# Her Majesty's Minorities

### Danièle Joly

**T**he economic boom of Britain's postwar reconstruction brought on the arrival of a substantial number of immigrant workers. Throughout the 1950's, Britain, then short of labour, attracted and sometimes positively encouraged workers from its former colonies to immigrate.The main sources of labour were the New Commonwealth and in particular the Indian subcontinent and the West Indies. Young single men came to Britain with the intention of repatriating after saving enough money to buy property in the homeland. Their eventual departure seemed implicit in Britain's policy; nobody had anticipated or planned the arrival of families and communities. But things did not go as expected. Immigration increased steadily, bringing at the beginning more and more male members of the family and village in a chain migration. The restrictions on immigration imposed in 1962 and 1968 were bound to change for ever the make-up of the immigrant population. By restricting entry almost exclusively to the wives and children of those already resident in Britain, these laws hoped to curb the immigration influx. As a matter of fact, however, due to these restrictions the early immigrant communities lost their temporary character and became a stable feature of British society.

According to the 1981 British census, nearly 3.4 million people were born overseas and another 1.41 million are non-white, for the most part immigrants from the New Commonwealth countries and Pakistan.[1]

Immediately after the war, the first substantial group arrived from the British West Indies. In the 1950's and 1960's these Caribbean migrants were joined by Indians and Pakistanis. Workers from Bangladesh began to arrive only in the early 1970's. Roughly at the same time thousands of people of Asian origin escaped (or were expelled) from East Africa and sought refuge in Britain.

The patterns of settlement of these New Commonwealth immigrants were determined by employment and housing opportunities. They concentrated in the large industrial areas of Britain: 52 percent settled in London and the southeast, 23 percent in the

midlands and 16 percent in the north and northwest. As a matter of fact, wherever they settled they gathered in a few areas—a development largely brought about by their de facto exclusion from mainstream housing markets. A three-to-five-year residential requirement excluded them from council flats during the early stages of migration. This led them first to find lodging in, and thereafter to purchase, cheap, derelict houses in the most run-down areas: the inner cities. Only here rented accommodations could be found through housing associations which renovated old properties and leased them at a reasonable price. This has brought about a veritable geographical segregation of New Commonwealth immigrants,[2] a segregation which becomes even worse in schools, where the proportion of ethnic minority students quite often ranges from 50 to 90 percent, or above.[3]

## Communities and associations

Chain migration combined with patterns of settlement to create conditions conducive to the formation of communities. As families regrouped, communities were reconstituted with their kinship networks, their institutions, their places of worship, their specific shops and their associations. By now, these are settled communities which no longer plan to return to their native country; they have begun the long process of adaptation.[4]

In the West-Indian communities, men and women generally went out to work, and relatively few set up their own businesses. They gathered around local "black-led" churches, broadly defined as Pentecostal.[5] Although they partake in British culture more than Asians do, West-Indians speak their own form of Creole English which for a long time was looked down upon as "bad English" by teachers in schools.

For their part, the Asian immigrant communities display major regional, national and religious differences. They speak a variety of languages and dialects (Punjabi, Gujerati, Bengali etc.) and practice oft-conflicting religions (Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism). The only major feature they have in common is the extended-family system, which continues to play an important role and to provide emotional and material support.

These communities have given rise to numerous associations and they have all set up advice- and community centres and supplementary schools. Among people from Pakistan and Bangladesh, the main form of organization is the mosque, which fulfills multiple functions. It functions as place of worship and of religious education, as guardian of values, as dispenser of advice and community services. It organizes language courses and even functions as a pressure group with regard to local authorities.[6] Among the Indian communities, the Indian Workers Association remained for a long time the only broad-based and active organization. This is mainly a political working-class organization, to which at one time about half of all Punjabi men were said to belong.[7] In the past it launched a variety of effective initiatives and campaigns

against racist discrimination and neo-fascist organizations; it also created (often in the face of white trade unionist hostility) well-attended, militant trade-union branches in the factories where its members were employed. Recently, however, its "hegemony" has been challenged by Sikh religious organizations which support the formation of an independent Khalistan in India.[8]

## Nationality Act

With its notion that Commonwealth and colonial persons shared with British people the common feature of being subjects of the King or Queen, the 1948 Nationality Act reflected the old ideology of the empire. It included the citizens of Australia, New Zealand and Canada, but also the inhabitants of all British colonies and of those former colonies which gained independence and joined the Commonwealth. Eventually almost all former colonies gained their independence and formed what is often referred to as the New Commonwealth. The Nationality Act did establish a distinction between the citizens of the United Kingdom and the colonies on the one hand, and citizens of the independent Commonwealth on the other, but allowed entry to all in Britain. Thus, when in the 1950's labour shortages became apparent there were no legal restrictions on the numbers of colonials and ex-colonials that could be recruited to fill the gaps.

However, an opposition to this immigration developed from several circles, including conservative politicians and sections of the electorate. This led to the passing of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act, which made all entries subject to the holding of employment vouchers. By 1964 only people with special skills or with pre-arranged jobs were granted such vouchers.

From then on, the trend was set. The Labour Party opposed the introduction of immigration controls; but when it was elected to government in 1964, it failed to repeal them. Fears of losing seats to the Conservatives, who were campaigning on an anti-immigration ticket, apparently led the Labour Party to modify its policy.[9] In August 1965, employment vouchers were further reduced to an annual figure of 8,500 and the White Paper presented at the 1965 Labour Party conference proposed other restrictive pieces of legislation.

## "Patriality"

In 1968, a new Commonwealth Immigration Act established the principle of "patriality" or original citizenship. This Act, which was intended to subject Asians from Africa to immigration controls despite their being British passport holders, in effect introduced discrimination on a racial basis. According to the new Act, British passport holders resident in the Commonwealth were exempt from immigration controls only if they had a parent or a grandparent living in Britain. More often than not, this meant that only white people could freely settle in Britain. In 1969, a ban was
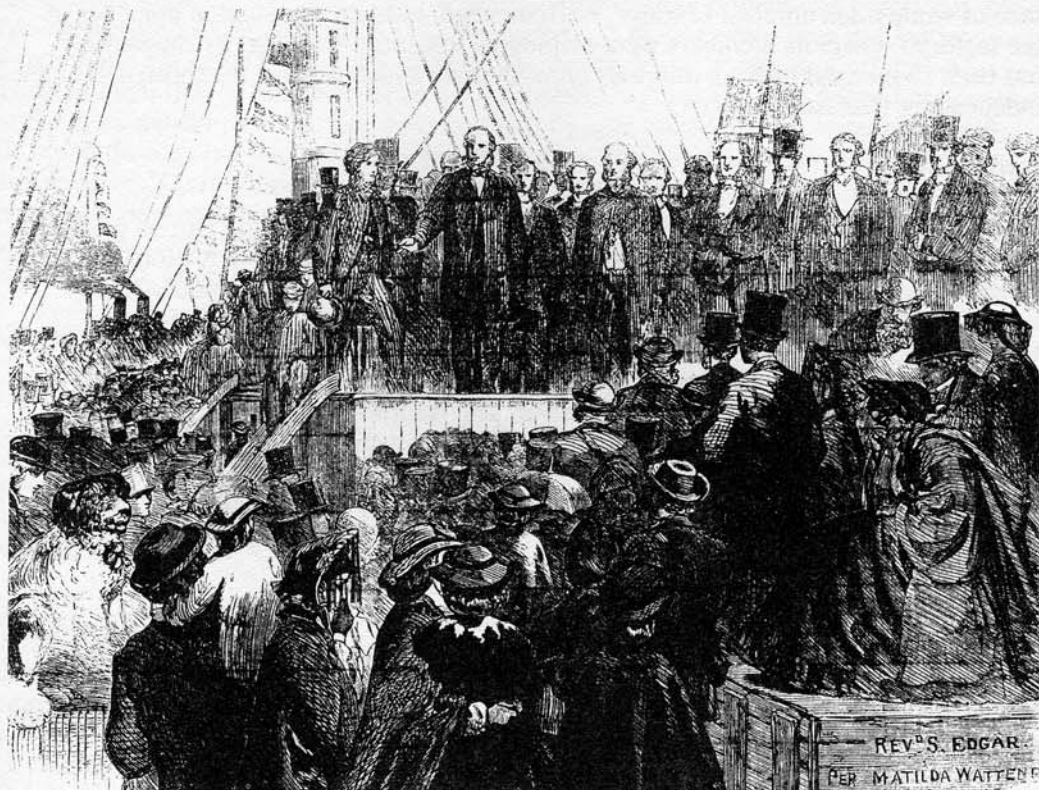
*Religious non-conformists departing to America*

imposed on the entry of male fiances from the Commonwealth who came to get married with women already established in Britain.

In 1971, the Conservative government introduced an Immigration Act which generalized the patriality principle, granting the right of abode to "patrials" only, that is only to those who had British ancestors. All others had to comply with immigration regulations by obtaining a work permit and registering with the police.

Finally the 1981 Nationality Act (which came into force in 1983) gave a rational basis to the previous legislation by creating two different classes of British citizens: those resident or born in the United Kingdom before 1983, and those living in British protectorates or colonies. The other major contribution of this Act was the abolition of the *jus soli* which had prevailed until then, according to which any child born in Britain was automatically British, whatever the nationality of the parents.

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This brief presentation of successive immigration policies demonstrates that, beginning in the mid-1960's, the two main parties in practice agreed on racial discrimination in the area of immigration. This was paralleled and prompted by movements against "coloured" immigrants from the 1950's onwards. Such attitudes were manifested in racial attacks and acts of discrimination throughout the social spectrum.[10] In 1960, associations were set up to oppose immigration, such as the Birmingham Immigration Control Association and the Southall Residents' associations.

## Powellism

Politically, this attitude (named Powellism after the name of Enoch Powell, a Conservative MP) attained a growing popularity which culminated in Powell's famous speech in April 1968, warning of "rivers of blood" through the streets of Britain if immigration was not halted and deportations initiated. On April 23, fifteen hundred dockers marched to Westminster in support of Powell and later more pro-Powell marches took place in the province. In general, the trade union movement had been less than favourable to the immigrant workers, as was demonstrated by the joint statement presented by the Trades Union Congress, the Confederation of British Industries and Nationalized Industry to the Minister of Labour in order to oppose the extension of anti-discriminatory legislation to the area of employment. In many areas trade unions had also resisted ethnic minority membership and representation (shop stewards).[11] In the 1970's, Powellism was overshadowed by the National Front, a racist and neo-fascist political party, which scored a series of relative electoral successes.[12] In the 1980's, however, both Enoch Powell and the National Front lost their prominence. Racial attacks do continue, however, despite a Home Office investigation into racism.

## A protestant society

Britain is primarily a Christian Protestant society. This character is not only apparent in the dominant ideology but is also enshrined in the composition of its institutions whereby State and Church are not separated — the Church of England being the state religion. The Queen is formally both the head of the state and the head of the Church. This manifests itself in multiple facets of British society. The 1944 Education Act and the 1988 Act make it compulsory to teach religion and prescribe that the school day must start with a Christian act of collective worship (assembly). In a court of law it is customary to take the oath on the Bible. City council meetings begin with a prayer to the Lord even when the Labour Party holds the council majority. Few people seem to have strong objections to this since British political history is not fraught with a long tradition of anti-clericalism as in the case of France. In the official church a priest celebrates marriages which are legally recognized. Blasphemy Laws protecting the Christian religion are enforced and were still used recently (Mary Whitehouse versus Gay News, 1977). These are only a few examples which serve to illustrate the Christian foundations of British society. The long-established religious

minorities—the Catholics (mostly Irish immigrants) and the Jews—have gained a small space for themselves: they have obtained for their schools the status of independent, yet state-supported, schools; and marriages celebrated by Catholic priests and rabbis are legally recognized. Priests from other churches can obtain a certificate enabling them to have the same prerogatives. But other religious minorities such as Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims do not enjoy the same rights.

Life in the Commonwealth awarded most immigrant workers in Britain a unique position compared to immigrants in other European countries. According to the 1948 Nationality Act, as we have seen, any person born on the territory of the UK and its colonies had British nationality. Any Commonwealth citizen was also a British subject, as the Queen of the UK is Queen of the Commonwealth, and thus he or she could register as a British citizen after one year of residence in the United Kingdom. These immigrants enjoy the same political and civic rights as British natives: the right to vote and to be elected in local and national elections, the right to serve in juries and in the armed forces (there has been no national conscription in Britain since 1957), and access to the civil service. They are entitled to social benefits; they can hold trade-union responsibilities and form associations without any restrictions. It is worth mentioning that in Britain there does not exist a law governing the creation and registration of associations (like the Loi of 1901 in France). As the vast majority of immigrant workers in Britain have come from the Commonwealth (mostly from the New Commonwealth), they have benefited from these provisions.

Pakistan constitutes a special case. As it left the Commonwealth in 1972, its nationals should have fallen under the same regime as other aliens. However, special measures were taken so that Pakistanis could preserve the same civic and political rights as Commonwealth citizens; they were granted the right to become British citizens (without the loss of their Pakistani nationality) if they had the status of residents before 1973. As for their children born in Britain, until the 1981 Nationality Act the *jus soli* gave them British nationality.

**Immigrants and politics**

In the early stages of migration, immigrants mostly took an interest in the politics of the country of origin and reproduced the cleavages that obtained there. Once in Britain, they created branches of the home parties such as the People's Party of Pakistan, the Congress Party and the various Indian Marxist parties. Events in the homelands were of great importance and continue to retain interest today among the ethnic communities. The Pakistan-Bangladesh war of 1971 fomented hostility among the corresponding communities in Britain. The movement for an autonomous or independent Azad Kashmir found some supporters in Britain (which led to the foundation of the Kashmir Liberation Front), and the debate about Indian-controlled Kashmir brought about in 1984 the assassination of the Indian Consul in Birmingham by an organization called the Kashmir Liberation Army. The Khalistani movement in

India has aroused an active network of organizations in Britain. The issue of untouchability in India still mobilizes groups in Britain. The revival of Islam in the Muslim world found an echo in Britain (although this is by no means the sole nor the principal reason for the multiplication of mosques in Britain). Even the Tienanmen massacre in Pekin aroused a debate within the Chinese community in Britain — a community sometimes called "the invisible minority," as it rarely hits the headlines.

Over the last fifteen years, however, the situation has partly changed and a sizable portion of ethnic minority people have become involved in British politics. Where traditional parties are concerned, most ethnic minorities vote Labour and join the

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Labour Party. Some of them have otherwise become mobilized on immigration issues (immigration laws, anti-deportation and divided-families campaigns) as well as on the question of racism. Lately, Muslims have formed a committee and even an Islamic party as a result of protest over Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*.

Extra-parliamentary politics also found expression in youth riots in 1980, 1981 and 1985. Contributing to the riots of the 1980's, unparalleled in other European countries, are several factors. For the ethnic minorities, disadvantages in housing and education were compounded by the recession of the 1970's which hit ethnic minorities more than others, and young members of these communities most of all. In addition, the racism which had contributed to the creation of the National Front at the end of the 1960's—and to the formation of skinhead gangs involved in 'Paki-bashing'—combined with a bad police image to exacerbate the situation in the inner city.

In electoral politics, ethnic minority involvement began on a local level but is now branching out into the national arena. Such participation undoubtedly gives political

clout, however limited, to specific demands from the ethnic minorities, all the more so as they constitute more than 50 per cent of the voters in some electoral wards of the inner city. On the local level, several immigrant city councillors have been elected in towns with a concentration of ethnic minorities; in Birmingham, for instance, there are 18 out 117; nation-wide, there are 250 ethnic minority councillors. On the national level, four ethnic minority MPs were elected in the 1987 general elections.

**Non-parliamentary politics**

Parliamentary politics, however, do not encompass the only domain in which ethnic minorities are involved. A number of first-generation people have founded organizations which, albeit active in British politics, have decided to remain outside electoral politics for ideological reasons; they include the Indian Workers Association, the Pakistani Workers Association, the Kashmiri Workers Association and some West-Indian organizations. They have taken part in a number of campaigns of which the main activists have been young people.

Although a few young people are beginning to concern themselves with parliamentary politics, and indeed some of them have been elected onto local councils, most of the politicized youths join or support other types of movements. These comprise anti-racist campaigns, and campaigns against deportation and immigration laws such as the Campaign against Racist Laws, the Divided Families campaigns or the Immigration Widows campaigns.[13]

Young people are also mobilized on the issue of police violence and arrests, particularly when these result from political activities. One extremely important characteristic of these new movements is that, unlike most first-generation associations, they cut across ethnic and religious boundaries and include both men and women of all origins. In addition, there are groups of young Asians, such as the one formed in Southall, which counteract racist and National Front attacks; at the same time there are Asian and Black women's groups bringing together young women from various communities. The young Muslims, who on the whole had remained quieter, were seen to demonstrate vehemently against Salman Rushdie's book. As for young West Indians, large numbers of them have become Rastafarians; as they look towards an eventual return to Africa, they remain on the margins of British society.

**In search of a policy**

British policies have undergone sharp changes and turns over the last thirty years. Early on, the prevalent viewpoint stemmed from an assimilationist ideology and hoped for the elimination of differences and the rapid integration of immigrants into mainstream British society. In education, for instance, policies have given exclusive priority to the teaching of English and the recommendation that schools should not

have over 30 percent of immigrant children;[14] in some areas bussing has been initiated as a consequence.

From the mid-1960's, though, these views were abandoned and subsequent legislation specifically addressed to ethnic minorities derived from another approach: the notion



*British subjects*

of social disadvantage. The 1966 Local Government Act incorporated a section (Section 11) which made it possible for local authorities to obtain additional funding if they had a substantial number of immigrant residents.

Local authorities themselves appeared to have asked for such provision. It is not clear, however, whether this additional funding was seen as compensation for what local authorities perceived as an extra burden on services resulting from the presence of immigrants, or as a resource designed to benefit the minorities themselves. Also based on the notion of 'social disadvantage' was the Community Relations Commission, which was established with the explicit purpose of promoting social-work initiatives. Altogether this approach tended to regard the ethnic minorities as responsible for their own deprivation and problems.[15]

The underlying philosophy of this "social disadvantage" approach was further developed in 1968 when, under the aegis of the Home Office, an Urban Programme was launched in order to fight inner-city deprivation. The Programme did not mention the presence of ethnic minorities, and was addressed to the "urban poor" in general. Even when the Programme was reformed and expanded in 1977, no specific mention was made to the ethnic-minority poor. It is possible that the Labour Party decided to do so fearing an electoral backlash, lest its policies be perceived as giving preferential attention to the immigrant population. This whole approach, in the last analysis, made it possible to put all the blame for inner-city deprivation on the poor themselves, and absolved the authorities from any responsibility. The Department of Environment, the Department of Trade and Industry and local governments were supposed to join their forces in order to revitalize the inner city. To this day, however, it remains doubtful whether these measures really benefitted ethnic minorities.

Education was not among the targets of this inner-city policy. Nevertheless it had come to the attention of the Select Committee on Immigration and Race Relations. This led to the creation of a Commission of Enquiry, charged with producing a report on "the causes of the underachievement of children of West-Indian origin". The Rapton report (named after the chairman of the Committee) placed the blame for academic failure not only upon the structure of the West-Indian community and family, but also upon racism in schools.[16] It was the first time that an official document identified racism as one factor of disadvantage. A new approach was finally emerging.

## Racial Disadvantage

In 1979, the newly elected Conservative government replaced the Rapton committee with another committee headed by Lord Swann, which was to examine "the achievements and needs of all pupils for education for life in a multicultural society." A few comments are needed here about the two main approaches which have stimulated a sharp debate among educationalists: multiculturalism and anti-racism. Multiculturalism is supposed to make room for difference and for the peculiarities of

each ethnic minority culture; multiculural teaching would thus mean the recognition of different cultures and their incorporation into the curriculum. However, even multiculturalism is not without its own risks. In fact, if it is not based within a solid framework of equal-opportunity policies it could easily become a vehicle for *de-facto* racial segregation . And if multiculturalism were to remain limited, as has often been the case, to inner city schools, it could be seen as providing a second-rate substitute for sound academic standards of education. In the end, this would certainly not satisfy ethnic minority parents and pupils who aspire, like others, to academic success.

Anti-racism is often presented as an alternative to multiculturalism, or at least as a necessary safeguard. By submitting the curriculum to sharp scrutiny and by making staff and pupils aware of the issue, anti-racist education is supposed to correct racial disadvantage. The Swann report "Education for All" incorporates both multiculturalism and anti-racism in its recommendations. However, it does not endorse the teaching of minority languages.

### Fighting discrimination

There is an entire series of laws intended to fight racial discrimination. The first Race Relations Act was passed in October 1965, and outlawed both discrimination in public places and incitement to racial hatred. It also set up a Race Relations Board to take action against those defying the act, and a National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants (NCCI) to speak in the interest of immigrants. This rather weak piece of legislation was strengthened in 1968 by another Race Relations Act which extended its scope to discrimination in the area of employment and housing.

The Race Relations Board was maintained but the NCCI was replaced by a Community Relations Commission and local Community Relations Councils with the vague responsibility of improving ethnic relations. The most noticeable result of these measures was the emergence of a large "race-relations industry" of salaried ethnic-minority employees; one concomitant effect was to neutralize potentially militant educated immigrants and community leaders.[17]

The 1976 Race Relations Act covered much broader areas of discrimination, including indirect discrimination. Under the Act, a newly created Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) was empowered to investigate cases of racial discrimination on an individual basis, in private firms as well as in government departments; it could even make recommendations to the Home Office for legal changes it considered necessary for "good race relations." The CRE also took over the roles of Community Relations Commission and the Race Relations Board. Moreover the 1976 Act called upon local authorities to deal with the question of racial equality.

The 1980's ushered in new policies which were largely initiated by the ethnic minorities themselves. Both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary politics

contributed to this. It had become apparent that ethnic-minority votes had to be taken into account, at least at the local level; the growing number of ethnic-minority councillors was a clear sign of this new reality. In addition, ethnic minorities had created a dense network of associations, committees and *ad-hoc* campaigns. The full impact of ethnic minority dissatisfaction and demands took its toll when a series of urban riots broke out in British inner cities in 1980, 1981 and 1985.

## Integration and identity

In the 1980's, policies for ethnic minorities were characterized by a new approach which included two different elements, not necessarily accepted together. Without eliminating it altogether, the notion of "racial disadvantage" superseded what had so far been referred to as the "poverty syndrome" of ethnic minorities. This led to policies designed to bring about racial equality either by assuring "equal opportunities" or, less frequently, by taking "positive action" in favor of the disadvantaged communities.

Cultural identity and difference were fully acknowledged; and regular consulting with the ethnic communities was initiated. From this followed a more recent trend with respect to what is sometimes called "self help." The decision was taken to assist minority organizations in their efforts to develop economic projects and provide services for their own people. The success of all these measures, however, remains questionable.

Considering the future of ethnic minorities in Britain, several elements have to be taken into account. On the one hand, Conservative Government policies have led to a high level of unemployment and a deterioration of public services which has severely hit ethnic minority people, and the young particularly so. Compounded by racism, racial discrimination and what has been perceived as police harassment of young blacks, these circumstances have created a potentially explosive situation, as the riots of the 1980's have shown. They may also have contributed to a reaffirmation of cultural and religious values.

Yet the desire to preserve a different cultural and religious heritage should not be interpreted as incompatible with a project of settlement and participation in British society. British society itself positively identifies and recognizes diverse communities; the latter are even granted public funding to carry out their activities. The media have overemphasized the dichotomy "integration versus self-identification," and have played a significant role in misrepresenting the situation. As a case in point, they have widely reported Mr. Siddiqui's proposal to create a Muslim Parliament as if this request were largely supported by Muslims in Britain. In reality, the vast majority of Muslim leaders and people have no intention of joining in this venture and disapprove of it. They much prefer to use established British political structures and channels to forward their demands.

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