

⁷⁷ Foot, 169.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 170.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 172.

⁸⁰ Idem.

⁸¹ Ibid., 173.

⁸² Gish, 25.

was given to workers with particular qualifications, such as nurses, teachers, or doctors; otherwise, only those who had already secured a specific job offer would be granted vouchers.⁸³ Clearly, the era in which the United Kingdom opened its arms – and its factories – to struggling subjects from across the Empire was finished. The sociologist Oscar Gish, a specialist in British immigration, sees clear signs of bias regarding both race and technical skill. He stated confidently in 1968, “There is little doubt that national and racial chauvinism play a part in shaping British immigration policy... Where the United Kingdom is affected by colour bar pressure to exclude coloured immigrants it is also affected by the need for skills possessed by coloured immigrants.”⁸⁴

The Commonwealth Immigrants Act is not ostentatious in its racial bias, but close analysis reveals its preference for white immigrants. The text itself succeeds in establishing stricter parameters for entry of “colored” immigrants without explicitly addressing the issue of race. Sociologist Anne Wilson wrote in a 1984 article,

“Faced with overt discrimination practiced against Commonwealth immigrants alone, sociologists began to regard British racial classification as being cloaked in nuance and obscured by euphemism... the British hid their racial consciousness in the blanket conceptions of ‘foreigners’ and ‘immigrants.’”⁸⁵

For example, unlike South Asians, Southern Irish immigrants were subject to no immigration controls, despite the fact that they were considered Commonwealth subjects like any others.⁸⁶ This caveat was part of an ongoing discussion of “the Irish question” in British immigration policy. Citizens from the Irish Republic already spoke the language, were good workers, and were supported by a strong pro-Irish movement in Britain. Also, they had traditionally been allowed into Great Britain without restrictions, even after the Irish Republic seceded from the Commonwealth.⁸⁷ The Act also distinguished between “Old Commonwealth” subjects, from Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, and those from the “New Commonwealth.” Not surprisingly, Old Commonwealth residents – that is to say, whites – were treated somewhat preferentially. For example, in a two-year period, 70 doctors from Old Commonwealth countries received work vouchers, but 512 managed to obtain employment without vouchers in the same period.⁸⁸ Additionally, Old Commonwealth immigrants made up 85% of long-term visitors granted admission into the United Kingdom in 1965. In 1967, this percentage had increased to 91%.⁸⁹ These numbers are important, because entry as a “long-term visitor” was one of the only ways to enter the country without a work voucher.

⁸³ Gish, 25.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁸⁷ Foot, 139.

⁸⁸ Gish, 33.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

One unintentional side effect of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act is that it actually contributed to the establishment of a permanent immigrant community in the United Kingdom. While the Act was created to limit and control immigration, its inclusion of a clause for family reunification encouraged immigrants to stay and settle in Britain.⁹⁰ Once their wives and children had rejoined them in the United Kingdom, male workers were less likely to leave and return to the Indian subcontinent.

Immigrants as employees

A closer look at the text of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act reveals that it essentially equated immigrants with workers, relegating those who entered the country to be seen as nothing more than employees instead of fellow citizens. It limited the entries of students and families, then placed complicated restrictions on all other immigrants wishing to work in the country.

Indeed, in the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, employment was the “main criterion of control” for entry.⁹¹ New Commonwealth immigrants were required to have a specific function in order to enter the country: doctors, teachers, students, or others with confirmed job offers. White immigrants from the Old Commonwealth, though, were permitted to enter simply as long-term visitors, which allowed them to stay in the country for extended periods of time and fulfill any function they desired. Taken in another sense, Old Commonwealth immigrants were permitted in the country as individuals, while New Commonwealth immigrants were regarded only as workers. These racial discrepancies did not escape unnoticed, and drew significant criticism from Labour and Liberal democrats in Parliament. The work voucher system seemed particularly illogical: previous to the Act, 95% of immigrants had found employment within mere weeks of their arrival, so employment was clearly not a problem for Commonwealth immigrants. Additionally, the government had no way to control whether immigrants entering with a specific work voucher actually worked in that position or sought out another employer after being granted entry.⁹² Thus, this focus on employment for immigrants actually rendered the Commonwealth Immigrants Act less effective. In the words of Paul Foot, “Thus the Immigration Act did not ‘control’ immigration at all. It set up a substantial bureaucracy which would not solve any problems....”⁹³

At its inception, the act was to continue to allow Commonwealth residents to come to Great Britain to study. But throughout the 1960’s, the number of students entering the country decreased dramatically. The reduction in student entries was due to two main causes. Firstly,

⁹⁰ Lewis, 16.

⁹¹ Foot, 140.

⁹² Ibid., 140-141.

⁹³ Ibid., 141.

part-time students were no longer eligible to obtain student visas, eliminating a large proportion of the student population. Secondly, immigrants who entered the country on student visas were no longer permitted to seek work in Great Britain at the end of their studies.⁹⁴ This discouraged many South Asians from pursuing their education in the United Kingdom, since they were not sure to be able to use their diplomas elsewhere.

1965 Revisions to the Commonwealth Immigrants Act

In August 1965, the British government published a White Paper that introduced certain modifications to the Commonwealth Immigrants Act and reinforced the image of immigrants as workers. The modifications further restricted entries of students, as well as those of dependents and family members.⁹⁵ However, the 1965 White Paper also offered two new options: the possibility of temporary on-the-job training in the United Kingdom, if the immigrants promised to leave the country after their training finished; and the exemption from work vouchers for seasonal workers.⁹⁶

These new laws, then, limited immigrant identity to that of employees. The restrictions for students and family members prevented the entry of immigrants that could present a different face to the British public; the admission of seasonal and temporary workers prevented these immigrants from becoming stable members of society and putting down roots in the country. According to Oscar Gish's exhaustive article about the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, the restrictions to obtaining work vouchers created "a large pool of revolving (and usually low paid) labour entering and leaving the United Kingdom which constantly replaces itself."⁹⁷

Additionally, the 1965 modifications to the Commonwealth Immigrants Act continued the unacknowledged bias against non-white immigrants. Total immigration to Great Britain was limited to 8,500 entries per year, but 1,000 entries were reserved for immigrants from Malta.⁹⁸ This, again, granted white Commonwealth immigrants a privileged place with regards to non-whites.

1968 revisions to the Commonwealth Immigrants Act

In 1968, Minister of Labour Ray Gunter made a series of revisions to the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, still the standard for British immigration policy six years after its inception. First, he further reduced access to Ministry of Labour work vouchers by restricting the areas of employment that qualified for such vouchers. While previously it had been possible to obtain work vouchers as long as one had secured a specific offer of

⁹⁴ Gish, 27.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 30.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 29-30.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 34.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 29.

employment in Great Britain, Gunter's revision specified that from 1968 on, these vouchers would only be for workers who contribute "substantial economic or social value to the United Kingdom."⁹⁹ Additionally, applications were no longer filled on a first-come-first-served basis; instead, their order was to be determined by the merit of the immigrant applying for entry. These measures only furthered the impression that immigrants were no more than workers. Under the 1968 amendments to the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, immigrants could be permitted to enter the country only to fill the needs of the British people. Also, the restrictions to entry of less-skilled immigrants set the stage for an antagonistic relationship between the British and foreign working classes, since immigration policy put the two at odds with one another by granting priority to British workers.

The 1968 revisions also maintained the racial slant of preceding legislation, prioritizing the right of entry of white Old Commonwealth immigrants over those from the New Commonwealth. The introduction of a "grandfather clause" allowed any resident of the Old Commonwealth countries with blood ties to England to immigrate freely.¹⁰⁰ At the same time, many Asians living in refugee camps were frustrated to find that their requests to have their wives, still in India or in Africa, relocated and their families reunited were being consistently refused.¹⁰¹ This discrepancy in the treatment of immigrants from Commonwealth countries, seemingly based only on the color of their skin, left many South Asians feeling excluded and unwanted.

It has been often said that the above changes to the Commonwealth Immigrants Act had long been encouraged by Conservatives in the British government, but were not put through for fear of public outcry against the measures. The publicity and the urgency of the arrival of Kenyan and Ugandan Asians, to be discussed in the following pages, gave just the necessary opportunity for the modifications to be slipped into the Immigrants Act without public reaction.¹⁰²

III. British Asians Put Down Roots

The interdependency of the South Asian community

The first major wave of South Asian immigrants to Great Britain, arriving after the Second World War, unknowingly set the precedent for the thousands of immigrants yet to come. This phenomenon is known as "chain migration," and refers to the phenomenon of men

⁹⁹ Gish, 64.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁰¹ *Idem.*

¹⁰² Gish, 33.

and women following earlier, settled migrants, inspired by letters, visits, or remittances sent back to their home country.¹⁰³

In addition to creating a close-knit, interdependent Asian community, already discussed earlier in this essay, family regrouping has had a ripple effect on the occupations of South Asian immigrants to Britain. Since the first waves of immigrants were mostly manual laborers, the generations that followed – even those better educated than their ancestors – were likely to follow their relatives into factory and manufacturing jobs.¹⁰⁴ This has had a collective downward pull on the income and social class of many British Asians. Samad Iqbal, the main character in Zadie Smith’s bestselling and much-lauded novel *White Teeth*, is the perfect illustration of this situation. Samad is a Bangladeshi immigrant who had fought for England in the Second World War and studied science at Delhi University. But upon his arrival in England after the war, despite his education, Samad finds himself working as a waiter for minimum wage in his cousin’s Indian restaurant. He finds his work humiliating, and at one point describes his overwhelming desire to wear a sign: “I am not a waiter. I have been a student, a scientist, a soldier...”¹⁰⁵

This situation is one that has repeated itself throughout the United Kingdom. Seeking to rejoin family members or to reestablish communities, South Asians immigrating to Great Britain have settled in ethnic enclaves. For example, many Bengalis live in East London, where the first Bengalis to arrive in Britain worked as seamen.¹⁰⁶ The city of Leicester has a strongly Punjabi Sikh population because they had fought with the Leicester Regiment in pre-partition India from 1840 to 1947. Bradford, an industrial city in Northern England, has a population of 75,000 Pakistanis, nearly all hailing from one rural, mountainous district in Azad Kashmir called Mirpur.¹⁰⁷ They also tend to follow one another into the same industries, for example, working in textile mills in Bradford.

Although moving into an ethnic community may seem to be a way to ease the transition into life in a new country, according to an article published by sociologist Ernest Krausz in 1972, it could actually have a negative effect on the long-term social integration of immigrants. Krausz explains:

“Minority groups become associated with certain industries and occupational levels, leading to stereotypes which are usually consonant with some original objective situation.... They become the predominant mode of identifying individuals in

¹⁰³ Thompson, 243.

¹⁰⁴ Model and Lin, 1067.

¹⁰⁵ Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (New York: Vintage International, 2000. Print), 49.

¹⁰⁶ Ziauddin Sardar, “Who Are the British Asians?” *The New Statesman* 25 September 2008, Web, 7 April 2009,

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/uk/05/london_blasts/investigation/html/introduction.stm.

¹⁰⁷ Sardar.

connection with socio-economic relationships, producing a factor which then tends to be detrimental to the mobility chances of minorities.”¹⁰⁸

Following Krausz’s reasoning, the tendency of early South Asian immigrants to reunite in ethnic enclaves, to live and work together, has contributed to their social exclusion and prevented any upwards social mobility.

This line of thinking is also found in Marcus Thompson’s 1974 article, “The Second Generation: Punjabi or English?” Thompson studied the effects of chain migration on one heavily Punjabi neighborhood in Coventry, England. He found that when immigrants follow friends or family members and settle near one another in Great Britain, they often recreate life in their home country in its entirety. In the community that Thompson studied, Punjabi immigrants retained their commitment to family honor, or *ijjat*. In India, Punjabi Jat society is organized around family; each family in the village is judged and earns status according to their land owned and their *ijjat*.¹⁰⁹

But Thompson found that these same characteristics in Punjabi enclaves in England. He writes, “By coming to England men have not opted out of the moral sphere of the village.”¹¹⁰ The Punjabi immigrants continued to live their lives as they would have in India, alienating them from the British society around them. More than just a lifestyle choice, the immigrants also retained financial and social ties to Punjab. Thompson witnessed immigrants regularly sending money or gifts to relatives in India, arranging marriages between youths in England and youths in Punjab; or by visiting India for holidays and family events.¹¹¹ They also sponsored family members’ emigration to Britain, furthering the cycle of chain migration.¹¹²

The interdependency of the South Asian community has, according to Thompson, strengthened rather than weakened family and village ties among British Asians. These continued ties to their home country can prevent immigrants from fully immersing themselves into British daily life, and their physical segregation can prevent social integration with the British public.

The Kenya and Uganda Asians

During the colonial era, the British Empire included significant portions of land in Africa as well as in the Indian subcontinent. Much of this land was acquired during the “Scramble for Africa,” the period beginning in the late 19th century when European powers

¹⁰⁸ Ernest Krausz, “Factors of Social Mobility in British Minority Groups,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 23.3 (September 1972): 282, *JSTOR*, Web, 7 May 2009, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/589077>.

¹⁰⁹ Marcus Thompson, “The Second Generation – Punjabi or English?” *New Community* 3.2 (1974): 243. Print.

¹¹⁰ *Idem*.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 244.

¹¹² *Idem*.

battled to control the largest swaths of Africa. At the time, India was the most important British colony. In Africa, the new colonies were pre-capitalist; the people were viewed as savages, and there was no indigenous infrastructure. Also, in the 19th century, Britain had not yet started to use natives for forced labor. So Indians were called upon to aid the British colonization efforts in Africa. They came, first as soldiers; then as laborers; then as artisans, peasants, petty clerks and traders.¹¹³ Exchanges between the two regions were frequent, and there developed a sizable population of Asians in British territories such as Kenya and Uganda. The end of British rule in Africa in the late 1960's, however, led to a collective questioning regarding the place of Asians living there.

On August 5th, 1972, Ugandan dictator Idi Amin ordered that “Asians must go.”¹¹⁴ In a daring speech, Amin claimed, “Asians came to Uganda to build the railway. The railway is finished. They must leave now....”¹¹⁵ The announcement came as a shock to most Asians living in Uganda, including Mahmood Mamdani, a university professor who recounts first-hand the events surrounding the expulsion of Asians from Uganda in his book *From Citizen to Refugee*. This decree left the Uganda Asians – as well as those in Kenya – in a particular position. Many did not have Indian passports, and considered themselves British; they had British citizenship and spoke only English. Fully 23,242 Uganda Asians were actually Ugandan citizens, but under Amin's decree even Ugandan citizens of Indian descent were ordered to leave the country.¹¹⁶ Mahmood Mamdani reflected on the situation, “What was important was not that one held a British or Ugandan passport, but the colour of one's skin. British or Ugandan, an Asian was an Asian....”¹¹⁷ Unfortunately, this statement was to hold true even after the arrival of African Asians in the United Kingdom.

The original solution proposed by the British government was to allow Asian residents of East Africa the option of migrating to the United Kingdom.¹¹⁸ But when the majority of South Asians in Africa seemed to be making a move for Great Britain, Conservative politicians across the country resisted. From Mamdani's perspective, “[England] seemed to be getting ready for us as one prepares for a swarm of locusts.”¹¹⁹

A 1968 Act of Parliament created different classes of British passport holders, meaning that even British citizens born in the colonies did not have free entry into the country.¹²⁰ And anyone wishing to move to Britain was obligated to pass through the British High Commissions, embassies located in each colonial capital. The goal of these High Commissions

¹¹³ Mamdani, 13.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹¹⁸ Gish, 32.

¹¹⁹ Mamdani, 64.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

was to limit emigration to England, creating another administrative hurdle. Uganda Asians, no longer welcome in Idi Amin's Uganda, found themselves waiting in queues at the British High Commissions for entire days hoping to obtain permission to migrate. And due to the quota voucher system, some Asians found themselves unable to obtain U.K. passports.¹²¹

For Kenya and Uganda Asians who did manage to enter Great Britain, their situation did not always improve. Many were shocked to find that they were obligated to pay customs duties on their personal possessions, even though they were British citizens arriving from a British colony.¹²² Then, they were placed in temporary refugee camps, supposed to provide shelter and aid in finding a job and more permanent lodgings. But these camps were often most unpleasant. Mamdani remembers having a nutritionally deficient diet, comprised almost entirely of starch; information about housing and job opportunities were closely guarded by British officials instead of being freely available; and tattling on other residents was encouraged and rewarded.¹²³ This reaction is somewhat surprising, since Asians emigrating from Africa offered a particular set of skills to Great Britain. For the most part, Asians who had lived in Africa were fluent in English, felt little nostalgia for India, were accustomed to being in the minority and being considered immigrants, and had honed their entrepreneurial skills over generations. Moreso, Asian Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus in Africa had already established good relations.¹²⁴ In effect, these immigrants had everything necessary to succeed in Britain. Writer Jon Snow called them "a well educated entrepreneurial class," and even went so far as to call the Uganda and Kenya Asians "tailor-made to succeed."¹²⁵

But the British population at large was no more welcoming to the Kenya and Uganda Asians than their government. Subways stations, camps, and press kiosks were covered in racist graffiti such as, "wogs out."¹²⁶ The cool welcome they received upon arriving in Britain, a country that they had long lauded as their home, contributed to a sense of disillusionment and disappointment among Uganda and Kenya Asians.

Causes of discrimination against South Asian immigrants

According to Gary Freeman, an American political scientist, the introduction of South Asian immigrant laborers has caused "social and economic stratification" in Great Britain, making the role of trade unions and political parties more complicated. Immigrant workers are

¹²¹ Mamdani, 32.

¹²² Ibid., 75.

¹²³ Ibid., 94.

¹²⁴ Lewis, 24.

¹²⁵ Jon Snow, in Lewis, ix.

¹²⁶ Lewis, 65.

viewed as a sort of sub-class, lower than native workers in the echelon of social status.¹²⁷ This stratification has fueled disputes and protests among both white and South Asian workers and created unrest among the entire British working class.

According to Mahmood Mamdani, the conflict between the British working class and South Asian immigrants is not surprising. As one of the Uganda Asians, he witnessed the government aid granted to him and his peers being taken directly away from the British poor. For him, it was no surprise that the English working class viewed Asians with hostility.¹²⁸

From what arises this hostility? Were the first South Asian immigrants – and even modern-day British Asians – victims of racial discrimination? Or does their lack of social status stem from something else? This is the question posed by sociologist Ernest Krausz in his article, “Factors of Social Mobility in British Minorities.”¹²⁹ He determines that British minorities have less social mobility – that is, the ability to change class and social status – than native-born, white British citizens. But it is not easy to identify the origins of discrimination against South Asians and other minorities.

At first, Krausz seems to be leaning towards racial discrimination as an explanation. He cites two government white papers concerning Commonwealth immigration published in 1964, saying, “the evidence laid more stress on the hostility towards [immigrants] stemming directly from colour prejudice.”¹³⁰ He also cites ‘situation tests’ performed in the late 1960’s, which investigated the situation of immigrants in Britain by comparing European immigrants and those from Africa and Asia. The tests found that “coloured immigrants” suffered “much severer discrimination” than their white counterparts, implying that it is skin color and not nationality that affects social mobility.¹³¹ Following through with this idea, Krausz proposes the idea of a “colour line”: according to this theory, immigrants who are distinguishable as a minority by their skin color, or by another phenotypical characteristic, are more discriminated against and have less social mobility than white immigrants. The “colour line” compresses them into the lower classes of society, and they are blocked from opportunities to enter the middle or upper class.¹³²

However, there are other possible explanations for the lack of social mobility among South Asian immigrant groups. For example, the situation of immigrants in their home country

¹²⁷ Gary Freeman, “Immigrant Labor and Working-Class Politics: The French and British Experience,” *Comparative Politics* 11:1 (October 1978), 24, *JSTOR*, Web, 9 May 2009. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/421788>.

¹²⁸ Mamdani, 113.

¹²⁹ Krausz.

¹³⁰ *Second Report by Commonwealth Immigrants Advisory Council*, Cmnd 2266, H.M.S.O., February 1964, p. 4, and *Third Report by Commonwealth Immigrants Advisory Council*, Cmnd 2458, H.M.S.O., September 1964, p. 3, in Krausz, 276.

¹³¹ W. W. Daniels, *Racial Discrimination in England*, based on P.E.P. Report, Penguin, 1968, p. 209, in Krausz, 276.

¹³² See appendix. Krausz, 277.

could affect their integration. Immigrants coming from rural areas – such as Mirpur, in Pakistan – tend to have fewer language skills, less education, and fewer marketable job skills. This last characteristic can be very important. In 1972, two thirds of black or Indian immigrants to the UK held manufacturing jobs, but only 13% had previously worked in this sector.¹³³ Their lack of previous experience, and not only their skin color, could have been what held back these immigrants from advancing professionally. A 2007 IPPR study indicated that Pakistani and Bangladeshi immigrants, who often come from rural areas, were three times more likely to have income support and two times more likely to be on disability than their British-born counterparts. Indians, though, who often hail from more developed, urban centers, are less likely than white British to have either benefit.¹³⁴ The social mobility of immigrants could thus be limited by their education and their previous work experience, lacking in many immigrants from rural areas.

The example of the Kenya Asians show just how important an immigrant's background can be concerning their social mobility, and how racial bias can sometimes be overcome. Although they share the same physical traits as an immigrant coming directly from India or Pakistan, they have been much more economically successful than other South Asian immigrants since their arrival in Great Britain. According to Krausz,

“this group has an urban background achieved through a selection process of migration from Asia to Africa; ...its occupational distribution is biased towards the top half of the socio-economic scale; and ... the group is characterized by attitudes which are conducive to social advancement. Although they have been subjected to discrimination on account of colour... the early indications are that they have in a short time been able to move outwards to the suburbs and upwards in terms of social mobility.”¹³⁵

So, according to this example, it would be too simplistic to say that racial discrimination is a sufficient explanation for the lack of social mobility among Africans and South Asians in Britain. Krausz himself invented a diagram indicating that there are, in fact, seven factors that contribute to social mobility among immigrants: “individual achievement-motivation, family and kinship system, community values, original background (urban v. rural), discrimination in receiving country, stereotyping in receiving country, and economic and political conditions in receiving country.”¹³⁶ As indicated in the diagram, discrimination is only one of the factors to be considered in explaining South Asian immigrants' lack of social mobility. In another study, sociologist Sheila Patterson found similar results, indicating that

¹³³ W.W. Daniels, op. cit., p. 60, in Krausz, 280.

¹³⁴ Jon Snow, in Lewis, x.

¹³⁵ E. Butterworth, 'Kenya Asians in Britain', in *Venture*, vol. 20, no. 4 (April 1968), p. 23, in Krausz, 281-282.

¹³⁶ See appendix for diagram. Krausz, 283.

skin color was “less important a factor than socio-cultural and educational background, and the possession of skills, aptitudes, adaptability and a knowledge of English.”¹³⁷

These two sources both indicate that race is but one factor influencing the relative success of an immigrant group. As we will see in the next chapter, South Asians face challenges to their social integration arising from their religion, race, educational and socio-cultural background, and even community values.

Immigrants and religion

Before the 1980’s, there was little discussion of the Muslim population in Britain. South Asian immigrants were considered as one, unified group, and most British authorities did not distinguish between Muslim, Hindu, Sikh or other. Jon Snow attributes this lack of discussion to the racial focus of immigration policy. He argues that the British were distracted from religion by the “racially charged debate about immigration itself.” He continues, “Indeed, the far right perceived the ‘threat’ to their sense of ‘white Britain’” more from immigrants’ skin color than from their religion.¹³⁸

But the influx of Eastern European immigrants that would arrive in the 1990’s and 2000’s led to a changing discourse on immigration and integration. The arrival of non-Asian, often Muslim immigrants brought greater awareness of religion, but also meant that “Asian” could no longer serve as a synonym for “immigrant.” I will examine the ever-enlarging role of Islam, as well as contemporary issues for British Asians of all religions, in the following chapters.

¹³⁷ Sheila Patterson, *Immigrants in Industry*, O.U.P. for the Institute of Race Relations, 1968, page 168 and 290, in Krausz, 283.

¹³⁸ Snow, in Lewis, ix.

**SOCIAL EXCLUSION OF SOUTH ASIANS IN GREAT
BRITAIN TODAY**

Despite the fact that South Asians have now been living in Great Britain for more than a half-century, their integration is, at best, incomplete. They earn less money than whites; they live in separate communities; they have different hopes for their children and grandchildren; they are victims of discrimination and racism and do not always have access to legal protection.

This social exclusion is sometimes difficult to quantify. The British government has not always collected data regarding ethnic minorities; when it has, the data is sometimes incomplete or does not have sufficient detail, such as those studies that group all non-Europeans into one “minority” group. Any numeric analysis of the exclusion of South Asians in modern-day Britain is complicated by the lack of empirical data regarding the subject. The British census, for example, first asked regarding ethnicity only in 1991.¹³⁹ Before this date, the British government performed no organized collection of information regarding ethnic minorities.

Whatever the source, though, it is sure that British Asians do not live at the same level as white Christians in Britain. In the United Kingdom, people from ethnic minorities live in low-income households at twice the rate of whites, forty percent vs. twenty percent. Fully half of people from Bangladeshi and Pakistani origins live in low-income housing. In London, the case is particularly striking. More than half of the residents in low-incoming housing in the English capital are from ethnic minorities.

Not only do British Asians and white British not live in the same caliber of residences, they also do not earn the same. More than half of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in the United Kingdom earn less than seven euros per hour.¹⁴⁰ The mean weekly salary for a Sikh in England is less than 73% of a white Christian’s salary.¹⁴¹ Unemployment rates are similarly telling: unemployment among white Christians in England is 8.63%; among Sikhs it is 19.4%; and among Muslims it is 38.3%.¹⁴² Such inequalities have wide-ranging consequences for South Asians in Britain. They can contribute to the negative image of British Asians among whites, and also in the media. They can also incite crime in Asian communities; many youths turn to stealing or selling drugs when they see no other possibilities for their futures. And vast inequalities in income and education level can also be a factor in South Asian feelings of exclusion from British society at large.

Also, there are semantic complications to any discussion. What constitutes exclusion? integration? discrimination? What constitutes “successful” race relations? These questions, and many more, confuse any analysis of the place for South Asians in British society.

¹³⁹ Ceri Peach, “Does Britain Have Ghettos?” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series* 21.1 (1996): 216, *JSTOR*, Web, 25 March 2009, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/622934>.

¹⁴⁰ Guy Palmer, “What the Indicators Show: Ethnic Groups,” *The Poverty Site*, Web, 2 April 2009, <http://www.poverty.org.uk/summary/ethnic.htm>.

¹⁴¹ Model and Lin, 1076.

¹⁴² *Idem*.

Despite the hurdles, I aim to identify the causes of social exclusion of British Asians by studying contemporary issues related to minorities in Britain today. These include statistics on inequality and segregation, the specific challenges facing British Asian youths, and continuing political discussions of race relations and immigration policy. Another important issue is the generation gap between first-generation British Asians, generally considered to be more traditional and more closely linked to their homeland, and second- and third-generation British Asians, who are attempting to create their own hybrid identity today.

I. Race Relations and Immigration Restrictions: South Asians in British Politics

The UK model: a dual approach

From 1962 to 1976, the UK government passed three laws restricting immigration and three additional laws against racial discrimination. This legislation was representative of the so-called “UK model”: a dual approach that attempted to limit immigration, with an official goal of zero total migration, combined with “race relations” attempting to improve the living conditions of minority immigrants already in the country.¹⁴³ This approach has been criticized by many as inherently contradictory, since it clearly tried to keep blacks and other minorities from entering the country, but then emphasized equal rights and race relations for immigrants living in Britain. According to historian Sarah Spencer, the British government has long been forced to face critics of their policies, which they accuse of “discriminat[ing] against ethnic minorities at the point of entry while seeking to remove discrimination against them internally.”¹⁴⁴

In order to protect minorities from domestic discrimination, the British government turned towards a policy of “race relations.” The race relations movement, born in the 1960s, aimed to eliminate racial discrimination and to encourage equal opportunities for ethnic minorities. Race relations in Britain are governed by three major acts: The Race Relations Acts of 1965, 1968, and 1976. The first Act in 1965 established a board, with modest legal powers, to fight racial discrimination in public. Although the first act did not have a significant effect on race relations in Britain, it set the base for future administration and bureaucracy.¹⁴⁵ The following act, passed in 1968, extended the board’s powers by granting them the ability to conduct investigations regarding employment or housing discrimination.¹⁴⁶ And the Third Race Relations Act of 1976, which remains the standard of race relations even today in Great Britain, enlarged the definition of discrimination by forbidding even “indirect” discrimination, set up

¹⁴³ Will Somerville, “The Immigration Legacy of Tony Blair,” *Migration Policy Institute*, Web, 13 April 2010, <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?id=600>.

¹⁴⁴ Sarah Spencer, “The Implications of Immigration Policy for Race Relations,” in S. Spencer, editor, *Strangers and Citizens*, London: IPPR/Rivers Oram Press, 1994, 319, in Joppke, 479.

¹⁴⁵ Joppke, 480.

¹⁴⁶ Joppke, 481.

local Race Relations Councils across the country, and established the Commission for Racial Equity for formal investigations and government relations.¹⁴⁷

Despite the efforts put forth by the British government to encourage equality, historians Anthony Lester and Geoffrey Bindman condemned the first two British Race Relations Acts in 1972, saying, “The effectiveness of the Race Relations Act is and will continue to be undermined by discriminatory immigration laws.”¹⁴⁸ Immigration law aside, the British government has made a concerted effort to eliminate discrimination in their society. Immigration expert Gary Freeman wrote, “The emergent race relations regime... was carried by the genuine impulse to eradicate racial discrimination and to spread ‘equal opportunities’ to disadvantaged ethnic minorities.”¹⁴⁹ However, Britain has shied away from American-style affirmative action or reverse discrimination in order to fight inequality. Instead, the country aims to be “color-blind” in all its public services. According to Christian Joppke, “Faithful to the universalistic thrust of the British welfare and health care system, the distribution of public housing, jobs, and services to ethnic minorities is to occur ‘color-blind.’”¹⁵⁰

This color-blindness is accompanied by an official goal of multiculturalism. The British commitment to multiculturalism was first explained by Home Secretary Roy Jenkins in a May 1966 speech. In this speech, Jenkins explained how assimilation was not the goal; Britain intended for ethnic minorities to keep their individual characteristics.

“Integration is perhaps rather a loose word. I do not regard it as meaning the loss, by immigrants, of their own national characteristics and culture. I do not think that we need in this country a ‘melting pot,’ which will turn everybody out in a common mould.... I... define integration, therefore, not as a flattening process of assimilation but as equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance.”¹⁵¹

Multiculturalism was, at first, seen as something of a necessary evil by British politicians. An official rejection of assimilation was obligatory, since Great Britain had established its international reputation upon the idea of a multi-racial empire.¹⁵²

Today, official British multiculturalism is expressed through a number of legal provisions for minorities. For example, Sikhs are not obligated to wear helmets on motorcycles if they are wearing a turban.¹⁵³ Young Asian girls are permitted to wear *shalwar*, or trousers, to school in place of school uniform skirts. And Hindus and Muslims are exempted from normally strict traditional British marriage rules.¹⁵⁴ Judging from the incredible diversity that can be

¹⁴⁷ Joppke, 481.

¹⁴⁸ Lester and Bindman, *Race and Law*, New York: Penguin, 1972, in Swann, 209.

¹⁴⁹ Gary Freeman, *Immigrant Labor and Racial Conflict*, 148, in Joppke, 480.

¹⁵⁰ Joppke, 481.

¹⁵¹ Shiela Patterson, *Immigration and Race Relations in Britain 1960-1967*, London : Oxford University Press, 1969, 112f, in Joppke, 480.

¹⁵² Joppke, 480.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 281.

¹⁵⁴ *Idem.*

witnessed in ethnic enclaves such as Brick Lane in London, for example, Christian Joppke concludes, “Clearly, there is no presumption for these ethnic groups to become ‘British’ in any other sense than ownership of a British passport.”¹⁵⁵

Political Racism and the British extreme right

The failure of the Commonwealth and the introduction of hundreds of thousands of foreign immigrants in the post-war years led to a shift in ideology away from the civic model and towards the ethnic model of nationhood. In Britain, this ideological change is one explanation for the concurrent rise in political racism, embodied by the National Front and its descendent, the British National Party, as well as the late Conservative and Unionist politician Enoch Powell. Historian Tom Nairn wrote about Enoch Powell, “In the obscene form of racism, English nationalism has been re-born.”¹⁵⁶

Accusations of “racism” distract from the fact that, in many ways, this ideological shift was a necessary step in Britain. A continuation of the civic nation would have made Great Britain accessible to every member of the Commonwealth, something that was both economically and physically impossible. Joppke explains,

“At the end of WWII, eight hundred million persons, born outside the United Kingdom on a territory that covered twenty-five percent of the land surface of the globe, could claim the equal status of ‘British subject,’ with the con-comittant right of settlement in Britain. A shift of membership definition from the feudal-dynastic principle of ‘allegiance to the crown’ to the national principle of territorial citizenship was not only a requirement of political modernization, but also corresponded to the right of a national collectivity to regulate its boundaries.”¹⁵⁷

Enoch Powell was a British politician who passed the majority of his political career with the Conservative party. He was first elected in 1950, but became known on a national – and even international – level only in April 1968, when he made his “Rivers of Blood” speech. This speech has been called “perhaps the most significant speech made in British politics since the Second World War” by Simon Heffer, who wrote Powell’s biography.¹⁵⁸ Powell’s blatantly anti-immigration, racialist discourse gained him incredible popularity and made him a formidable, if polarizing, figure in British politics.¹⁵⁹ Political commentator Norman Shrapnel

¹⁵⁵ Joppke, 281.

¹⁵⁶ Nairn, in Joppke, 477.

¹⁵⁷ Joppke, 477.

¹⁵⁸ Simon Heffer, “Enoch Powell: the Great Lie survives,” *The Telegraph*, 19 April 2008, Web, 20 April 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/columnists/simonheffer/3557402/Enoch-Powell-the-Great-Lie-survives.html>.

¹⁵⁹ As a Conservative, despite the obviously racialist overtones of his speeches, Powell maintained the party line of race relations in Britain. Even in his “Rivers of Blood” speech, he promised, “The third element of the Conservative Party’s policy is that all who are in this country as citizens should be equal before the law and that there shall be no discrimination or difference made between them by public authority. As Mr. Heath has put it, we will have no ‘first-class citizens’ and ‘second-class citizens’.” www.enochpowell.net

wrote that before Powell's arrival on the political scene, 'Immigrants were accustomed to hearing white people complain, but in general, we had a sense that... a liberal consensus had emerged among the politicians which would, somehow, protect us if the worst came to the worst. Powell destroyed our complacency in one night.'¹⁶⁰

Before Powell, no other politician had dared express – at least in public – views so far to the political right. And once these views were put out in the open, other whites who shared Powell's beliefs rallied around their new champion.

“Powell had become a rallying point for most of the hostility and rage we encountered, a shorthand for hatred and contempt. ‘I'm with Enoch,’ they said, or ‘they should let Enoch sort you lot out...’ He became a myth, a bogymen, in whose name blacks and Asians were to be harassed and assaulted for the next couple of decades.”¹⁶¹

Powell's nationalism, however, was little more than a symptom of the ethnic model of nationhood that was gaining support around the country. Many of Powell's Conservative colleagues actually agreed with his views, if not with his approach. Mike Phillips wrote of Powell's “Rivers of Blood” speech, “It was made without consulting any of his colleagues, who criticised it more for the intemperance of its language than for its basic message.”¹⁶² According to Shrapnel, it was this connection between nationalism and racism which gave Powell his success: “By marrying his version of nationalism to racist rage he gave British racism and racist violence in British streets its own peculiar shape for a time, and it bore his name, Powellism.”¹⁶³

Today, the far-right British National Party (BNP), which has long espoused the position of “Britain for the British,” dominates the extreme right of the British political spectrum. Although the party remains fairly marginal and has attracted negative attention from mainstream political parties and the media in recent years, it has also achieved a certain following. In 2008, the party garnered 5.3 percent of the popular vote in the London mayoral elections, and as a result won a place for their candidate, Richard Barnbrook, in the 25-seat London Assembly.¹⁶⁴

The BNP received a blow in 2010, though, when it was ordered by the Central London county court to modify a membership policy deemed as racist. For years, the party's membership rules had included a direct whites-only clause, something that the BNP removed only in February 2010 under pressure from the Equalities and Human Rights Coalition (EHRC).

¹⁶⁰ Norman Shrapnel, “Enoch Powell,” *The Guardian*, 7 February 2001, Web, 20 April 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/0098/feb/09/obituaries.mikephillips>.

¹⁶¹ *Idem*.

¹⁶² Mike Phillips, “Enoch Powell,” *The Guardian*, 7 February 2001, Web, 20 April 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/0098/feb/09/obituaries.mikephillips>.

¹⁶³ Shrapnel.

¹⁶⁴ “Profile: Richard Barnbrook,” *British Broadcasting Corporation*, 3 May 2008, Web, 20 April 2010, news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/7219747.stm.

But the following month, Judge Paul Collins ordered two additional clauses removed, saying that they were “indirectly racist towards non-white would-be members.”¹⁶⁵ One of the two clauses is a requirement for members to embrace the party’s core belief in “‘continued creation, fostering, maintenance and existence’ of an indigenous British race and action towards ‘stemming and reversing’ migration.”¹⁶⁶

BNP leader Nick Griffin spoke out against the ruling, saying that is “opens a very dangerous door. It’s a huge change to the unwritten constitution of Britain. The judgment has given a government-appointed, taxpayer-funded quango the rights to change the aims and objectives of political parties.”¹⁶⁷ He continued to say that changing the membership clauses would have no significant effect on the party’s beliefs about immigration and race. With a clear reference to the ethnic model, an internal BNP memo circulated soon after the judgment said, “We will not let this deflect us from our political objectives of saving Britain and restoring the primacy of the indigenous British people.”¹⁶⁸

Immigration policy and race relations in the Conservative Party

The Conservative Party was in the majority in Britain from 1976 to 1997, and this period was one of continuity with earlier immigration policy. The Conservatives stayed true to the post-war tactic of combining immigration restrictions with domestic race relations. The only major change was in the government’s attitude towards asylum seekers, who also became targets of restrictionist discourse. The official Conservative goal over these two decades was to “curtail the number of individuals seeking asylum in the United Kingdom.”¹⁶⁹ In recent years, Conservatives have taken a tougher stance against immigration than Labour, embracing, for example, a numeric cap or quota for immigrant entries per year.

Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher made a landmark speech in January 1978, in which she made clear the Conservative’s tough stance on immigration and, by doing so, drew many of the far-right National Front’s supporters to the Conservative Party. The speech, often referred to as her “swamping” speech, was in the words of journalist Jon Swaine, “held responsible for a collapse in support for the National Front, which had been gathering momentum in working class communities.”¹⁷⁰ The speech – actually a television interview for the program *World in Action* – is one of Thatcher’s best-known. When asked just how severely she would try to cut back on immigration numbers, Thatcher responded,

¹⁶⁵ Peter Walker, “BNP ‘whites-only’ membership rules outlawed,” *The Guardian*, 13 March 2010, Web, 18 April 2010, www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/mar/12/bnp-racist-membership-rules-outlawed.

¹⁶⁶ *Idem.*

¹⁶⁷ *Idem.*

¹⁶⁸ *Idem.*

¹⁶⁹ Somerville.

¹⁷⁰ Jon Swaine, “Margaret Thatcher complained about Asian immigration to Britain,” *The Telegraph*, 30 December 2009, Web, 18 April 2010, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/politics/margaret-thatcher/6906503/Margaret-Thatcher-complained-about-Asian-immigration-to-Britain.html.

“If [immigration continues at its current rate], by the end of the century there would be four million people of the new Commonwealth or Pakistan here. Now, that is an awful lot and I think it means that people are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with such a different culture and, you know, the British character has done so much for democracy, for law and done so much throughout the world that if there is any fear that it might be swamped people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in.”¹⁷¹

Thatcher went on to say that her ultimate goal was to stop immigration entirely: “We do have to hold out the prospect of an end to immigration except, of course, for compassionate cases.”¹⁷²

Thatcher then tried to link her restrictionist view of immigration policy to improved race relations in Britain. She said, “My great fear is now that if we get them coming in at that rate people will turn round and we shall not have good race relations with those who are here. Every one who is here must be treated equally under the law...” Despite espousing positive race relations, Thatcher went on to reiterate her commitment to an end to immigration: “We must hold out the prospect of a clear end to immigration and that is the view we have taken and I am certain that is the right view to keep good race relations...”¹⁷³

Documents only recently made public show that just one year later, in July 1979, Thatcher complained privately that too many Asian immigrants were being allowed to enter Britain. Although Thatcher had publicly said that she identified with concerns that Britain was being “swamped” by immigrants, her private statements revealed in these documents went even further. Speaking with two of her cabinet members about the Vietnam “boat people,” Thatcher said that there were already too many immigrants entering Britain and that it would be impossible to grant asylum to even 10,000 Vietnamese refugees over a two-year period.¹⁷⁴ Thatcher said that “it was essential to draw a line somewhere,” then continued to say that she found it “quite wrong that immigrants should be given council housing whereas white citizens were not.”

In the 1980s, Conservatives fought back against a growing liberal anti-racist stance with what has been called an “anti-anti-racist” platform embracing color blindness. Their famous slogan of the decade was, “Labour calls him Black, we call him British.”¹⁷⁵ Throughout the years, they have maintained a strong commitment, at least verbally, to positive race relations and color blindness within the country, combined with a strong restrictionist immigration policy

¹⁷¹ Margaret Thatcher, “TV Interview for Granada *World in Action*,” *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, 27 January 1978, Web, 18 April 2010, www.margaretthatcher.org/speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=103485.

¹⁷² *Idem*.

¹⁷³ *Idem*.

¹⁷⁴ Swaine.

¹⁷⁵ Joppke, 485.

that has not shied away from suggesting numeric caps or an eventual stop to immigration altogether.

In general, Conservatives have shown themselves to be more critical of the multicultural approach to Britishness. In 2007, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) published a study commissioned by the Labour Party suggesting that Christian festivals be “downgraded” in order to favorize race relations between different religions. Conservatives quickly spoke out about the IPPR report. Sayeeda Warsi, a Conservative spokesperson for community cohesion, says, “Their comments betray a breathtaking misunderstanding of what it is to be British. These proposals could actually damage cohesion.... You don’t build community cohesion by throwing out our history and denying the fundamental contribution Christianity has played and does play to our nation.”¹⁷⁶

For the 2010 elections, Conservative leader David Cameron has attempted to take a strong stance against immigration, an important issue for the Conservative party’s grassroots supporters. In January 2010, he promised his party “would drastically reduce net immigration levels by imposing a cap – to prevent the population rising above 70 million.”¹⁷⁷ However, he was careful not to veer into BNP territory and the extreme right in order to win votes. He said in a February YouTube broadcast, “It’s for us [the Conservatives] to be both modern and radical. Not to go back to the old ways and not to play it safe.”¹⁷⁸

Immigration policy and race relations in the Labour Party

Since Tony Blair’s election in 1997, the British immigration model has changed significantly. Blair made a concerted effort to link immigration policy to economics in what is called “economic migration,” a connection that was rarely made by previous administrations.¹⁷⁹ By embracing economic migration, Blair has broken with the tradition of unquestioned immigration restrictions that dominated the British political scene for the previous half century. Beginning in 2001, Blair proposed a number of measures not to limit, but to facilitate the migration of both low- and highly-skilled workers. Additionally, Labour has facilitated transitions between visas to encourage economic migration. Now foreign students can apply for a work permit through the Highly Skilled Migrants Program or the Science and Engineering Graduate Scheme while still finishing their studies.

And although Tony Blair took a firm stance against numeric caps on immigration, he also took firm measures to discourage illegal immigration and asylum seekers. He increased

¹⁷⁶ James Chapman, “Christmas should be ‘downgraded’ to help race relations says Labour think tank,” *The Daily Mail*, 1 November 2007, Web, 13 April 2010, www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-490925/Christmas-downgraded-heop-race-relations-says-Labour-think-tank.html.

¹⁷⁷ Anushka Asthana and Toby Helm, “Tories caught up in new immigration storm,” *The Guardian*, 28 February 2010, Web, 13 April 2010, www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/feb/28/tory-immigration-row.

¹⁷⁸ *Idem*.

¹⁷⁹ Somerville.

resources for border control dramatically in order to decrease illegal immigration, and created the Border and Immigration Agency on April 2, 2007. The agency was previously a part of the Home Office, but in its new independent state benefits from greater operational freedom. In order to discourage individuals demanding asylum in Britain, the government began “dispersing” asylum seekers – forcibly relocating them around the country – and reducing social benefits granted to asylum seekers.¹⁸⁰

But in recent years, Labour in the majority has been attempting to modify its approach to race relations. The passing of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act in 2000 and the Human Rights Act in 1998 have, in the words of Will Somerville, “made equality a fundamental tenet of general policymaking.”¹⁸¹ And under Tony Blair, Labour’s attitude towards multiculturalism evolved to envision changes within the British population itself. Blair often referred to a “two-way street” or a “two-way process” when speaking about integration, encouraging adaptation of the host community as well as that of immigrants.¹⁸² In 2006, he proposed a measure that would link community funding to integration, a measure based upon Blair’s belief that the multicultural model in Britain must be closely linked to community in order to succeed.¹⁸³

Blair’s idea of a “two-way street” was echoed by the 2007 report by the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR), a report commissioned by the Labour party that was also mentioned in the previous section. The report suggested that in order to improve race relations, Christmas celebrations should be “downgraded” in favor of other religions’ festivals.¹⁸⁴ Although the report did not suggest eliminating Christmas from national holiday calendars entirely, it did call for greater equality among Christian festivals and those from other religions. The IPPR report is strongly in favor of multiculturalism, supporting the idea that communities should be able to conserve individual culture and identity. Surprisingly, the report does not even insist on language competency among ethnic communities. It said that immigrants should be required to be fluent in English “if – but only if – the settled population is willing to open up national institutions and practices to newcomers and give a more inclusive cast to national narratives and symbols.”¹⁸⁵ Later, the report called for a “multicultural understanding of Britishness.”¹⁸⁶ In addition to reducing the importance of Christmas, the report proposed a number of other ways to improve race relations, such as the elimination of church bishops from the House of Lords, an end to “sectarian” religious education, and the introduction of flags other than the Union Jack around the country.

¹⁸⁰ Somerville.

¹⁸¹ Idem.

¹⁸² Idem.

¹⁸³ Idem.

¹⁸⁴ Chapman.

¹⁸⁵ Idem.

¹⁸⁶ Idem.

Labour communities secretary John Denham made waves in January 2010 when he stated that significant progress had already been made on the subject of race equality, and that the “one-dimensional debate” assuming that all minorities are disadvantaged was outdated.¹⁸⁷ According to Denham, too much emphasis is currently placed on race equality, and social disadvantage is linked as much to social class and poverty as it is to race. He cited the growing number of Asians in the middle class to show the advancement of ethnic minorities, saying that equating race with disadvantage was outdated. He also said that working-class whites face just as many disadvantages as minorities. He did not, however, advocate a reduction in efforts to combat racism.¹⁸⁸

Denham’s comments came at the same time as a new Equality Bill, which at the time was under discussion in parliament. The bill proposed increased attention to socio-economic inequalities by public authorities, alongside currently existing efforts to promote racial equality, and was eventually passed on April 6, 2010.¹⁸⁹

On the subject of immigration, current prime minister Gordon Brown has kept the issue in the news by putting in place an “Australian-style Points Based System,” a system with the goal of controlling immigration while still filling skills gaps.¹⁹⁰ In a March 2010 speech about immigration controls, Brown was careful to highlight Britain’s liberal history and to balance his promises of immigration restrictions with condemnations of ethnocentrism and racism. At the very beginning of his speech, he promised not to stop immigration entirely and praised the contribution of past immigrants:

“We are, as a country, proud of our values, our history of liberty, tolerance and fairness.... We are proud too of the immense contribution – economic, social and cultural – that newcomers to Britain have offered down the years in making Britain the place that it is.... There’s something of a consensus among the mainstream of British politics in the sense that none of us agree with those who would bring down the shutters around Britain entirely.”¹⁹¹

Brown went on to call for this same “mainstream” in British politics to stand together against racists or ethnocentrists who want to stop immigration “simply because they just don’t like migrants.”¹⁹² He stated with confidence, “No mainstream party wants to bring an end to immigration altogether – the debate is over how to control it, about what level it should be and how we achieve that.”¹⁹³ At the same time, though, Brown conceded that the British population has many concerns about immigration. He cited worries about hospitals, schools, and public

¹⁸⁷ Alan Travis, “Time for new approach to race relations, minister urges,” *The Guardian*, 14 January 2010, Web, 13 April 2010, www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jan/14/john-denham-race-relations.

¹⁸⁸ *Idem*.

¹⁸⁹ *Idem*.

¹⁹⁰ Gordon Brown, “Speech on controlling immigration for a fairer Britain,” *Number10.gov.uk*, 31 March 2010, Web, 14 April 2010, www.number10.gov.uk.

¹⁹¹ *Idem*.

¹⁹² *Idem*.

¹⁹³ *Idem*.

housing being overrun by immigrants; of neighborhoods changing too rapidly; of immigrants hurting job prospects for British children; and of immigrants taking advantage of British opportunities without contributing anything back to the country. However, instead of stewing over these issues privately, Brown encouraged a public, national conversation about such concerns.

The Points Based System is Brown's solution to immigration concerns, and he assured the public that the system would be effective in permitting necessary, highly-skilled workers to enter the country and keeping unskilled workers out. With this innovation, Brown continues his predecessor Tony Blair's commitment to economic migration, for as he said, "[The debate] is actually about the flexibility to access the skilled workers we need when we need them; and to exclude the rest."¹⁹⁴

Brown has also continued to speak out against an immigration cap or quota, which he called "arbitrary and unworkable."¹⁹⁵ In order to justify this opposition, Brown has often cited statistics showing that "net inward migration" – the difference between the number of entries and exits to Britain in a given year – actually fell from 2007 to 2008. He has also insisted that his Points system is working, and that statistics for 2009 will show an even greater drop in net inward migration rates.¹⁹⁶ However, critics have claimed that Brown's statistics are erroneous, and that immigration is actually on the rise. The newspaper *The Daily Mail* reported that the number of immigrants entering Britain each year has tripled under Labour, not decreased as Brown claims.¹⁹⁷ And the chairman of MigrationWatch, Andrew Green, said, "Immigration has trebled under Labour and it is now driving our population towards the 70 million mark. The Government are in denial."¹⁹⁸ Brown may be risking the political support of the British-born working class, many of whom were upset to learn that 98.5 percent of the 1.67 million jobs created under Labour were taken by foreign-born workers, by continuing his opposition to an immigration cap. But Brown has not backed down, saying that the immigration problem must be put "in perspective" and continuing to oppose Conservative propositions for quotas.¹⁹⁹

Criticism of British anti-discrimination law

The majority of South Asians in Great Britain will face discrimination at some point in their lives. In 1994, the Fourth National Study of Ethnic Origins, or NSEM, asked thousands of white Britons to respond to questions regarding minorities. The results showed a surprisingly high amount of prejudice and discrimination against South Asians. For example, 32.6% of

¹⁹⁴ Brown.

¹⁹⁵ Idem.

¹⁹⁶ Kirsty Walker, "Brown faces backlash after telling voters to put immigration crisis 'into perspective,'" *The Daily Mail*, 19 April 2010, Web, 19 April 2010, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/election/article-1267029/General-Election-2010-Gordon-Brown-risks-alienating-working-class-immigration.html>.

¹⁹⁷ Idem.

¹⁹⁸ Idem.

¹⁹⁹ Idem.

white believed that Asians were the most discriminated-against minority in Great Britain, followed by 11.7% who said specifically Pakistanis, 10.6% said Muslims, and 10.4% who said Caribbeans. Fully 26% of participants acknowledged being personally prejudiced against Asians and 25% against Muslims.²⁰⁰

With such widespread prejudice among the population, one might expect strong anti-discrimination laws to protect minorities. Although minorities in Great Britain are protected by anti-discrimination law, granting individuals who have been mistreated the possibility of legal recourse, some have criticized British laws for placing a too-heavy burden on victims to prove that a crime has been committed. Sociologists Model and Lin compare British anti-discrimination law unfavorably to those in other countries in their article, “The Cost of Not Being Christian.” According to their studies, the United Kingdom holds a very stringent standard of evidence in anti-discrimination cases.²⁰¹ Also, similar cases filed by different individuals are deliberated separately and are not considered together, meaning that repeat perpetrators of racial discrimination often escape with less-severe punishments. Individuals who file claims are financially responsible for their own defense, discouraging lower-class Asians to come forward; in Canada, on the other hand, discrimination complaints are financed by the government. Finally, although discrimination is officially a crime in Great Britain, the law does not specify religious discrimination, a striking omission since the majority of non-Christians in the country are of South Asian descent.²⁰²

The Macpherson Report

No discussion of racial discrimination in Britain would be complete without a discussion of the Macpherson Report. This report is a 1999 investigation into institutionalized police racism in Britain, inspired by the 1993 murder of Stephen Lawrence. Lawrence was a young black man killed in a racially-motivated attack at a bus stop, but his killers were never caught due to racism and cover-ups by the mainly white police. As a result, the government commissioned the Macpherson Report to develop a series of suggestions for how to protect racial minorities and improve police relations with the public.

The Macpherson Report provides a wide range of modifications, both to the legal system and to the British police itself. In order to grant the government greater supervision over police forces, it changed laws in order to allow police officers to be disciplined even up to five years after retirement. It also declared that “all racist words or acts” by police officers should

²⁰⁰ Model and Lin, 1064.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 1063.

²⁰² *Idem.*

be punished by dismissal, or at the very least a disciplinary proceeding. The Report also guaranteed independent investigations into all public complaints registered against the police.²⁰³

In order to increase racial sensitivity among police forces, the Macpherson Report suggested that local ethnic minorities be involved in regular police training and that all officers be required to attend regular “racial awareness training.”²⁰⁴ Another modification was to the composition of police forces themselves. According to the report, police forces should include greater ethnic diversity and make an effort to employ more minorities. In the words of the Guardian newspaper staff, “Police forces should reflect the cultural and ethnic mix of the communities they serve.”²⁰⁵

Following the report, the term “racist incident” was enlarged to include even non-crimes that were racially motivated. Also, such incidents could be reported 24 hours per day, and not only in police stations.

On the whole, the Macpherson Report was successful in placing the police under greater public and government control and protecting the rights of victims and victims’ families. The Report falls under the broad umbrella of “race relations” and “multiculturalism” in modern British politics, and its efforts have gone a long way in protecting the rights of minorities. However, social and cultural prejudices still exist.

Towards new immigration quotas?

Even today, British Asians still seem to be victims of government prejudice and even racism. In 2004, secret documents leaked from Downing Street implied that the government was moving towards the reestablishment of immigration quotas, specifically targeting Asian and African immigrants.²⁰⁶ These documents discussed the number of immigrants entering the country under the “working holiday maker scheme.” Each year, approximately 40,000 under-30’s from the Commonwealth come to the UK to work for two years, at the end of which they must return to their home countries. Working holiday visas permit Commonwealth citizens to come to Great Britain without a set work contract, and provide employers with cheap foreign labor. The program, however, has been criticized for multiple reasons. According to BBC reporter Dominic Casciani, “The scheme was long viewed as discriminatory: While 18,000 Australians were on the scheme in 1999, only 50 Indians qualified.”²⁰⁷ Also, the government

²⁰³ “The Macpherson Report: summary,” *The Guardian*, 24 February 1999, Web, 13 April 2010, www.guardian.co.uk/uk/1999/feb/24/lawrence.ukcrime12.

²⁰⁴ *Idem*.

²⁰⁵ *Idem*.

²⁰⁶ Dominic Casciani, “Analysis: Immigration quotas for the UK?” *BBC News Online*, 7 June 2004, Web, 17 February 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/3783273.stm.

²⁰⁷ *Idem*.

fears that people are taking advantage of the scheme, applying for longer-term work permits after their first year and not leaving when their two-year visa expires.

The leaked documents implied that government officials were worried by the increase in applications from Africa and Asia, even going so far as to discuss possible quotas for Asian and African Commonwealth countries. The quota discussions were spurred by an increase in applications for working holiday visas from Asian and African nations from 1998 to 2002, but according to a BBC News article, “what remains unclear is exactly why this has been a cause of concern.”²⁰⁸

Such proposed quotas on “colored” immigration, however, could have catastrophic results. According to Karen Couhan, an employee of race campaigning group the 1990 Trust, such quotas could leave minorities “confused and frustrated” about their place in society. “These new proposals are entirely consistent with everything from the 1960s which has seen immigration legislation drawn on race,” she said. “If the Home Office says it wants to tackle abuse, they should have a system which is race neutral and tackle it wherever it is within the immigration system.”²⁰⁹

II. The Situation of Contemporary British Asians

The British Asian “community”

One major difficulty arises when discussing the so-called British Asian “community”: such a community does not, in fact, exist. Naseem Khan wrote in her introduction to Tim Smith’s collection of photographs, *Asians in Britain*, “In the eyes of much of the media, ‘Asians’ exist as an entity, but on the ground no such unity exists.”²¹⁰ Ziauddin Sardar, a well-known British writer and academic, wrote a denunciation of the term “Asian community” in the magazine *The New Statesman* in 2008. “Asia is a continent, not an identity,” he writes, continuing on to cite the incredible diversity of the people who fall under the British label of “Asian.”²¹¹ They could be Hindu or Muslim; Bangladeshi, Indian, or Pakistani; Kashmiri or Punjabi. They are divided by language, religion, culture, and history. In their home countries, they led separate lives. It was only after arriving in Britain that they were grouped together as “Asians,” a term many had never even heard before arriving in the United Kingdom.²¹²

For this Asian community is a vast one. It encompasses four national identities: Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Sri Lankan.²¹³ Numerous ethnic groups are also included, such as

²⁰⁸ Casciani.

²⁰⁹ *Idem*.

²¹⁰ Tim Smith, 9.

²¹¹ Sardar.

²¹² *Idem*.

²¹³ It should be noted that such “nations” are the product of British creativity and are not always reflective of cultural boundaries.

Punjabis, Kashmiris, Gujaratis, Sindhis, Bengalis, Beharis, Tamils, and Singhalese. South Asians are religiously diverse, as they could be Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Sikh, Jain, or Muslim. This diversity has had a high price for British Asians. Divisions within the South Asian community along religious, ethnic, and national boundaries has prevented any organized, unified uprising among British Asians, such as that of the African American community in the American Civil Rights movement. And the fracture lines between South Asian ethnic groups do not show signs of receding. In a study conducted from 1997 to 2002 among South Asian women, 98% of Bangladeshis, 94% of Pakistanis, and 92% of Indians reported marrying men of their own ethnicity.²¹⁴ It is perhaps because of their very diversity that British Asians have been unable to bring widespread attention to inequalities in British society and create a grassroots movement for change.

“Feeling” British

These feelings of exclusion from white society among British Asians were confirmed in a 2007 poll by the British news conglomerate the BBC. The poll interrogated whites as well as British Asians to determine each group’s sentiments regarding cultural belonging. The survey contacted 500 Asians and 213 whites, all aged between 16 and 34, during July 2007. Among the British Asian participants, 75% expressed the sentiment that “their culture was being diluted by living in the UK.” Half of respondents felt that they were not treated “as British” by whites. Even more surprisingly, 38% said that they felt only “slightly” or “not at all” British.²¹⁵

The white respondents also revealed some biases. More than 60% of whites interviewed thought it was “too easy” for immigrants to move to Britain. However, 73% of whites felt that they, themselves, were British, a much higher percentage than that of residents with South Asian origins.²¹⁶

According to the BBC poll, in reaction to their perceived exclusion, some British Asians have embraced the identity of “coconuts.” This term is used, with loose reference to the fruit, for someone who is brown on the outside but white on the inside. More than a third of British Asians polled felt that they needed to be “coconuts” in order to succeed in Britain.²¹⁷

Physical segregation of South Asians

The social segregation of South Asians in Great Britain seems evident wherever one looks. But their physical separation from white Europeans is actually quite difficult to quantify.

²¹⁴ Lewis, 5.

²¹⁵ “Many Asians ‘do not feel British,’” *British Broadcasting Corporation*, 30 July 2007, Web, 25 March 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6921534.stm.

²¹⁶ *Idem*.

²¹⁷ *Idem*.

Geographer Ceri Peach wrote an article in 1996 that posed the question, “Does Britain have ghettos?”²¹⁸ She found it difficult to determine an answer.

Peach’s main challenge came in the definition of terms like “separation” or “ghetto.” For example, if one black person lives on a block of whites, should this block be considered “integrated”? If one neighborhood has a higher concentration of a minority than in the surrounding city as a whole, is this neighborhood a “ghetto”?²¹⁹

One definition that came easier to Peach was that of an “ethnic minority,” a term already specified by the 1991 British Census to mean anyone in Britain of non-European origin. The same census that defined this term determined that the total number of people belonging to ethnic minorities was just more than three million, meaning that 5.5% of the British population was part of an ethnic minority in 1991.²²⁰ This is a fairly small percentage, particularly for a country with such a long colonial heritage. For comparison, the percentage of ethnic minorities in the United States is more than twice that of Great Britain.²²¹

This small population, though, can still reveal quite a bit about the placement of South Asians in Britain. Firstly, the great majority are concentrated in England. Only 85% of the white population of the United Kingdom is in England, but 98% of Indians live in England. Also, South Asians are much more likely to live in metropolitan areas than in the country, perhaps a result of their concentration around factories and manufacturing zones.²²²

If one examines minority distribution only at the city or district level in England, South Asians seem to be fairly well integrated. That is to say, South Asians are fairly equally distributed among the major metropolitan centers of England. However, investigation at the ward or enumeration district levels, smaller administrative regions within cities in England, it becomes evident that ethnic groups are more concentrated and less integrated.²²³ This detailed investigation is necessary due to the small total number of ethnic minorities in England. The results of Peach’s research found that Bangladeshis are particularly isolated, tending to live separate both from whites and from other minority groups. Pakistanis are also segregated, although they are more likely to mix with other immigrant groups than Bangladeshis. Finally, Indians are even more integrated than Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, but are still more likely to live in proximity to Pakistanis or Bangladeshis than whites.²²⁴

It is true that different South Asian subgroups inhabit different regions of England and the United Kingdom, another reminder that the South Asian “community” is incredibly diverse and not at all one seamless, unified group. Many Bengalis live in East London, where the first

²¹⁸ Peach.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 217.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 218.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 219.

²²² *Idem.*

²²³ *Ibid.*, 221.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 225.

Bengalis to arrive in Britain worked as seamen.²²⁵ Many Punjabi Sikhs came to settle in Leicester because they had fought with the Leicester Regiment in pre-partition India from 1840 to 1947. And as mentioned earlier in this essay, Bradford, an industrial city in Northern England, has a population of 75,000 Pakistanis all hailing from district in Pakistan called Mirpur.²²⁶

This segregation can have a heavy effect on young British Asians growing up in ethnically isolate communities. Writer M.Y. Alam, a British Asian with Pakistani origins, describes Bradford's segregation in his novel *Kilo*, the story of a young boy's journey into the Bradford underworld of drugs and gangs:

“Little by little, house by house, the Asians moved in and the whites moved out. The trouble with Asians, especially pakis, is that they're different. Different clothes, different language, food, skin, and, of course, we got a different God. That's why the whites move out. They see these different beings, with their different ways and they don't like what they see. So what do they do? They bitch, moan – sometimes panic – and then, sooner or later, they move the fuck out because that's the only thing they think they can do. After that, the only ones who'll move in are more pakis because whites don't want to now, not once the place has become polluted. And on and on it goes until you get these little enclaves, some would say ghettos, sprawling up all over the town. And then, when the young punks start kicking up a fuss for whatever reason, in comes some smart fucker who tells the world that a place like Bradford suffers from self segregation. No fucking shit Einstein.”²²⁷

Bradford: the “sum of all fears”?

Bradford, an industrial city in northern England near Leeds, has become somewhat of an icon for what can happen when the British Asian population becomes too concentrated in one area. In rather apocalyptic terms, Ziauddin Sardar calls Bradford “the sum of all fears we associate with Asians and Muslims.”²²⁸ But the city is a particular case among ethnic enclaves in Britain. The first immigrants to Bradford came in the 1950's and 1960's to work in textile mills, for the city was once internationally known for its textiles. But the industry suffered during the economic downturn of the 1970's, and in the following decades, continued to lose ground against low-cost producers in China. From 1970-1990, Bradford lost 60,000 jobs, or 80 percent of total textile jobs.²²⁹ The ravaging effects of the economy on Bradford are hauntingly captured by Tim Smith in his collection of photographs, *Asians in Britain*. Among photos of other cities and other Asian communities that show bustling markets or fish and chips shops, Smith shares a series of photos of closed, deserted textile mills in and around Bradford.²³⁰

²²⁵ Sardar.

²²⁶ Idem.

²²⁷ M.Y. Alam, *Kilo* (West Yorks: Route, 2002. Print), 301.

²²⁸ Sardar.

²²⁹ Lewis, 25.

²³⁰ Tim Smith.

Indeed, the scene is as bleak as Smith makes it out to be. As mentioned above, the majority of Asian residents in Bradford come from the Mirpur region of Pakistan, a rural and poor area.²³¹ Many first-generation immigrants to Britain had little or no education, could not read or write in any language, and had no exploitable professional capacities. They found work in the textile mills and developed a highly specific set of skills that could not easily transfer to other industries. Since the closing of the mills, entrepreneurs and residents alike have encountered difficulties in rebuilding industry and creating jobs in the area.²³²

As a consequence of their density in Bradford, the Pakistanis that have come to settle there have hardly changed their habits from Mirpur. In the 1999 film *East is East*, set in 1970's Britain, a Pakistani father named George Khan brings his sons to Bradford to set up arranged marriages for the two eldest. Upon entering the city, they see that the "Welcome to Bradford" sign has been painted over to read, "Welcome to Bradistan." Within the city limits, women wear saris, families shop in open-air markets for exotic fruits and vegetables, and mosques are more common than churches.²³³ For Khan, this Pakistani authenticity is what is missing in his sons' lives. "We should have moved to Bradford," he laments, thinking of their Catholic neighbors in Manchester.

But the segregation of ethnic groups in Bradford has also had negative effects. There were large, nationally-publicized riots in 1995 and 2001, where the South Asian community protested against discrimination by the city's white majority. In the July 2001 riots, more than 300 police officers were injured, and 90% of rioters were of South Asian descent.²³⁴ Of the 200 rioters that were arrested, "62% were previously known to police and 60% of non-student offenders were unemployed."²³⁵ This last statistic indicates just how high the rates of crime and unemployment are in Bradford, as well as the effects that these have on the community. And unfortunately, things do not seem to be changing soon. Educational statistics for the region are nothing short of frightening. Only 17% of Pakistani boys and 28% of Pakistani girls achieved five or more GSCE's, certificates granted for grades of C or above, in Bradford in 1999. In comparison, the national average was 45% for boys and 55% of girls.²³⁶ In a study of young people ages 14-18 in Bradford, 38% said that their families "needed them at home," which incited them to quit school or to study from home. This statistic is three times the national average. The same study found that only 11% of Bradford youths, compared to 34% nationally,

²³¹ Lewis, 25.

²³² *Idem.*

²³³ *East is East*, FilmFour, 1999, DVD.

²³⁴ Lewis, 29.

²³⁵ *Idem.*

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

had sufficient “life skills” – such as handling money, eating well, dealing with stress, applying for work and so forth – to succeed.²³⁷

British Muslim fiction writer M.Y. Alam describes the bleak opportunities offered to young Pakistanis in Bradford in his novel *Kilo*. Near the end of the novel, he looks out at Oak Lane, one of the primary retail streets in Bradford, and paints the scene:

A centre of many a thriving business but it became notorious throughout Bradford after the riots of 1995. As Swain and I drove up we saw young punks, all of them Asian, standing on corners, ready to kick up a fuss for no reason in particular. When the mood takes them, these fuckers will hurl abuse and bricks at anyone, thinking they and the next big thing are one and the same. A bunch of trouble causers, a bunch of cowards with an ever ready supply of petrol bombs for that special, or not so special, occasion. That’s what this town, along with the rest of the world, happens to think because that’s what gets told. Doesn’t mean it’s the truth.²³⁸

Consequences of physical segregation: a comparison

Lauretta Frederking’s detailed study of two South Asian communities around London, published under the title *Economic and Political Integration in Immigrant Neighborhoods*, shows to just what degree segregation can be harmful to immigrant communities.²³⁹ The study investigates the communities of Southall and Wembley, both boroughs of London.

Southall

Southall, sometimes known as “Little India,” is almost entirely comprised of Punjabi Sikhs. Frederking reports that it is rare to see a Caucasian, to hear English spoken, or to see a store or restaurant that does not cater specifically to Indians.²⁴⁰ Indian immigrants more or less took over the area in the 1960’s, a demographic shift that is evident in the origin of local places of worship. The first Sikh temple in Southall was once a Methodist church; the Southall Hindu temple used to be a social club; and the mosque is a converted factory.²⁴¹ Business exchanges in the area are governed by the notions of bargaining and settling. Customers often have lines of credit with store owners, and rarely pay with cash. Large portions of stores’ profits are sent back to India, for the “myth of return” still lives on in Southall. Owners of local businesses hope to work for just a few years, saving up as much as possible, and then to return to India.²⁴²

But these local businesses are not performing as well financially as they could. The area suffers from economic stagnation, for their stores have little appeal outside the immediate community.²⁴³ Frederking describes the community as a “revolving door of business activities”:

²³⁷ Lewis, 40.

²³⁸ Alam, 299.

²³⁹ Lauretta Frederking, *Economic and political integration in immigrant neighborhoods: trajectories and vicious cycles* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2007. Print).

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 57.

hopeful entrepreneurs will open up one business just to see it fail, then open a new venture just next door, and so on.²⁴⁴ The Southall Chamber of Commerce is 95% Asian; members report that they joined because they felt obliged, and that the chamber offers no real economic advantages to its members. In general, shopkeepers reported a sense of “depression” about the state of business in Southall.²⁴⁵ Outside of business, there are little alternatives for socialization. There are only two social groups in the area, both with an exclusively non-Asian membership. The members of these groups report viewing them as a sort of “haven” in order to escape from the pervading Asian-ness in the surrounding community.²⁴⁶

Wembley

Wembley, another community studied by Frederking, is located not far away, in the borough of Brent. The city is, like Southall, dominated by South Asians – in Wembley’s case, most Gujarati Indians. But the community presents itself as being much more diverse. Its stores and businesses display an “international” front, often selling modern or British versions of traditional Indian fashion, food, and goods. One fashion store, which sells Indian-inspired dresses and women’s clothing, proudly displays a photo of Princess Diana buying a sari-like dress from the shop.²⁴⁷ For the businesses in the area cater to a diverse clientele, as British as it is Asian. Unlike in Southall, there is no bargaining, no credit, and no financial ties with India. Most of the shopkeepers reported little desire to return to India, and considered themselves at home in Britain.²⁴⁸

Economically, Wembley is thriving. While Southall is stagnant, Wembley has experienced “slow, steady and stable development.”²⁴⁹ Gujartis in Wembley recently merged their local business association with the larger – and mainly Caucasian – Brent Chamber of Commerce. This merger has allowed more interactions, more commercial exchanges, and has proven extremely beneficial to Wembley.²⁵⁰ And while Frederking’s study initially showed that income distribution was roughly the same between the two communities, closer investigation shows that Wembley is actually better off than Southall. The majority of participants in her study in Southall were shopkeepers who owned their own businesses but also worked at the counter and normally had no employees. In Wembley, the individuals she interviewed were simply employees; the owners did not actually work in the shops. This shows that a business owner earns approximately the same salary in Southall as a simple employee in Wembley.²⁵¹

²⁴⁴ Frederking, 49.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

²⁴⁶ *Idem.*

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁵⁰ *Idem.*

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

Wembley also enjoys social advantages. In contrast to Southall's two social clubs, Wembley has so many that Frederking could not determine a reliable count. Many exist expressly to celebrate Asian culture, and members meet to enjoy traditional meals, celebrate holidays, or simply discuss their hybrid lives in Britain. More importantly still, most social clubs in Wembley have mixed membership, with Asians and whites in the same clubs.²⁵²

Frederking is not the only academic to be interested in Wembley. Philip Lewis, in his book *Young, British and Muslim*, also devotes a portion of his work to the borough of Brent. Like Frederking, he cites the diversity of the area. More than 25 nationalities live within just this one borough. And this ethnic variety leads to creativity and energy. Brent was the location of the founding of the country's first state-funded Muslim school, Shi'ite Islamic College, which provides both secondary and advanced degree courses. It is the place of publication of *Q-News*, an English-language Muslim monthly newspaper whose goal is to educate, entertain and inspire debate. It is also the site of the An-Nisa Society, an organization for the furthering of Muslim women, as well as the Islamic Human Rights Commission, Islamic Relief, and Muslim Aid.²⁵³ All of these organizations show evidence of British Asians making an effort to find a place in British society: sharing ideas with white British, creating peaceful outlets for youths, and helping one another.

Comparative analysis of Wembley and Southall

What can be learned from the examples of Wembley and of Southall? Briefly, that ethnic segregation leads to economic and social stagnation. Residents of Southall do not feel integrated, nor implicated, in Britain. As a result, their neighborhoods remain separate, their stores cater only to members of the community, and the residents dream of returning "home" to India or Pakistan. In Wembley, however, the outlook is more positive. Asians and whites enjoy good relationships, both professional and personal. They work and socialize together without difficulties. Their community is thriving.

It is important also to note that British Asians in Wembley have not sacrificed their home culture or abandoned their South Asian identity in order to assimilate. They continue to celebrate religious and cultural festivals, enjoy South Asian cuisine, and wear traditional dress. They have achieved economic and social success without assimilation, instead opting for a more moderate route of integration or multiculturalism.

This lesson is echoed in the city of Leicester. A mid-size city located in the East midlands, Leicester is different from Southall in that its population is not as diverse. The bulk of Leicester's ethnic minority is made up of Gujarati Indians and Uganda Asians expelled from Africa in the early 1970's. In general, Leicester's Asian population is well educated, fluent in English, feels little nostalgia for India, and has strong entrepreneurial skills. As such, Leicester

²⁵² Frederking, 48.

²⁵³ Lewis, 23-24. These organizations will be discussed in more depth in a later portion of this essay.

is often lauded as a paragon of “cohesion and positive multiculturalism” in the media and by politicians.²⁵⁴ However, closer investigation shows that this is not actually the case. First of all, many skills attributed to the Indian population of Leicester were actually acquired outside of Britain, in Uganda.²⁵⁵ They arrived in Britain already educated, fluent in English, and accustomed to living in diverse communities. Secondly, white and Asian communities remain quite separate. The two groups live and socialize separately, coexisting without mixing. And finally, the tentative balance in Leicester that has been maintained by both white and Asian support of the Labour party has recently been menaced. Since the Iraq War, many Muslims in the area that once supported Labour have changed to the Liberal Democrats, the only party to take a public anti-war stance. Additionally, the arrival of a number of Muslim refugees, namely Somalis, have recently arrived in Leicester, risking to disrupt the relationship between the Uganda Asians and the white community.²⁵⁶ Recent conflicts in Leicester show that integration must be more than just skin deep; there must be a real engagement from Asians and whites alike.

The examples of Southall and Leicester illustrate the risks associated with the exclusion of South Asians from British society. For British Asians to fully feel British, they must be included socially, economically, and physically into white Britain.

South Asian Studies in British universities

There exists a rather curious discipline in many major British universities: the field of South Asian Studies. This specialization, and the courses it entails, provides unconventional insight into the British attitude towards the South Asian community in Britain today. The field was born during the colonial era in major universities such as Cambridge, Oxford, London and Edinburgh. The goals of the discipline were, at the time, to train missionaries to and administrators of the colonies. Students took classes in language, religion, and culture of the Indian subcontinent.²⁵⁷ Studies had a clearly practical aim, their goal being to prepare the young British administrators for their first encounters with South Asians and to enlighten them on native practices.

With the end of the colonial era, however, the field of South Asian studies did not disappear. It remains even today a popular undergraduate and graduate degree in many British universities; in others, South Asian specialties are available from larger academic departments

²⁵⁴ Lewis, 24.

²⁵⁵ See discussion of Uganda Asians in chapter one.

²⁵⁶ Lewis, 24.

²⁵⁷ Vibha Arora, “An Introduction to South Asian Studies in the United Kingdom,” *Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies Guide to Good Practice*, 2005, Web, 9 May 2009, <http://www.llas.ac.uk/resources/gpg/2425>.

such as Sociology, Economics, History, or Political Science. To a certain degree, the focus of the discipline has shifted. Where before students learned about language, religion, and culture, today the emphasis is on cultural traditions, religion, and cultural representation. Language studies retain some interest, but are no longer at the center of South Asian studies. In addition to the academic programs offered, those interested in South Asian studies have an additional resource in the numerous student-run societies at British universities that celebrate South Asian culture in the form of dance, music, food, and the arts.²⁵⁸

But the popularity of South Asian studies is a double-edged sword. On the positive side, it rouses interest in and understanding of South Asian culture and ways of life. It could permit young British students to better identify with the British Asian community and to foster understanding among whites and Asians. However, British academic interest in South Asia today still holds on to colonial overtones. According to Vibha Arora, a professor and an Indian immigrant to the United Kingdom, “Current research trends and conference themes on South Asia indicate the shift towards a Commonwealth approach to development, social policy, and understanding of the South Asian diaspora.”²⁵⁹ The roots of the discipline in the colonial era leave certain overtones of the colonizer-versus-colonized dynamic. The very fact that students can study particularities of South Asian culture puts emphasis on the “otherness” of South Asians, which could serve to increase divisions between white British and British Asians.

Language ability and employment

In 2001, Derek Leslie and Joanne Lindley published an exhaustive study examining the connection between language ability and employment and earnings among non-whites living in Great Britain. Their study used statistics from the Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities, or FNSEM, to determine the language skills of British non-whites. Then, in their own words, Leslie and Lindley investigated “how much of the lower unemployment and higher earnings enjoyed by whites is the result of a comparative advantage in language.”²⁶⁰

The FNSEM results have inspired numerous studies of Britain’s non-white population, and for good reason. The study, conducted in 1994, surveyed 2867 whites and 5196 non-whites, all aged 16 and over. Ethnic groups were determined by two questions: first, respondents were asked which ethnic group they self-identified with; then they were asked their family origin. This double questioning allowed a more “accurate” identification of respondents. And unlike many other surveys on ethnicity and minorities, the FNSEM was conducted in respondents’ choice of language, in English or in the respondent’s main language. This

²⁵⁸ Arora.

²⁵⁹ Idem.

²⁶⁰ Derek Leslie and Joanne Lindley, “The Impact of Language Ability on Employment and Earnings of Britain’s Ethnic Communities,” *Economica* 68.272 (2001): 587, *JSTOR*, Web, 4 April 2009, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3549120>.

permitted researchers to contact individuals who were not fluent in English.²⁶¹ Additionally, instead of allowing respondents to self-identify their language skills, their ability was assessed by interviewers who categorized ability as “fluent,” “fair,” “poor,” or “none.”²⁶²

The results of Leslie and Lindley’s study are shocking. Among non-whites, only 59.3% were judged to be “fluent.” Among Pakistani and Bangladeshi men, the statistics were even lower – only 46% of Pakistani men and 40% of Bangladeshi men found to be fluent. These percentages are surprisingly low, even when compared with other non-whites included in the study such as Caribbeans, Chinese, and African Asians (including those from Uganda and Kenya). Among females, the differences are even more noticeable: only 31% of Pakistani females and 20% of Bangladeshi females are fluent, compared with 95% of Caribbeans and 66% of African Asians. These statistics indicate that not only race in general, but ethnic origin as well has an effect on language fluency. Additionally, given that Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are “among the most disadvantaged of all Britain’s ethnic communities” and that they have the lowest rates of fluency in English, there is an implied link between economic class and language ability.²⁶³

Leslie and Lindley also highlighted statistics showing that language ability is not the only factor considered for employment. They found that fluent non-whites have higher unemployment rates than whites. 23% of fluent non-white males and 21% of fluent non-white females are unemployed, compared with only 15% for white males and 9% for white females.²⁶⁴ These results show that racism still exists in contemporary Great Britain, and that it can prevent non-whites, even those with fluent language skills, from finding employment.

However, despite racial or ethnic discrimination, language ability is still the greatest factor in explaining activity rates. In every statistical analysis conducted, Leslie and Lindley found that fluent individuals had higher employment rates than those that were non-fluent.²⁶⁵ Additionally, if non-fluent individuals do find employment, statistics on their earnings indicate that they face penalties – their average earnings are much lower than fluents’.²⁶⁶ Language skills also showed a particular effect on female activity rates. Only 20% of non-fluent females were active, either in paid employment or as full-time students, while 63% of fluent females were active.²⁶⁷

The study also showed a major difference between foreign-born and UK-born non-white males. Foreign-born non-white males suffered an earnings penalty in comparison with

²⁶¹ Leslie and Lindley, 592.

²⁶² *Idem.*

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 593.

²⁶⁴ *Idem.*

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 594.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 595.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 594.

their UK-born counterparts, even when their language skills were comparable.²⁶⁸ But these two groups also showed differences in their language ability. From the sampled population, 48.9% of foreign-born non-whites were fluent in English, while fully 94.3% of UK-born non-white respondents were fluent.²⁶⁹ Since immigration restrictions have been put into place limiting entries into the United Kingdom, the former group – non-whites born outside the UK – will decrease in size, increasing the average fluency of the non-white British population. Also, this statistic implies that second- or third-generation non-whites will not face the same language difficulties as their ancestors. The difference in language ability can contribute to a “generation gap” among South Asians, to be discussed in the following section.

In recent years, politicians have begun trying to encourage greater English language skills in new immigrants. In a March 2010 speech, Gordon Brown said, “We know that migrants who are fluent in English are more likely to be employed, and find it easier to integrate. So as well as introducing a pre-entry English test for spouses from next year, we are now ensuring that this test applies to all students below degree and foundation degree level.”²⁷⁰ And Brown’s Minister for race relations, Sadiq Khan, said in an April 2008 interview that the government should cut back on translation services in order to encourage immigrants to learn English, which he suggested would lead to greater integration of minority communities.²⁷¹

III. The Generation Gap

The generation gap in film and literature

In the 60-some years since the first wave of South Asian immigrants came to Great Britain, many families have made their permanent homes in the United Kingdom. Even if they live in ethnic enclaves like Bradford, they are still in Britain, and this has created certain challenges for their children. The second generation of British Asians is in a situation just as precarious, if not even more so, than its parents. Despite the fact that they speak English and are born in Britain, children of South Asian immigrants often maintain close ties to the country of their ancestors. They keep relatives and friends in the Indian subcontinent, are often encouraged to maintain cultural or religious traditions by their parents, and remain loyal to their home country.²⁷²

The difficult situation of second-generation British Asians, pulled between their parents’ traditions and their new countries’ modernity, has been the subject of many recent movies and novels. These works tend to highlight the difficult position of the children of

²⁶⁸ Leslie and Lindley, 603.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 604.

²⁷⁰ Brown.

²⁷¹ Jonathan Oliver, “Muslims rebuffed over sharia courts,” *The Sunday Times*, 12 October 2008, Web, 14 April 2010, www.timesonline.co.uk/news/politics/article4926612.ece.

²⁷² Sardar.

immigrants, who often come into conflict with their parents as they try to create a new, hybrid identity that conserves their heritage but allows them to participate in modern British culture as well.

“Bend it like Beckham”

One of the greatest independent box office successes of recent years was the film “Bend it Like Beckham,” directed by Mira Nair. The movie tells the story of Jess Bamhra, the daughter of Hindu Indian immigrants living in the suburbs of London. The film takes its title from the British soccer player David Beckham; the major intrigue comes from Jess’s overwhelming desire to become a professional soccer player, against her parents’ belief that it is unfeminine and un-Indian to do so.

The ethnic isolation of young Indians in Mira Nair’s London is evident from the first scenes. Jess and her older sister, Pinky, go shopping for Pinky’s wedding accessories in a montage of Asian-ness. We witness Indians selling exotic fruits and baked goods, Indian drum beats play in the background, the two sisters see only Indian friends, and they greet neighbors and elders in Hindi.²⁷³ But Jess does not entirely belong to this traditional situation. She is often criticized by her parents for being too liberated, “running around with her legs showing,” which is her mother’s complaint about soccer, and not having an Indian boyfriend. She complains at one point, “Anything I can do just isn’t Indian enough for them!” This is the crux of the conflict between Jess and her parents, as well as the broader conflicts between first- and second-generation British Asians. The younger generation hopes to integrate, to lead their lives on their own terms; the older generation hopes to maintain South Asian values and ways of life even in a new country. Jess wears Adidas sweatpants, makes friends with an English blonde, and falls in love with her Irish soccer coach; her mother wears only saris, attempts tirelessly to teach Jess to cook Indian dishes, and dreams only of her finding a good Hindu husband.

White Teeth

This theme is repeated in nearly all of the modern representations of South Asians in the United Kingdom. In Zadie Smith’s novel *White Teeth*, the Bangladeshi protagonist, Samad Iqbal, has a love-hate relationship with Britain. He came for the opportunities, but fears that the country is corrupting his sons and family. He complains of his nieces and nephews, “They won’t go to mosque, they don’t pray, they speak strangely, they dress strangely, they eat all kinds of rubbish, they have intercourse with God knows who. No respect for tradition. People call it assimilation when it is nothing but corruption. Corruption!”²⁷⁴ Facing the fact that his best friend is an atheist and he is attracted to a white woman, Samad explodes, “I should never have come here – that’s where every problem has come from. Never should have had my sons here, so far from God. Willesden Green! Visiting cards in sweetshop windows, Judy Blume in

²⁷³ *Bend it Like Beckham*, Kintop Pictures, 2002, DVD.

²⁷⁴ Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001. Print), 159.

the school, condom on the pavement....”²⁷⁵ Samad’s solution is simple: in order to put their children back in order and back on track with tradition, they should be sent back to the Indian subcontinent temporarily to learn about their heritage. He even does so with his eldest son, Magid. But his younger son Millat, however, lives a different experience, and feels no need to travel to sense his Bangladeshi roots: “But the fact was Millat didn’t need to go back home: he stood schizophrenic, one foot in Bengal and one in Willisden. In his mind he was as much there as he was here. He did not require a passport to live in two places at once....”²⁷⁶

“East is East”

These are far from being isolated examples of the conflict between the first and second generation of immigrants in movies and film. A surprise box-office and critical success in 1999 was the low-budget film *East is East*, directed by Damien O’Donnell, which went on to win the BAFTA award for Best Film in 1999.²⁷⁷ It tells the story of George Khan, a strict Pakistani Muslim married to a Catholic English woman, and focuses on George’s relationship with his children. *East is East*, which is set in the 1970’s, shows the first and second generations’ ideals to be even more at odds with one another. In the opening scenes, George’s children participate in a Catholic parade through their neighborhood, then run and hide when they hear their father is approaching. They refuse to learn Arabic, and the oldest son runs off in the middle of his arranged marriage ceremony. His second-oldest son, Tariq, cries to his father at one point, “I’m not even Pakistani!”²⁷⁸

“My Beautiful Laundrette”

The 1985 film *My Beautiful Laundrette*, an international success from director Stephen Frears, focuses mainly on the relationship between whites and Pakistanis, but also touches on the generation gap within the South Asian community. Omar, the young and ambitious Pakistani protagonist, seems well-integrated into white Britain. His best friend, Johnny, is white –for which his father often reproaches him, encouraging to break off ties with Johnny – and Omar speaks only English. His uncle’s friend demands at one point, “Doesn’t the boy speak his own language,” astounded that Omar does not understand the conversation going on around him. Another conflict arises from the fact that Omar is obsessed with money and climbing the social ladder in England. He says at one point, referring to England, “I want big money... I’m not going to be beat down by this country.” Omar’s father, on the other hand, was a famed journalist in Bombay before moving to Great Britain, and thinks that all his son needs to succeed is education. “You need to go to college!” he repeats throughout the film.

²⁷⁵ Zadie Smith, 121.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 183.

²⁷⁷ “East is East,” *The Internet Movie Database*, 1999, Web, 14 May 2009, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0166175/>.

²⁷⁸ *East is East*, FilmFour.

Near the end, the father reiterates, “We must have knowledge... if we’re to see clearly what is being done, and to whom, in this country.”²⁷⁹

The frequency of these stories of disputes between first- and second-generation immigrants, as well as the critical and public acclaim that they achieve, implies that this conflict is widespread. Older immigrants, who came to the United Kingdom full of hope, have been disappointed by the lack of integration, material success, and acceptance of their values and beliefs. Their children are similarly dissatisfied by the social exclusion that they experience, but often see their parents and cultural traditions as the culprits. The exaggerated “generation gap” for British Asians has had a doubly negative effect, since both generations feel excluded by white British around them, but also potentially from their own families as well.

The generation gap in reality

This generation gap is in no way limited to film and literature; these representations have been inspired by real difficulties encountered by second- and third-generation South Asian immigrants in Great Britain in their daily lives.

Ethnic minority politics vary greatly between generations. The first generation of British Asians, who arrived in Britain as adolescents or adults, leaned towards moderate ethnic politics with an emphasis on welfare and “pragmatic self-help.”²⁸⁰ These first immigrants also embraced the governmental race relations institutions. Their children and grandchildren, however, have shown a tendency to turn towards a more extreme, anticolonial perspective. According to Christian Joppke, the anticolonial movement among second- and third-generation immigrants “articulated the frustrations of the young and unemployed in the urban ghettos.”²⁸¹ Youths have also been more resistant to race relations institutions and to the government in general.

Some of this resistance could be explained by two conflicting social mechanisms at work on later-generation British Asians today: firstly, the pressure for conformity to traditionally South Asian norms; and secondly, the pressure for liberalization of or deviation from South Asian norms.²⁸² There are two possible reactions to these social pressures. The first has been called the “rebel reaction.” Youths that follow this reaction reject their South Asian roots and attempt to behave as the typical Englishman. The second response is the “in-group reaction,” which is to behave as elder generations expect and to behave as a South Asian.²⁸³

But contemporary youths have been rejecting these two absolute responses and attempting to find their own way in a compromise between the two. According to Mark

²⁷⁹ *My Beautiful Laundrette*.

²⁸⁰ Joppke, 483.

²⁸¹ *Idem*.

²⁸² Thompson, 242.

²⁸³ *Idem*.

Thompson, who lived in and studied the second generation of a Punjabi community in Coventry, “The majority of the second generation do not want to give up their Punjabi identity and wholly to adopt English norms of behaviour; instead they want to liberalize the traditional village and family regime of Punjab.”²⁸⁴

Another element contributing to the generation gap is the different levels of socialization between generations. First generation immigrants were born, raised, and educated in South Asia; upon their arrival in Britain, as has been already discussed, they often settled in ethnic enclaves. As a result, they retain the same values and habits that they had in their home country. British Asian children, though, are more exposed to new ideas and new opportunities in British schools and in the workplace. Thompson wrote, “The whole field of education and employment is one in which the second generation are exposed to local English values and norms of social behaviour.”²⁸⁵

The difficulty for British Asian youths, according to Thompson, is that they often face criticism from all sides. While their parents and families perceived them as being too British, society at large sees them as being not enough so. Thompson describes this difficult situation for young British Asians:

“It is regrettable that so much of English society sees the behaviour of young Punjabis in negative terms; i.e. that they do not want to adopt English customs and practices, that they do not want to associate closely with English people, and do not want to speak to one another in English – all instances which reflect a very positive and legitimate aspiration to retain their heritage and identity as Punjabis, something which is in no way prejudicial or damaging to English society.”²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ Thompson, 242.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 247.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 248.

THE PARTICULAR SITUATION OF BRITISH MUSLIMS

Since 95% of Muslims in Britain have South Asian origins, any discussion of Muslims in Britain implicates South Asians.²⁸⁷ In recent years, Muslims have been an especially frequent topic of discussion in Great Britain. Since the terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001, and to an even greater extent since the subway bombings in London in July 2005, fears of British Muslim extremism are rampant. Many moderate and liberal Muslims report feeling targeted by their British compatriots, or as being treated as potential criminals wherever they go. All South Asians face certain difficulties in Great Britain – segregation, unemployment, discrimination – but Muslims must deal with all this, and more. The important role of Islam in their daily lives, as well as pre-conceived notions about their religion held by outsiders, can create specific challenges for British Muslims that can set them apart from other South Asian immigrants.

Statistics support the idea that Muslims face particular challenges, for they have a particular economic disadvantage when compared with white Christians in Britain. For example, Muslims, on average, earn only 67% of what white Christians earn.²⁸⁸ Approximately one third of Muslims in Britain are long-term unemployed or have never worked, which is more than twice the rate for Christians. 70% of Muslim women ages 25 and over were inactive in 2001, compared with only 30% of Christians.²⁸⁹

Before beginning this chapter, it must be noted that much as the term “British Asian” encompasses myriad identities, so too does the identifier “British Muslim.” Philip Lewis cites on the very first page of his book *Young, British and Muslim* “the complexity and dynamism of Britain’s Muslim communities, with their multiplicity of identities, stories, ethnicities and migration histories....”²⁹⁰

This section will examine the particular challenges for Muslims in Britain that stem from religious differences, the growing extremist movement among young British Muslims, as well as contemporary efforts to overcome such challenges.

I. Specific Challenges to Muslim Integration

Muslims as the Minority

One particular difficulty for Muslims is to find a way to integrate their religion with the modern, British society in which they live. Mohammed Siddique Khan, the leader of the London Subway Bombing group, detonated his bomb at the Edgware Road tube station – in

²⁸⁷ Model and Lin, 1074. I was unable to find confirmation for this statistic in other sources; according to Philip Lewis, only 68% of British Muslims are South Asian, and 43% of all British Muslims are Pakistani (Lewis, 19). But Lewis also notes that until 1981, approximately 80% of Muslims came from South Asia; in the past two decades, though, there has been an increase in refugees from countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia that have diminished the percentage of South Asian Muslims.

²⁸⁸ Model and Lin, 1076.

²⁸⁹ Lewis, 27.

²⁹⁰ Lewis, 1.

the center of London's largest Arab Muslim community. Some suppose that this choice of location was in protest of the mixing of Islam and British culture, the idea that Muslims could survive – and thrive - in the West.²⁹¹ An element of this problem is that the majority of Muslim immigrants to Britain came from Islamic countries, so it is sometimes difficult for them to learn how to live in a country where they are in the religious and cultural minority. Dr. Zaki Badawi, an Islamic scholar, said of Sunni Islam, “[our] theology offers, up to the present, no systematic formulation of the status of being in a minority.”²⁹² Badawi, conscious of this difficulty, even created a magazine entitled *Journal for Muslim Minority Affairs* to help Muslims understand how to be true to their faith and their country while being a minority.²⁹³

Difficulties in Language Acquisition

Language skills can also complicate the task of social integration for Muslims. Pakistani Muslims face a particular challenge, in that they must traditionally learn up to four languages. The Pakistani national language is Urdu, which is also the language for teaching Islam in British mosques. But the most common language in Pakistan is Punjabi, and this is the language that many British Muslims from Pakistani origins speak in their homes. Obviously, schooling for British Muslim youths is conducted in English, as are the majority of their social encounters. And finally, Muslim children are pressured to learn enough Arabic to read at least the Qur'an. According to one Pakistani historian, “we grew up literate not in one language but practically illiterate in at least four.”²⁹⁴

Such language difficulties can also prevent young Muslims from socializing with their British peers. The majority are obligated to attend *madrassa*, or mosque school, to learn to read Arabic and to study the Qur'an. *Madrassa* takes place directly after school during the week, and students are rushed from school to *madrassa* to home – preventing any casual socialization between Muslims and their white British classmates.²⁹⁵

Youths are not the only victims of the difficulties of language acquisition; Muslim parents can also suffer the consequences. In one micro-study of an inner-city primary school with majority Muslim enrollment, two thirds of mothers couldn't read or write English. The same study indicated that more than half of fathers could not communicate fluently in English.²⁹⁶ These difficulties can isolate families, and prevent Muslim parents from playing an active role in their child's education.

²⁹¹ Lewis, 2.

²⁹² Zaki Badawi, in Lewis, 6.

²⁹³ Lewis, 6.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

The Politics of biridari

Another challenge for Muslims come from their traditional community organization. Clans – called *biridari* – are the basis of social organization for older Muslims in Britain and around the world. Community centers, local politics, and mosques are all governed by the principle of clan politics.²⁹⁷ *Biridari* is omnipresent in Muslim enclaves; it “gives families their identity, a code of behaviour and a support network.”²⁹⁸

Although *biridari* can unite Muslim families in Britain, it can also be a divisive factor. Individuals from different clans are expected not to associate with one another, and are often in direct competition. A recent study of Muslim youths ages 14-19 from Miripuri backgrounds revealed that the *biridari* system can exert enormous pressure on British Muslim families. The majority of youths interviewed said that the differences between clans were as great as those between Muslims and Hindus, or even between Asians and whites.²⁹⁹

And too often, clan politics can be a restraint on young Muslims hoping to make their way in Britain. Philip Lewis tells the story of one young Pakistani who seemed to have a bright future before him. He was in college, taking A-level law and sociology, until one day his father arranged him a marriage to a girl in Pakistan. The boy could not refuse without being exiled from his clan and bringing shame on his father. His wife soon became pregnant, and under pressure from his community, the boy had to stop his studies and go to work in a textile mill.³⁰⁰ *Biridari* often pressure youths, and their extended families, to behave in a certain way. Young Muslims reported being afraid of doing something “inappropriate” such as choosing the wrong major in school or moving to the wrong city, which could have consequences as serious as causing their entire family to be expelled from the clan.³⁰¹

Clan politics can also inadvertently encourage crime in larger Muslim communities. Rival clans can experience intense competition, pushing youths to acquire outward signs of success in order to impress other *biridari*. Many turn to crime, such as selling drugs or stealing, in order to buy expensive cars, clothes, and jewelry.³⁰² Writer M.Y. Alam describes the situation in his novel, *Kilo*:

“Dealing’s become one of the best, most appealing and lucrative careers going and it just seems to grow more and more tempting. Why this is so is not such a complicated matter. When you can’t get a job and when every drug dealer you see happens to be driving around in a flash set of wheels, then it seems to be the *only* realistic and *sensible* choice to make.... Dealing drugs might still be a quick route to money and status but now, it’s more or less an acceptable way to earn.... When money comes into it,

²⁹⁷ Lewis, 8.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 49.

conflicts between religious beliefs and criminal activities are suddenly and quite miraculously overcome.”³⁰³

Such actions can contribute to the negative impression of the South Asian Muslim community held by the media and by much of the British population.

Finally, *biridari* politics are also beginning to influence British regional and national politics. Sultan Mahmood Chaudhry, a Pakistani politician who studied law in England, has begun traveling from Pakistan to Great Britain in order to mobilize specific *biridari* for elections.³⁰⁴ Chaudhry most recently came to England to support three specific candidates, all from the Jat *biridari*. What is striking about Chaudhry’s political motivation, though, is that the three candidates for whom he campaigned came from three different political parties: one a Conservative, one a Liberal democrat, and one Labour. His *biridari* activism has no conscience of the British political system; or as Lewis analyzes, “Clan rather than competence dictates selection.”³⁰⁵ What is regrettable in this situation is that qualified, motivated candidates – young professionals, for example, who could become community beacons – are often excluded in favor of elders or members of a certain caste.

Biridari: Ethnicity as social capital?

The organization of South Asian Muslim communities by *biridari* can be considered an example of “segmented assimilation,” a theory proposed by Portes and Zhou in their 1993 study “The new second generation.”³⁰⁶ According to this theory, immigrants can remain isolated in ethnic enclaves while still experiencing socio-economic advancement in their host country.³⁰⁷ They achieve such advancement by making the most of their ethnicity and transforming it into social capital. But it is important to distinguish between two types of ethnically-oriented communities: “ethnic enclaves” and “underclass ghettos.”³⁰⁸ While both types of communities show ethnic, racial, and social segregation, and tend to be economically depressed in comparison with neighboring communities, the former are distinguished by social ties and social networks that encourage upwards mobility. Ethnic enclaves promote economic success through ethnic cohesion, offering support and encouragement to community members.³⁰⁹ Underclass ghettos, however, do not exhibit the same characteristics. Instead of promoting

³⁰³ Alam, 150-151.

³⁰⁴ Lewis, 51.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 52.

³⁰⁶ A. Portes and M. Zhou, “The new second generation: segmented assimilation and its variants among post-1965 immigrant youth,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 530(1): 74-98, in Crul and Thompson, 1029.

³⁰⁷ Crul and Thompson, 1029.

³⁰⁸ M. Zhou, “Ethnicity as social capital: community-based institutions and embedded networks of social relations,” in G.C. Loury, T. Modood and S.M. Teles (eds) *Ethnicity, Social Mobility and Public Policy: Comparing the US and UK*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 131-59, in Crul and Thompson, 1030.

³⁰⁹ Crul and Thompson, 1030.

upwards mobility, they tend towards the type of “downward assimilation” discussed in the introduction to this paper.

Biridari present the opportunity to create either ethnic enclaves or underclass ghettos for their members. Depending on the attitudes and politics of the community, clan organization could either encourage upwards mobility among British Muslims or permit youths to fall into lives of crime and poverty. Today, a number of Muslim-run organizations are being founded in order to encourage the former and not the latter option.³¹⁰

Gender inequality

Inequality between males and females provides another layer of complexity to the situation of young Muslims in Britain today. Many Muslim parents in Britain express reluctance to let their daughters continue schooling after 18, or to allow their daughters to go away to school. They attribute this reluctance to fear of co-ed living, and of negative or simply non-traditional influences on their daughters.³¹¹ Girls who disobey their parents by pursuing education, being “liberated,” or standing up for women’s rights are seen as bringing shame on their families, or challenging traditional customs and ways of life.³¹² The stricter rules for girls can create resentment among Muslim females. In traditional neighborhoods, Muslim girls are forbidden to be seen with white boys, to drive, to wear makeup, to wear their hair as they wish, to watch British movies or listen to British music. Some girls interviewed by Philip Lewis even reported that their parents searched their rooms to make sure that they had nothing British in their possession.

Boys, however, have much more freedom. They may drive, socialize with white girls, or go out late at night.³¹³ Sociologist J. Jacobsen reports, “Young men take advantage of the relative laxity of parents to engage in irreligious behaviour. At the same time, they establish their Muslim credentials by insisting on the virtuous conduct of their wives, sisters and daughters.”³¹⁴ These inequalities have caused “lost respect for parental and *biridari* norms” among Muslim youths, also contributing to the generation gap in the British Muslim community to be discussed in the following section.³¹⁵

³¹⁰ See the section entitled “Hope for the future.”

³¹¹ Lewis, 40.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 55. It should be noted that these beliefs are not explicitly stated in the Qur’an, nor are they part of the traditional teachings of Muhammed.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 54.

³¹⁴ J. Jacobsen, *Islam in Transition: Religion and Identity among British Pakistani Youth* (London: Routledge, 1998), 121, in Lewis, 55.

³¹⁵ Lewis, 54.

The Muslim Generation Gap

In a recent study of youths ages 14-19 from Miripuri backgrounds, 90% of participants described themselves as British. However, the same youths said that 85% of their mothers and 70% of their fathers would describe themselves as Pakistani. Less than 1 in 10 participants in the study said they felt that their elders understood them, or that they could confide in older family members.³¹⁶ This lack of trust means that young Muslims often have trouble finding appropriate role models within their communities, which can lead to delinquency and behavioral problems.

But the Muslim generation gap is not limited to conceptions of nationality. Some stricter Muslim sects, such as Wahhabi or Deobandi, forbid listening to music, which can drive away young Muslims.³¹⁷ Second-generation Muslims often report feeling pulled two ways, between the modern British culture they experience at school and with peers and the more traditional atmosphere cultivated by their parents and families.³¹⁸ These same youths reported having very different lives in and out of their homes.³¹⁹

Sharia courts

The Arabic word “shari’a” literally means “way” or “path,” but its modern definition refers to the application of Islamic divine law. Much of the Muslim minority in Britain today supports efforts to have Islamic law established in a series of local courts that could be used for disputes between Muslims. Their efforts seem to be working: a 2009 study by Islamic specialist Denis MacEoin found that there were at least 85 sharia tribunals currently in use in Britain today. Of these 85 courts, though, there are only five that are officially sanctioned by the British government. The five major sharia courts, which are run by the Muslim Arbitration Tribunal, located in the cities of London, Manchester, Bradford, Birmingham and Nuneaton.³²⁰ They are recognized under the 1996 Arbitration Act, which “gives legal powers to a tribunal if all parties involved accept its authority.”³²¹ The unauthorized courts, however, are not governed by British law, which has many critics worried about their legality.

The challenge of applying sharia law in Britain is that it can often be contradictory to British law. MacEoin reported seeing rulings, for example, that a Muslim woman married to a

³¹⁶ Lewis, 53.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 5.

³¹⁸ Sughra Ahmed, *Seen and Not Heard* (Leicestershire: Policy Research Centre, September 2009. Print), 81.

³¹⁹ Sughra Ahmed, “Young Muslims Speak Up,” *The Guardian*, 1 September 2009, Web, 13 November 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2009/sep/01/young-muslims-policy-research>.

³²⁰ Steve Doughty, “Britain has 85 sharia courts: the astonishing spread of the Islamic justice behind closed doors,” *The Daily Mail*, 29 June 2009, Web, 19 April 2010, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1196165/Britain-85-sharia-courts-The-astonishing-spread-Islamic-justice-closed-doors.html>.

³²¹ Idem.

non-Muslim man should have her children taken from her until her husband converts to Islam. MacEoin's study also found support of polygamy in sharia courts, and that many decisions forced women to have sex with their husbands on demand. MacEoin wrote, "Sharia courts operating in Britain may be handing down rulings that are inappropriate to this country because they are linked to elements in Islamic law that are seriously out of step with trends in Western legislation."³²²

Conservative MP Philip Davies accused sharia courts of encouraging segregation in British society, saying, "They do entrench division in society, and do nothing to entrench integration or community cohesion. It leads to a segregated society."³²³ Lord Tebbit, also a Conservative, referenced the possibility of discrimination against women in sharia courts in early June 2009 when he said in the House of Lords, "Are you not aware that there is extreme pressure put upon vulnerable women to go through a form of arbitration that results in them being virtually precluded from access to British law?"³²⁴

Conservatives are not the only critics of sharia law. Sadiq Khan, Minister for race relations under Gordon Brown and a Muslim himself, spoke out against sharia courts in an April 2008 interview where he said that the Muslim community in Britain was not "advanced" enough for its own legal system.³²⁵ He, like Lord Tebbit, cited the possibility of discrimination against women in sharia courts, saying, "There is unequal bargaining power between men and women in this country. Women can be abused and persuaded to do things that they shouldn't have to do."³²⁶ And like Davies, Khan also criticized sharia courts for keeping Muslims separate from the rest of the British population, distancing himself from the typical discourse of multiculturalism. He says that supporting sharia courts would be contradictory to his personal message of integration: "It sends the wrong message at a time when I am trying to say to all citizens, 'learn English, get involved in your community.'³²⁷ In his interview, Khan also shot down comparisons between sharia and their Jewish equivalent, beth din courts, which play an important role for Britain's Jewish population in resolving family disputes. He said, "I have seen good examples of Jewish courts.... I don't think there is that level of sophistication [in sharia courts] that there is in Jewish law." He went on to point out that Jewish immigration to Britain has much deeper roots than Muslim immigration, saying that this also plays a role in the differences between the two communities. "Mass migration [among Asian Muslims] started 30 years ago. Jewish migration started 500 years ago."³²⁸

³²² Doughty.

³²³ *Idem.*

³²⁴ *Idem.*

³²⁵ Oliver.

³²⁶ *Idem.*

³²⁷ *Idem.*

³²⁸ *Idem.*

But there is no consensus against sharia courts in the government. Other major figures support sharia, such as the lord chief justice Lord Phillips, said in July 2008 that sharia courts could be used for marital or family disputes.³²⁹ Justice Minister Bridget Prentice said in 2008 that “if, in a family dispute... the parties to a judgment in a sharia council wish to have this recognised by English authorities, they are at liberty to draft a consent order embodying the terms of the agreement and submit it to an English court.”³³⁰ And a recent government sanction of sharia judges empowered them to issue legally binding rulings on finances, divorces, inheritances and domestic violence.³³¹ This ongoing dispute regarding sharia courts means that the issue is sure to remain in the news in coming years.

II. British Muslims and Extremism

The London subway bombings

The London subway bombings of July 2005 have brought the troubled situation of British Muslims to the attention of the world. The explosions – caused by four Muslim suicide bombers, three of South Asian descent – put the frustration and the separation of British Asians on the global stage. For these terrorists were not the same foreign extremists that piloted airplanes into the World Trade Center or the Pentagon in the United States. These were British citizens; born, raised, and educated in the United Kingdom. They were well-liked and relatively successful in their studies. They were young, all under 30 years old. And only two of the four, Mohammed Sidique Khan and Shehzad Tanweer, had even left Great Britain recently, both for a brief stay in Pakistan.³³²

But a closer look at the four bombers shows that they suffered from the same social exclusion and segregation as many British Asians. All four came from West Yorkshire, not far from the heavily Pakistani city of Bradford. When constructing the bombs, they rented an apartment together in a mainly South Asian neighborhood of Leeds, for they knew that four Asians living together would be remarked in a less ethnic area.³³³ They were all Muslim, active in their communities and mosques; however, they were not initially suspected of holding extremist beliefs. This, according to some sources, is normal. According to Model and Lin, “discrimination tends to exacerbate religious zeal,” meaning that much of the Islamic radicalism seen in Great Britain today could be a direct result of anti-Muslim attitudes among the

³²⁹ Oliver.

³³⁰ Doughty.

³³¹ Oliver.

³³² “7 July Bombings: London Bombings in Depth.”

³³³ Idem.

British.³³⁴ This seems even more likely due to a wave of “anti-Muslimism” that swept Europe in the wake of the 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States.³³⁵

As much pain and suffering that these bombings caused, there could be some positive outcomes. Jon Snow explains how the London attacks could actually bring attention to inequalities in British society: “Only the shock of discovering that educated British-born Muslim men could find it in themselves to murder their compatriots by killing themselves in the name of Allah have we awoken to where the most extreme form of this disconnect can lead.”³³⁶

Young Muslims and Extremism

Following the 7/7 terrorist attacks, and perhaps even more so today, many white Britons cite fears of young British Muslims being susceptible to extremism in their religious views. This fear has only been exacerbated by the attempted terrorist attacks of December 25th, 2009, when Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab – a Nigerian citizen who had once been president of the Islamic Society at a UK university – attempted to use an explosive device to blow up a plane landing in Detroit, Michigan. Following Abdulmutallab’s arrest, many young Muslims began feeling unfairly targeted. Faisal Hanjra, the spokesperson for FOSIS, the Federation of Student Islamic Societies, released the following formal response:

“The spotlight will now naturally fall on Islamic Societies and Muslim students and we must resist the criminalisation and labelling of Muslims as a suspect community. Terrorism is a global phenomenon and transcends international boundaries; Muslim students are equally concerned at this scourge and will continue to play their part in speaking out against terrorism. Our own work continues in dealing with issues surrounding extremism with the government, the National Union of Students and other relevant organisations. Islamic Societies across the country continue to play a crucial role in engaging Muslim students and building positive cross-campus relations. British Muslim students go on to make positive contributions to British society, and their experiences are nurtured at university. There remains no evidence to suggest that Muslim students are at particular risk of radicalisation or that university campuses are vulnerable to people seeking to recruit to this extreme ideology.”³³⁷

FOSIS is just one of many moderate, main-stream Islamic groups that exist in Britain. Along with organization such as the UK Islamic Mission, the Islamic Society of Britain, and others, FOSIS encourages “principled engagement,” the idea of being active both in Muslim and in wider British society.³³⁸ But unfortunately, these are not the only Islamic organizations that exist in Britain. Extremist groups spring up every day, soliciting young Muslims in Britain,

³³⁴ Model and Lin, 1069.

³³⁵ Ibid., 1062.

³³⁶ Jon Snow, in Lewis, x.

³³⁷ “Fosis comments on media reports regarding terror suspect,” *FOSIS*, 29 December 2009, Web, 29 January 2010, <http://fosis.org.uk/media/press-releases/649-fosis-comments-on-media-reports-regarding-terror-suspect>.

³³⁸ Lewis, 128.

playing upon their doubts and questions. So why is Great Britain becoming fertile ground for radical Islam?

The colonial hypothesis

One theory cites Britain and India's colonial history. According to P. Werbner, among British Muslims, there exists "'an oppositional postcolonial sensibility' which generates 'a suspicion in principle of the publicly declared good intentions of successive British governments.'"³³⁹ This theory is supported by the differences between Turkish and South Asian Muslims in Britain. Turkish Muslims in Britain number approximately 125,000. However, they come from a country that was not colonized by Britain, and what's more, Turkey was itself a colonial power. Also, Turkey is a member of NATO, so there is less East-West conflict in the self-identification of Turkish Muslims. This can permit young Turkish Muslims to explore their religious identity without feeling that they are abandoning their culture; as many as 68% of Turkish Muslims in London reported that they had no religious identification whatsoever. South Asian Muslims, in contrast, often feel more hostile towards Great Britain and that their identity is in direct conflict with Britain due to their colonial background.³⁴⁰

Islamophobia in Britain

Others look to Britain's modern-day politics for an explanation of growing extremism among young Muslims. Today's British Muslims have a long list of grievances against the British government, including, but not limited to, "British foreign policy, social and economic exclusion, or Islamophobia in the media and wider society which disparages and demeans Islam."³⁴¹ Indeed, a study conducted by Sughra Ahmed among young British Muslims published in 2009 found that the majority of young Muslims have a negative impression of British media and the way that it portrays Islam.³⁴² And these negative sentiments have only grown since the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in 2001 in the United States. Following these attacks, the UK put into place "draconian anti-terrorist legislation, perceived as having a disproportionate impact on Muslim communities."³⁴³ As a result of such legislation, many British Muslims felt suspicious of the UK, or felt specifically targeted by the "war on terror. They ask, "are all of us suspect?... who is on our side?"³⁴⁴ This is not a sentiment limited to extremists, but one shared by moderate or even liberal Muslims.

³³⁹ P. Werbner, "The Predicament of Diaspora and Millennial Islam: Reflections on September 11, 2001", *Ethnicities*, 4 (2004), 468, in Lewis, 123.

³⁴⁰ Lewis, 3.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 124.

³⁴² Ahmed, "Seen and Not Heard," 82.

³⁴³ Lewis, 124.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

British counter terrorism strategy has played an important role in alienating British Muslims. One of the keystones of post-September 11th national security in Britain is the “Prevent strategy,” whose goal is to “prevent people from becoming terrorists or supporting violent extremism.”³⁴⁵ However, Prevent has been criticized by some Muslim groups by targeting them specifically. In the three major goals for Prevent listed on the Home Office website, one is devoted in its entirety to Muslim communities in Britain. The An-Nisa Society was just one Muslim organization to speak out against the Prevent strategy. They published a report on their website in February 2009 that said, “The Prevent Strategy targets the whole Muslim community as a potential terrorist threat and intends to embed counter-terrorism strategies targeting Muslims across the core services of local councils.”³⁴⁶

A recent scandal involving the current Minister of State for Transport, Sadiq Khan, also points to islamophobia in the British police force. It was revealed in 2008 that Khan, who is a Muslim and was at the time an MP for Tooting, was secretly bugged while visiting a constituent in prison. This surveillance was in direct contradiction with an edict stating that British law enforcement agencies cannot eavesdrop on politicians.³⁴⁷ The bugging operation recorded private and personal conversations between Khan and his constituent, Babar Ahmad, who was also a childhood friend of Khan. Although Ahmad was facing extradition to the United States and was charged with running a website that financed terrorism, the *Sunday Times* reported that “there was no suspicion of criminal conduct by Khan to justify the operation.”³⁴⁸ A friend of Khan’s spoke out against the eavesdropping, saying that it would undermine government efforts to encourage positive relations between Muslims and other religions. The friend asked, “If he was not a Muslim MP would they be doing this? If it had been some ordinary white middle-class MP, would they have been bugged?”³⁴⁹ Even Khan himself admitted that the incident was highly discouraging to British Muslims. He reported having conversations with Muslim friends and constituents where he was asked, “You have been lecturing us and even you are being bugged. What chance have we got?”³⁵⁰

The Bosnia effect

Some would say that the origins of British Muslim extremism go even further back than 2001. The Bosnian War, in the early 1990’s, had a huge impact on extremism in Britain. The

³⁴⁵ “The UK counter-terrorism strategy,” *Home Office Office for Security and Counter Terrorism*, August 2009, Web, 20 April 2010, <http://security.homeoffice.gov.uk/counter-terrorism-strategy/prevent/>.

³⁴⁶ “Preventing Violent Extremism and the Prevent Strategy – a Muslim response,” *An-Nisa Society*, 17 February 2009, Web, 26 April 2010, <http://www.an-nisa.org/mainpage.asp?id=79>.

³⁴⁷ Michael Gillard and Jonathan Calvert, “Police bugged Muslim MP Khan,” *The Sunday Times*, 3 February 2008, Web, 26 April 2010, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/crime/article3295393.ece>.

³⁴⁸ *Idem*.

³⁴⁹ *Idem*.

³⁵⁰ Oliver.

war “brought political Islam to the dinner table” and polarized the issue of political Islam.³⁵¹ British Muslims were shocked that the European community did not do more to help Bosnian Muslims, since Bosnia was in Europe – located not that far from Britain itself. The lack of European action early in the war contributed to already-existing suspicions in the Muslim community that the United Nations and the United Kingdom did not care for Muslims in Europe. In Philip Lewis’s words, “Well-integrated European Muslims, blond and blue-eyed, were being ethnically cleansed.”³⁵² The situation was shocking for British Muslims, but it is clear how this could contribute to extremist movements. The groups that perpetrated the attacks of 7/7 in London, or the attempted attacks of 21/7, “present themselves as avenging oppressed Muslims across the world on behalf of a universal Muslim community engaged in a transnational battle against the infidels.”³⁵³

The problem of foreign imams

It is not always easy to combat extremism, even from within the Muslim community. One difficulty in Britain is that 85% of imams come from outside the UK, making it difficult for them to connect with young, British members of their mosque. Since so many imams cannot identify with the particular set of problems that these youths are facing, the mosque has become a good place for recruiting members for radical Islamic movements.³⁵⁴ Imams from outside of Britain are less able to counsel young Muslims on delicate issues such as practicing their faith in a Christian country, facing religious discrimination, or on pressures to assimilate into British culture. British extremist movements, however, propose solutions to all of these problems, and thus can seem irresistible in comparison to moderate mosques with foreign imams.

Effects of the generation gap

The generation gap, already discussed in the previous chapter for the South Asian community at large, can also contribute to extremism among Muslims. Within the Islamic community in Britain, the generation gap manifests itself in specific ways. For example, in recent years, young Muslims have begun showing themselves as more radical than their elders. Among a study of Muslims ages 16 to 24 in Britain, they indicated being more favorable to the creation of Islamic state schools than their elders; they preferred head coverings for women; they were more opposed to British foreign policy than older generations; and they felt greater ambivalence towards the 7/7 bombers.³⁵⁵ The same study indicates that approximately half of

³⁵¹ Lewis, 130.

³⁵² Idem.

³⁵³ Ibid., 135.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 120.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 11.

British Muslims ages 16 to 24 believe that the US and Israel were at fault for the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks of 9/11, and that 41% believe Princess Diana was killed to prevent her from marrying a Muslim.³⁵⁶

According to sociologist Sughra Ahmed, these opinions, shared among young people but not between generations, could be a direct result of youths feeling alienated from their parents and elders. Ahmed conducted a detailed study of young British Muslims in 2009, in which she characterized the youths' more radical beliefs as part of a broader system of "subcultures" only accessible to teenagers and young adults.³⁵⁷ She writes, "Subcultures are created because young people find contradictions in the social structure which lead them to create a collective identity, one in which they will find like-minded peers who will understand shared norms and values."³⁵⁸

Extremism in universities

Universities, too, can contribute to the radicalization of young Muslims. One difficulty in Britain is that the National Union of Students, the NUS, has shown itself to be unreceptive to Muslim issues. According to Philip Lewis, the NUS has "stigmatized a whole faith community" by not being aware of specifically Islamic issues.³⁵⁹ Additionally, British campuses are rife with active and visible pro-Israel movements, such as the Union of Jewish Students or UJS. These groups can leave Muslim students and organizations feeling left out or targeted.³⁶⁰

One recent event at Staffordshire University, in Stoke-on-Trent, shows the extent of anti-Muslim activity on British college campuses. In early February 2010, a number of Staffordshire University buildings were sprayed with swastikas and racist phrases, including "no Pakis."³⁶¹ Although the graffiti was quickly removed by university services, students interviewed by the local newspaper *The Sentinel* reported that racism was rampant at the university. One broadcast journalism student from Nottingham reported, "I have experienced racism during my time here, whether it is sly remarks or innuendos."³⁶² The president of the students' union, Assed Baig, is of Pakistani descent and thinks that the graffiti may have been aimed at him. The area of Stoke-on-Trent has a high level of British National Party, or BNP

³⁵⁶ Lewis, 11.

³⁵⁷ Ahmed, "Seen and Not Heard," 21.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

³⁵⁹ Lewis, 74.

³⁶⁰ *Idem.*

³⁶¹ "Students shocked by campus attack," *The Sentinel*, 11 February 2010, Web, 25 February 2010, <http://www.thisstaffordshire.co.uk/news/Students-shocked-campus-attack/article-1823044-detail/article.html>.

³⁶² *Idem.*

involvement, and Baig has been active in campaigns against the far-right party.³⁶³ Visible manifestations of racism, such as the graffiti at Staffordshire University, can lead young Muslims to feel excluded or unwanted, and can incite them to move towards extremism.

It is important to note that extremist movements, if on the rise, remain marginal in Britain. Of the approximately 1000 mosques in Britain, only 40 belong to radical, politicized sects. The problem is that many individuals, and often the media as well, look to these radical groups as a representation of the Muslim religion in general, even though this is not the case.³⁶⁴

III. Hope for the Future

The odds may seem stacked against success for British Muslims, but there is hope for the future. A study of young British Muslims, ages 16-24, indicated that 84% “feel that they have been treated fairly in British society.”³⁶⁵ And in order to increase this statistic, a number of cultural and religious organizations are working to aid young British Muslims in their faith and in their daily lives. These organizations attempt to make a positive impact on young Muslims, emphasizing multiculturalism and community cohesion in Britain. Additionally, many British Muslims are achieving great success in Britain, showing their peers and the entire population just what is possible.

British Muslim Success Stories

Although many British Muslims still suffer from discrimination and economic inequalities, there are a number of notable British Muslims in the limelight for their success. Here, I will highlight just a few select example from the worlds of business, politics, and the arts.

Young British Muslim writers are gaining success and making the plight of their community public. One such is M.Y. Alam, author of the prize-winning novel *Kilo*. The novel itself, in fact, tells of one Pakistani immigrant’s voyage into – and out of - the violent, drug-riddled underworld of crime among immigrants in Bradford. Alam has also published three other novels and many short stories, and is a successful professor at the University of Bradford. But it is his novels, according to Philip Lewis, that have helped show Britain and the world at large the realities of British Muslim daily life. Lewis reports, “British-born writers are contributing to an understanding of Muslim communities which neither idealizes nor demonizes them.”³⁶⁶

³⁶³ “Students shocked by campus attack.”

³⁶⁴ Lewis, xiv.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

In the political sphere, history was made in 2009 when Sadiq Khan became the first Muslim to serve in the British prime minister's cabinet.³⁶⁷ Khan, a Sunni Muslim, was appointed Minister of State for transport under Gordon Brown in June 2009. Khan has been active in efforts to promote community cohesion and to prevent violent extremism, particularly among British Muslims.³⁶⁸ He has also remained very popular with and connected to his constituency by using modern techniques like the social tool Twitter, the photo sharing site Flickr, and by keeping a blog on his political website.

One of the wealthiest men in Britain, founder of the corner store supplier Bestway, is the Muslim businessman Sir Anwar Pervez. Pervez arrived in Britain from Pakistan in 1963 at the age of 21, and first opened a small convenience store in West London.³⁶⁹ After 13 years he switched to cash-and-carry, owned six warehouses by the mid-1980s, and today is worth more than 543 million pounds.³⁷⁰ Despite his staggering success in Britain, Pervez has maintained close ties to his native Pakistan. He is involved in Pakistan's banking and power generation businesses, and his company Bestway is the second-largest cement producer in Pakistan. However, Pervez has shown himself as hesitant to discuss his religion in the context of his business or his public life. He once said, "Islam is part of my life, but it is a personal matter."³⁷¹ Despite his lack of public discourse on religion, Pervez remains a beacon for Muslims hoping for financial success in Britain.

Muslim Youthwork Foundation

Muslim Youthwork Foundation (MYWF) is a registered charity founded in 2006 in order to "[create] safe spaces for Muslim young people to explore personal, social, spiritual and political choices."³⁷² The organization has played an important role in encouraging specifically Muslim youthwork to be included in the professional youthwork domain in Britain. It is a great advocate for community cohesion and for multiculturalism, promising in the "About the MYWF" section of its website to "[work] with young people of all backgrounds, nurturing relationships across ethnicities and faiths," as well as to "strengthen neighbourhood ties and relationships."³⁷³

³⁶⁷ "Khan becomes transport minister," *British Broadcasting Corporation*, 7 June 2009, Web, 20 April 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/8087602.stm.

³⁶⁸ *Idem*.

³⁶⁹ Sathnam Sanghera, "Slim margins mean fat profits for the man who supplies Britain's corner shops," *The Times*, 21 July 2007, Web, 20 April 2010, http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/industry_sectors/retailing/article2112546.ece.

³⁷⁰ *Idem*.

³⁷¹ *Idem*.

³⁷² "Muslim Youthwork Foundation," *Muslim Youthwork Foundation*, 2006, Web, 29 January 2010, www.mywf.org.uk.

³⁷³ "About the MYWF," *Muslim Youthwork Foundation*, 2006, Web, 29 January 2010, www.mywf.org.uk/?page=about.

The charity's homepage shows just how diverse the MYWF's involvement is. Their announcements include a workshop at the London School of Economics about "the silent minority," a multicultural conference for youth workers, offers of grants or internships for young Muslims, and even a call for participants in a BBC1 documentary entitled "My Name is Muhammed."³⁷⁴

The Muslim Youth Hotline

The Muslim Youth Hotline, also known as MYH, was founded in 2001 by 18-year-old Muhammed Mamdani in order to reflect upon and address the concerns of young British Muslims.³⁷⁵ To explain the inspiration behind his creation, Mamdani explained, "As a young Muslim growing up in the UK, I was all too familiar with the problems young Muslims face. The alienation and isolation of Muslim youth... was something I lived with...."³⁷⁶ He created the Muslim Youth Helpline as a response to the "absence of effective community support schemes and the apathy to deal with rising levels of social exclusion, mental health problems, abuse and criminal activity."³⁷⁷

Today, the helpline created by Mamdani is free, anonymous and open seven days a week. The MYH also offers a chat function on the internet, also available seven days a week. For his efforts, Mamdani has been awarded prizes such as the Helpline Volunteer of the Year award in 2003 and the Whitbread Young Achievers Award in 2004, and the MYH in general was given the AOL Innovation in the Community Award in 2003 and the Community Care Award in 2005, among others.

The Nasiha Program

In May 2007, the Bradford Council for Mosques launched a program called *Nasiha*, which comes from the Arabic word for "good advice." *Nasiha* is a citizenship course for 12 to 16 year old British Muslims.³⁷⁸ It is the brainchild of a charity group called Nasiha Education Foundation, or NEF, whose goal is to "build capacity and resources for young people to understand faith, diversity and cohesion in their communities."³⁷⁹

Their goals and methods clearly embrace multiculturalism. One of the major units of the *Nasiha* course, for example, focuses on Andalusian civilization, known primarily for the

³⁷⁴ "Muslim Youthwork Foundation."

³⁷⁵ "About us : MYH," *Muslim Youth Helpline*, Web, 29 January 2010, http://www.myh.org.uk/about_us?id=3.

³⁷⁶ *Idem*.

³⁷⁷ *Idem*.

³⁷⁸ Lewis, 82.

³⁷⁹ "Nasiha Education Foundation," *Nasiha Education Foundation*, 2009, Web, 20 April 2010, <http://www.nasiha.co.uk/>.

peaceful cohabitation of Muslims and Christians. This unit is included in order to “reinforce the importance of community cohesion, conviviality and tolerance between individuals of different faith and cultures.”³⁸⁰ The course also includes a lesson called “Oath of Peace,” which the NEF website describes as an opportunity to “learn the importance of living in the UK, respecting its laws and abiding here peacefully.”³⁸¹

City Circle

City Circle is a social group that often discusses Muslim-related issues. However, the group is unique in that it uses neither “Muslim” nor “Islamic” as an official label for their group. According to members, the group doesn’t need to “rally under a separate Muslim banner.”³⁸² The website for City Circle declares their mission to be the “[promotion] of a distinct British Muslim identity.”³⁸³ Like most pro-Muslim organizations in Britain, City Circle emphasizes community cohesion, in their case by “building bilateral strategic alliances between Muslim and non-Muslim communities and harness and channel the skills and resources of Muslim professionals into practical projects.”³⁸⁴ City Circle also encourages integration, hoping that their members will benefit from alliances formed by the group in order to insert themselves into wider British society.

The An-Nisa Society

According to the Society’s website, the An-Nisa Society was founded by and for Muslim women, “in response to the needs of Muslim women and their families.”³⁸⁵ The founders of the society saw a need for such an organization because of the difficulties they encountered in identifying themselves as multi-ethnic individuals, both British and Muslim. The Society’s website describes their founders: “They could not identify themselves as Muslims because race and ethnicity were the only markers of identity and also the criteria on which services were provided.” They continue, “A multi-ethnic British Muslim identity was not recognised...” They claim that the Muslim community has suffered from “disadvantage and deprivation,” mainly due to a lack of awareness and understanding from the greater British population. According to the An-Nisa Society, British Muslims are socially excluded because they are an “invisible community,” and in order to combat this exclusion, the Society works to

³⁸⁰ “Nasiha Education Foundation.”

³⁸¹ *Idem.*

³⁸² Lewis, 63.

³⁸³ “City Circle,” *The City Circle*, 2009, Web, 20 April 2009, www.thecitycircle.org.

³⁸⁴ *Idem.*

³⁸⁵ “An-Nisa Society,” *An-Nisa Society*, 17 October 2009, Web, 7 February 2010, www.an-nisa.org.

promote a positive identity for British Muslims and to increase awareness of Muslim needs in Britain.

Although the An-Nisa Society supports the prevention of extremism in Muslim communities, it takes offense to the British government's "Prevent Strategy," which paints all Muslims as potential terrorists and extremists.³⁸⁶

Is Islam the culprit?

Despite all the discussion of religion, and specifically Islam, in talks regarding discrimination in Great Britain, some researchers are beginning to think that Islam is not as important as it has been made out to be. Maurice Crul and Mark Thompson argue that the role of Islam, in fact, has been overplayed in discussing the "failure" of certain immigrant groups' assimilation into their host countries. They cite the Muslim populations in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the Netherlands, saying, "In all these countries the Muslim identity of these groups has been played out as a significant factor in explaining the failure to integrate.... In the public debate, there is a general tendency to see religion, and specifically Islam, as one of the major obstacles to integration."³⁸⁷ But there are numerous other factors that could also be identified as causes, and that perhaps may be easier to address.

For example, many problems within the South Asian community, including the growing extremist movement among young Muslims, are less a question of religion than of dislocation. As Philip Lewis writes,

Many of these problems have little to do with Islam and more to do with the dislocation wrought by migration or learning to live as a religious minority in an environment perceived as either indifferent or hostile. This sharpens the usual inter-generational tensions within any community.³⁸⁸

Difficulties discussed in the second chapter, such as questions of language ability, retaining close ties to the home country, or the generation gap also play a significant role in British Muslims' sense of exclusion. In a sense, reducing the importance of religion in discussions of British Muslim inequality and increasing the attention paid to these other challenges could facilitate integration and acceptance. British Muslims are unlikely to change their religion, but they could easily develop closer relationships within their British communities or acquire greater English language abilities. Such developments provide hope for a future in which British Muslims could be regarded as simply "British."

³⁸⁶ "An-Nisa Society."

³⁸⁷ Crul and Thompson, 1026.

³⁸⁸ Lewis, xvi.

CONCLUSION

From a historical perspective, it would seem that South Asian immigrants to Britain were set up to fail. Precedents established during the colonial era, such as the “divide and rule” theory put into place by British colonial authorities, kept South Asians at arms’ length and set up institutionalized racial segregation that would continue even in Great Britain itself. The British government’s goal of independence instead of integration for their colonies meant that there were no concerted efforts to encourage meaningful interactions between South Asians and British.

The arrival of the first South Asian immigrants in the post-war years could have been an opportunity to change the dynamics of the relationship between South Asians and the British. And indeed, the first Commonwealth immigrants were welcomed into the country to fill the labour shortage, and played an important role in factories and workers’ unions. But few immigrants were welcomed into British society at large. It is difficult to assign blame for this continued segregation. Of course, the government played a role. Their restrictionist immigration policies, and the Commonwealth Immigrants Act in particular, limited immigrants’ identity to that of workers or employees and made it clear that South Asians were undesirable outsiders in the country. The British population also had a hand in excluding South Asians. Working-class protests against immigrant employees or landlords refusing to rent to colored tenants are just two examples of the kind of racism that South Asians had to face upon their arrival in Britain. And finally, there is the idea of self-segregation, that South Asians themselves played a role in their separation from the British public. There are elements of truth in this last theory as well. Chain migration – and the ethnic enclaves that formed in Britain as a result – has functioned as a double-edged sword for British Asians. Although ethnic communities have permitted immigrants to maintain elements of their home culture, they have also kept them separate from the rest of Britain. And these first immigrants, who often arrived in Britain alone and were sustained by the myth of return, made little investment into the communities that welcomed them.

Today, there has been little evolution concerning the situation of British Asians. The ethnic model of nationhood, embraced by far-right groups like the British National Party, leaves immigrants and minorities feeling targeted. The government’s promises of race relations, multiculturalism and equality are contradicted by ever more strict immigration controls, even going so far as to discourage demands for political asylum. The country’s major political parties offer few solutions and, worse, all seem to support essentially the same position. Younger generations of British Asians have their own set of problems. They come into conflict with their elders, who encourage closer links with their heritage, and often find themselves obligated to choose between family loyalties and being British. British Asian Muslims seem to face the most challenges of all. They are forced to confront not only racism, but also

islamophobia from the British public. Fears of extremism leave many feeling targeted by government policies such as the “Prevent” strategy.

Despite challenges, there is hope for British Asians – and for Britain as a whole – in solving these issues. Second- and third-generation immigrants are leading the way in defining a new role for British Asians. Youths of today are creating new identities for themselves, and helping to shape a new generation of British culture. They are successful in retaining their unique, individual ethnic distinctions, while finding a place of their own within the boundaries of modern British society. As Crul and Thompson wrote in their study of second-generation immigrants in Britain and in the US, “The second generation will, as citizens, negotiate their own identity with reference to the national setting, creating new, hyphenated identities... which become part of the common discourse.”³⁸⁹

Efforts by British Asian youths are complemented by organizations seeking to establish community cohesion in a multicultural context. The Bradford Council of Mosque’s *Nasiha* citizenship courses, discussions inspired by the An-Nisa Society or the City Circle, or support provided by the Muslim Youthwork Foundation or Muslim Youth Hotline provide hope that contradictions between “British” and “South Asian” identities will one day be resolved.

Although I hope that this essay, even in its current state, will help to illuminate the situation of South Asians in contemporary Great Britain, I recognize that the subject lends itself to further study. As discussed in the introduction, changing notions of identity, citizenship, religion, and culture mean that the question of immigrant assimilation is ongoing.

Additionally, there are many aspects of my thesis that I think could be more exhaustively researched with more time and resources. I was lucky to be able to make two brief visits to London in 2009 and 2010, and these visits only piqued my interest for the incredible wealth of information that could be accessed through on-site research. I would have loved to include personal interviews and anecdotes with British Asians, first-hand impressions of communities like Bradford or Wembley, or reports of Asian cultural manifestations around Great Britain.

The question of minority assimilation is one that could be applied to nearly all European countries today. My study of South Asians in Britain finds parallels in, for example, the situation of North African immigrants in France, Moroccan immigrants in the Netherlands, or Turkish immigrants in Germany. Like Great Britain, these countries are faced with significant populations of foreign immigrants with a different religion, different culture, and different appearance than their hosts, and as a result are changing their conceptualization of nationhood

³⁸⁹ Crul and Thompson, 1037-1038.

and belonging. Like British Asians, these minorities face discrimination, economic disadvantages, and social exclusion.

In Britain, the question comes down to a new definition of the nation. Today, talk of “Britishness” is contradicted by policies of multiculturalism, encouraging every community to develop its own, unique identity. According to T.H. Marshall, citizenship rights in modern Britain must evolve in order to be based on some conception of a common “national consciousness.”³⁹⁰ Citizenship means nothing if it is not rooted in some sense of belonging to a community, which traditionally is the nation itself. In Britain, though, the policy of multiculturalism has eliminated the bonds that had formerly defined the nation. Joppke concludes, “If multiculturalism challenges the nation, it fails to offer a substitute for it.”³⁹¹

Sociologists Alba and Nee define assimilation as “the decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences.”³⁹² Should this be the goal in modern Britain? Would this be the solution to immigrant exclusion? Or should ethnic and cultural differences be embraced, as per the principles of multiculturalism? This is the dilemma in contemporary Great Britain, both for politicians and for British Asians themselves. The incredible diversity that once defined “the empire on which the sun never sets” now stands in the way of her national unity. Britain of the 21st century must now determine just what it means to be British today.

³⁹⁰ T.H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class*, London: Pluto Press, 1992, 25, in Joppke, 488.

³⁹¹ Joppke, 488.

³⁹² R. Alba and V. Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003. In Crul and Thompson, 1027.

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APPENDICES

“The Colour Line”

The “colour line,” Adapted from W. Lloyd Warner’s work on racial minorities in the United States. Ernest Krausz took the same principle, examining how the social status of racial minorities (defined as minorities who were distinguishable in phenotypical terms, and not simply by religion, language, or culture) compare to whites, and applied it to Great Britain.

FIGURE 1A *The Colour line** (adapted from W. Lloyd Warner)

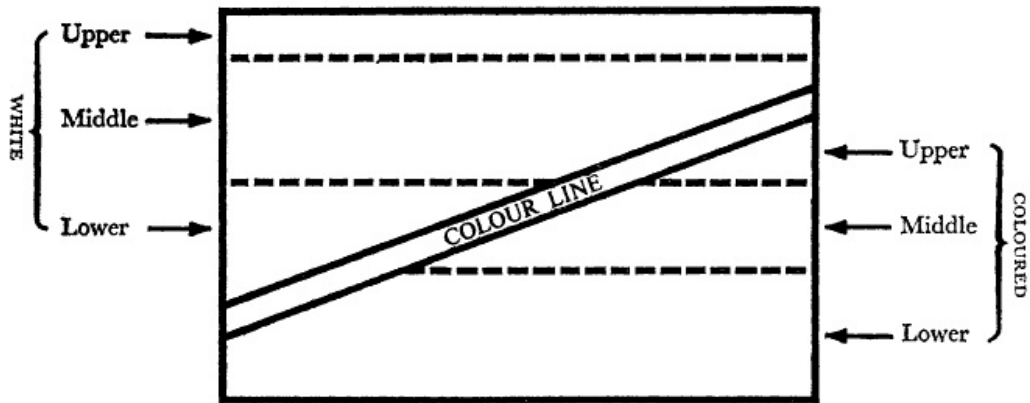
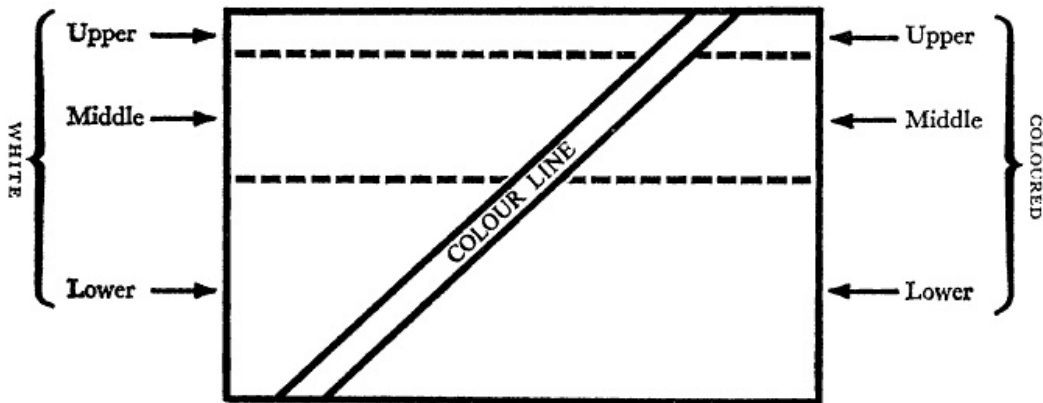


FIGURE 1B *The colour line** (modified to show situation in Britain)

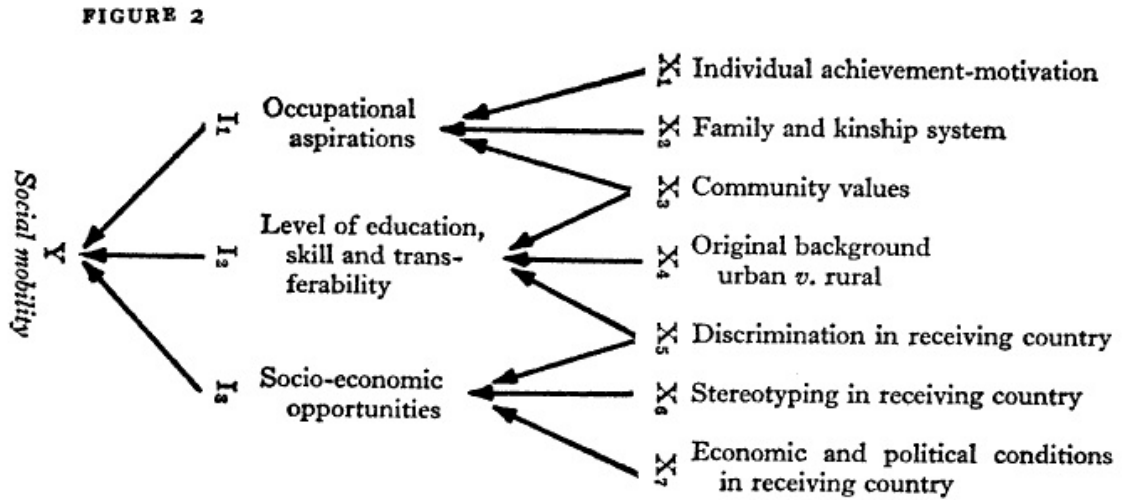


* NOTE: Figures 1A and 1B are visual aids showing the special features of certain types of social structure. They in no way represent ‘true’ or ‘typical’ proportions in the different socio-economic groups of such social structures.

Source: Ernest Krausz, “Factors of social mobility in British minority groups,” page 277.

“Social Mobility Among Immigrants”

Ernest Krausz’s diagram of social mobility among immigrants.



Source: Ernest Krausz, “Factors of social mobility in British minority groups,” page 283.

“New Commonwealth Immigration, 1953-1961”

Table showing the increase in New Commonwealth immigration to Britain from 1953 to 1961.

<i>Year</i>	<i>West Indies</i>	<i>India</i>	<i>Pakistan</i>	<i>Total "Coloured" Commonwealth</i>
1953	2 000			2 000
1954	11 000			11 000
1955	27 000	6 000	1 800	42 700
1956	30 000	5 500	2 000	46 850
1957	23 000	6 600	5 200	42 400
1958	15 000	6 200	4 700	27 450
1959	16 000	3 000	860	21 550
1960	50 000	6 000	2 500	58 300
1961	66 000	24 000	25 000	125 400

Source: Paul Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics*, page 126.

“Rivers of Blood”

Enoch Powell’s Birmingham speech, also known as the “Rivers of Blood” speech.

Birmingham, 20 April 1968.

“The supreme function of statesmanship is to provide against preventable evils. In seeking to do so, it encounters obstacles which are deeply rooted in human nature. One is that by the very order of things such evils are not demonstrable until they have occurred: at each stage in their onset there is room for doubt and for dispute whether they be real or imaginary. By the same token, they attract little attention in comparison with current troubles, which are both indisputable and pressing. Hence the besetting temptation of all politics to concern itself with the immediate present at the expense of the future. Above all, people are disposed to mistake predicting troubles for causing troubles and even for desiring troubles: ‘if only’, they love to think, ‘if only people wouldn’t talk about it, it probably wouldn’t happen’. Perhaps this habit goes back to the primitive belief that the word and the thing, the name and the object, are identical. At all events, the discussion of future grave but, with effort now, avoidable evils is the most unpopular and at the same time the most necessary occupation for the politician. Those who knowingly shirk it, deserve, and not infrequently receive, the curses of those who come after.

A week or two ago I fell into conversation with a constituent, a middle-aged, quite ordinary working man employed in one of our nationalized industries. After a sentence or two about the weather, he suddenly said: ‘If I had the money to go, I wouldn’t stay in this country’. I made some deprecatory reply, to the effect that even this government wouldn’t last for ever; but he took no notice, and continued: ‘I have three children, all of them been through grammar school and two of them married now, with family. I shan’t be satisfied till I have seen them all settled overseas. In this country in fifteen or twenty years time the black man will have the whip hand over the white man.’

I can already hear the chorus of execration. How dare I say such a horrible thing? How dare I stir up trouble and inflame feelings by repeating such a conversation? The answer is that I do not have the right not to do so. Here is a decent, ordinary fellow-Englishman, who in broad daylight in my own town says to me, his Member of Parliament, that this country will not be worth living in for his children. I simply do not have the right to shrug my shoulders and think about something else. What he is saying, thousands and hundreds of thousands are saying and thinking – not throughout Great Britain, perhaps, but in the areas that are already undergoing the total transformation to which there is no parallel in a thousand years of English history.

In fifteen or twenty years, on present trends, there will be in this country 3½ million Commonwealth immigrants and their descendants. That is not my figure. That is the official figure given to Parliament by the spokesman of the Registrar General’s office. There is no comparable official figure for the year 2000; but it must be in the region of five to seven million, approximately one-tenth of the whole population, and approaching that of Greater London. Of course, it will not be evenly distributed from Margate to Aberystwyth and from Penzance to Aberdeen. Whole areas, towns and parts of towns across England will be occupied by different sections of the immigrant and immigrant-descended population.

As time goes on, the proportion of this total who are immigrant descendants, those born in England, who arrived here by exactly the same route as the rest of us, will rapidly increase. Already by 1985 those born here would constitute the majority. It is this fact above all which creates the extreme urgency of action now, of just that kind of action which is hardest for politicians to take, action where the difficulties lie in the present but the evils to be prevented or minimized lie several parliaments ahead.

The natural and rational first question for a nation confronted by such a prospect is to ask: ‘how can its dimensions be reduced?’ Granted it be not wholly preventable, can it be limited, bearing in mind that numbers are of the essence. The significance and consequences of an alien

element introduced into a country or population are profoundly different according to whether that element is one per cent or 10 per cent. The answers to the simple and rational question are equally simple and rational: by stopping, or virtually stopping, further inflow, and by promoting the maximum outflow. Both answers are part of the official policy of the Conservative Party.

It almost passes belief that at this moment 20 or 30 additional immigrant children are arriving from overseas in Wolverhampton alone every week – and that means 15 or 20 additional families a decade or two hence. Those whom the gods wish to destroy, they first make mad. We must be mad, literally mad, as a nation to be permitting the annual inflow of some 50,000 dependents, who are for the most part the material of the future growth of the immigrant-descended population. It is like watching a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre. So insane are we that we actually permit unmarried persons to immigrate for the purpose of founding a family with spouses and fiances whom they have never seen. Let no one suppose that the flow of dependents will automatically tail off. On the contrary, even at the present admission rate of only 5,000 a year by voucher, there is sufficient for a further 25,000 dependents per annum *ad infinitum*, without taking into account the huge reservoir of existing relations in this country – and I am making no allowance at all for fraudulent entry. In these circumstances nothing will suffice but that the total inflow for settlement should be reduced at once to negligible proportions, and that the necessary legislative and administrative measures be taken without delay. I stress the words ‘for settlement’. This has nothing to do with the entry of Commonwealth citizens, any more than of aliens, into this country, for the purposes of study or of improving their qualifications, like (for instance) the Commonwealth doctors who, to the advantage of their own countries, have enabled our hospital service to be expanded faster than would otherwise have been possible. These are not, and never have been, immigrants.

I turn to re-emigration. If all immigration ended tomorrow, the rate of growth of the immigrant and immigrant-descended population would be substantially reduced, but the prospective size of this element in the population would still leave the basic character of the national danger unaffected. This can only be tackled while a considerable proportion of the total still comprises persons who entered this country during the last ten years or so. Hence the urgency of implementing now the second element of the Conservative Party’s policy: the encouragement of re-emigration. Nobody can make an estimate of the numbers which, with generous grants and assistance would choose either to return to their countries of origin or go to other countries anxious to receive the manpower and the skills they represent. Nobody knows, because no such policy has yet been attempted. I can only say that, even at present, immigrants in my own constituency from time to time come to me, asking if I can find them assistance to return home. If such a policy were adopted and pursued with the determination which the gravity of the alternative justifies, the resultant outflow could appreciably alter the prospects for the future.

It can be no part of any policy that existing families should be kept divided; but there are two directions in which families can be reunited, and if our former and present immigration laws have brought about the division of families, albeit voluntary or semi-voluntary, we ought to be prepared to arrange for them to be reunited in their countries of origin. In short, suspension of immigration and encouragement of re-emigration hang together, logically and humanly, as two aspects of the same approach.

The third element of the Conservative Party’s policy is that all who are in this country as citizens should be equal before the law and that there shall be no discrimination or difference made between them by public authority. As Mr. Heath has put it, we will have no ‘first-class citizens’ and ‘second-class citizens’. This does not mean that the immigrant and his descendants should be elevated into a privileged or special class or that the citizen should be denied his right to discriminate in the management of his own affairs between one fellow-citizen and another or that he should be subjected to inquisition as to his reasons and motives for behaving in one lawful manner rather than another.

There could be no grosser misconception of the realities than is entertained by those who vociferously demand legislation as they call it ‘against discrimination’, whether they be leaders-writers of the same kidney and sometimes on the same newspapers which year after year in the 1930s tried to blind this country to the rising peril which confronted it, or archbishops who live

in palaces, faring delicately, with the bedclothes pulled right over their heads. They have got it exactly and diametrically wrong. The discrimination and the deprivation, the sense of alarm and of resentment, lies not with the immigrant population but with those among whom they have come and are still coming. This is why to enact legislation of the kind before Parliament at this moment is to risk throwing a match on to gunpowder. The kindest thing that can be said about those who propose and support it is that they know not what they do.

Nothing is more misleading than comparison between the Commonwealth immigrant in Britain and the American negro. The negro population of the United States, which was already in existence before the United States became a nation, started literally as slaves and were later given the franchise and other rights of citizenship, to the exercise of which they have only gradually and still incompletely come. The Commonwealth immigrant came to Britain as a full citizen, to a country which knew no discrimination between one citizen and another, and he entered instantly into the possession of the rights of every citizen, from the vote to free treatment under the National Health Service. Whatever drawbacks attended the immigrants – and they were drawbacks which did not, and do not, make admission into Britain by hook or by crook appear less than desirable – arose not from the law or from public policy or from administration but from those personal circumstances and accidents which cause, and always will cause, the fortunes and experience of one man to be different from another's.

But while to the immigrant entry to this country was admission to privileges and opportunities eagerly sought, the impact upon the existing population was very different. For reasons which they could not comprehend, and in pursuance of a decision by default, on which they were never consulted, they found themselves made strangers in their own country. They found their wives unable to obtain hospital beds in childbirth, their children unable to obtain school places, their homes and neighbourhoods changed beyond recognition, their plans and prospects for the future defeated; at work they found that employers hesitated to apply to the immigrant worker the standards of discipline and competence required of the native-born worker; they began to hear, as time went by, more and more voices which told them that they were now the unwanted. On top of this, they now learn that a one-way privilege is to be established by Act of Parliament: a law, which cannot, and is not intended, to operate to protect them or redress their grievances, is to be enacted to give the stranger, the disgruntled and the *agent provocateur* the power to pillory them for their private actions.

In the hundreds upon hundreds of letters I received when I last spoke on this subject two or three months ago, there was one striking feature which was largely new and which I find ominous. All Members of Parliament are used to the typical anonymous correspondent; but what surprised and alarmed me was the high proportion of ordinary, decent, sensible people, writing a rational and often well-educated letter, who believed that they had to omit their address because it was dangerous to have committed themselves to paper to a Member of Parliament agreeing with the views I had expressed, and that they would risk either penalties or reprisals if they were known to have done so. The sense of being a persecuted minority which is growing among ordinary English people in the areas of the country affected is something that those without direct experience can hardly imagine. I am going to allow just one of those hundreds of people to speak for me. She did give her name and address, which I have detached from the letter which I am about to read. She was writing from Northumberland about something which is happening at this moment in my own constituency.

'Eight years ago in a respectable street in Wolverhampton a house was sold to a negro. Now only one white (a woman old-age pensioner) lives there. This is her story. She lost her husband and both her sons in the war. So she turned her seven-roomed house, her only asset, into a boarding house. She worked hard and did well, paid off her mortgage and began to put something by for her old age. Then the immigrants moved in. With growing fear, she saw one house after another taken over. The quiet street became a place of noise and confusion. Regretfully, her white tenants moved out.

The day after the last one left, she was awakened at 7 a.m. by two negroes who wanted to use her phone to contact their employer. When she refused, as she would have refused any stranger at such an hour, she was abused and feared she would have been attacked but for the chain on her door. Immigrant families have tried to rent rooms in her house, but she always

refused. Her little store of money went, and after paying her rates, she has less than £2 per week. She went to apply for a rate reduction and was seen by a young girl, who on hearing she had a seven-roomed house, suggested she should let part of it. When she said the only people she could get were negroes, the girl said 'racial prejudice won't get you anywhere in this country'. So she went home.

The telephone is her lifeline. Her family pay the bill, and help her out as best they can. Immigrants have offered to buy her house – at a price which the prospective landlord would be able to recover from his tenants in weeks, or at most a few months. She is becoming afraid to go out. Windows are broken. She finds excreta pushed through her letterbox. When she goes to the shops, she is followed by children, charming, wide-grinning piccaninnies. They cannot speak English, but one word they know. 'Racialist', they chant. When the new Race Relations Bill is passed, this woman is convinced she will go to prison. And is she so wrong? I begin to wonder.'

The other dangerous delusion from which those who are wilfully or otherwise blind to realities suffer, is summed up in the word 'integration'. To be integrated into a population means to become for all practical purposes indistinguishable from its other members. Now, at all times, where there are marked physical differences, especially of colour, integration is difficult, though over a period, not impossible. There are among the Commonwealth immigrants who have come to live here in the last fifteen years or so, many thousands whose wish and purpose is to be integrated and whose every thought and endeavour is bent in that direction. But to imagine that such a thing enters the heads of a great and growing majority of immigrants and their descendants is a ludicrous misconception, and a dangerous one to boot.

We are on the verge of a change. Hitherto it has been force of circumstance and of background which has rendered the very idea of integration inaccessible to the greater part of the immigrant population – that they never conceived or intended such a thing, and that their numbers and physical concentration meant the pressures towards integration which normally bear upon any small minority did not operate. Now we are seeing the growth of positive forces acting against integration, of vested interests in the preservation and sharpening of racial and religious differences, with a view to the exercise of actual domination, first over fellow-immigrants and then over the rest of the population. The cloud no bigger than a man's hand, that can so rapidly overcast the sky, has been visible recently in Wolverhampton and has shown signs of spreading quickly. The words I am about to use, verbatim as they appeared in the local press of 17th February [1968], are not mine, but those of a Labour Member of Parliament who is a Minister in the Government. 'The Sikh community's campaign to maintain customs inappropriate in Britain is much to be regretted. Working in Britain, particularly in the public services, they should be prepared to accept the terms and conditions of their employment. To claim special communal rights (or should one say rites?) leads to a dangerous fragmentation within society. This communalism is a canker; whether practised by one colour or another it is to be strongly condemned.' All credit to John Stonehouse for having had the insight to perceive that, and the courage to say it.

For these dangerous and divisive elements the legislation proposed in the Race Relations Bill is the very pabulum they need to flourish. Here is the means of showing that the immigrant communities can organize to consolidate their members, to agitate and campaign against their fellow-citizens, and to overawe and dominate the rest with the legal weapons which the ignorant and the ill-informed have provided. As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I seem to see 'the River Tiber foaming with much blood'. That tragic and intractable phenomenon which we watch with horror on the other side of the Atlantic but which there is interwoven with the history and existence of the States itself, is coming upon us here by our own volition and our own neglect. Indeed, it has all but come. In numerical terms, it will be of American proportions long before the end of the century. Only resolute and urgent action will avert it even now. Whether there will be the public will to demand and obtain that action, I do not know. All I know is that to see, and not to speak, would be the great betrayal."

Source: Enoch Powell, "Rivers of Blood' Speech," <http://www.enochpowell.net/fr-79.html>.

“Ethnic Minority Language Ability”

FNSEM statistics regarding ethnic minority language ability and employment in Great Britain.

TABLE I
ENGLISH-LANGUAGE FLUENCY SAMPLE DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS, 1994
(FROM FNSEM)

Ethnic group	Sample size	% fluent	% unemployed and fluent ^c	% unemployed and not fluent ^c	% active ^d and fluent	% active and not fluent
<i>Males^a</i>						
Caribbean	527	90	32	48	64	38
Indian	603	58	16	26	83	62
African Asian	386	71	13	20	84	71
Pakistani	620	46	32	48	73	48
Bangladeshi	307	40	29	61	78	35
Chinese	102	66	4	26	96	71
Non-White	2545	62	23 [302]	41 [178]	76	51
Whites	1201	100	15 [345]	–	77	–
<i>Females^b</i>						
Caribbean	678	95	23	45	64	31
Indian	670	46	14	16	64	37
African Asian	342	66	16	10	66	41
Pakistani	565	31	41	60	54	6
Bangladeshi	284	20	53	64	47	5
Chinese	112	59	6	13	88	42
Non-White	2651	56	21 [231]	26 [140]	63	20
Whites	1666	100	9 [197]	–	63	–

^a‘Unemployed’: sample size of 2678; ‘active’: sample size of 3192.

^b‘Unemployed’: sample size of 1896, ‘active’: sample size of 3401.

^c Figures in square brackets give average weekly earnings for fluents and non-fluents in jobs.

^d‘Active’ includes those in paid employment and those in full-time education, aged above 16 and below 65.

Source: Derek Leslie and Joanne Lindley, “The Impact of Language Ability on Employment and Earnings of Britain’s Ethnic Communities,” page 594.

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