The European Elections: Outcomes and Prospects for the Future

Georgina Siklossy of the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) analyses the results of the June 2009 European Elections, and identifies some worrying trends.

The European elections took place from 4 to 7 June 2009 across the European Union. EU citizens were called to vote for the 736 members who will represent them in the European Parliament until 2014. The results ended in a clear victory for the centre-right with the Socialists losing ground. The centre-right European People’s Party (EPP) won 264 seats, against 184 seats for the Party of European Socialists (PES), renamed the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in Europe (S&D) and incorporating 21 Italian members from the Democratic Party. In the outgoing European Parliament the EPP had 288 MEPs whilst the Socialists had 217. The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe obtained 84 seats, down from 103 in the previous Parliament, whilst the European Greens won 55 seats, up from 42 last time around.

Centre right majority vs. Socialist defeat and a fragmented Parliament

Results suggest that the centre-right European People’s Party will retain its position as the largest group in the European Parliament, despite the decision by the 29 British Conservatives to leave the group to form a separate anti-EU political group, the so-called European Conservatives and Reformists Group, together with the Polish Law and Justice party and others. The centre-right was particularly successful in the largest EU countries: Germany, United Kingdom, France, Italy, Spain and Poland.

On the other hand, the Socialists lost ground both where they are in government (except Slovakia) and where they are in opposition (except Greece). They also lost in the countries where they form a coalition with the Christian Democrats, i.e. in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands - while their coalition partners did much better. The reasons for this defeat vary from country to country and include internal political divisions, the lack of an identifiable policy response to the current economic crisis, the erosion of traditional constituencies and the absence of an identifiable policy response to the current economic crisis.

In this issue:

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- Welcome to Brussels? Four MEPs - Baroness Sarah Ludford, Sajjad Karim, Jean Lambert and Claude Moraes comment on the recent election of two British National Party MEPs to the European Parliament
- Rob Berkeley and Rosie Ellis ask what difference BME parliamentarians make
- Robbie McVeigh reports on the disturbing recent events in Belfast, where violence forces Roma out. Belfast is back across world headlines for all the wrong reasons
- Jessica Mai Sims, who wrote the Runnymede Community Study Soldiers, Migrants and Citizens - The Nepalese In Britain, provides an update to the Gurkha Justice Campaign

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of leading figures.¹ This means that the EPP will continue to play a pivotal role in the European Parliament, as no coalition would be possible without it in order to achieve consensus on legislation and other decisions.

In addition, the new European Parliament will be much more fragmented than previously, with an important amount of smaller parties making the threshold, including populist, anti-EU and anti-immigration parties. Even though it is clear that the anti-EU camp is stronger, it still remains to be seen what impact it will have on the functioning of the Parliament. In any event this result is a worrying signal for European democracy and the process of EU integration more generally.

Rise of the far-right
Another, much more disquieting, result of the European elections is the substantial support won by the far-right in many member states, and about which the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) has expressed strong concerns.² Far-right parties have gained seats in Austria, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Romania and the UK.

In the Netherlands, the anti-immigration and anti-Islam Freedom Party of Geert Wilders (PVV) became the second political force and won four seats for the European Parliament, and in Austria, the Freedom Party (FPÖ) also made important gains, scoring 12.7%, winning 2 seats, with the other far-right party, BZÖ, scoring 4.5%.

Hungary’s far-right Jobbik party, elected on an anti-Roma, nationalist platform which has founded a paramilitary-style organization, the Hungarian Guard, won three seats (14.7% of the vote).

Italy’s anti-immigration Northern League has more than doubled its representation, from four to nine MEPs. The situation in Italy is distinct in that two other hard-right parties, the Alleanza Nazionale of Gianfranco Fini and the Social Alternative of Alessandra Mussolini, have now been incorporated into Berlusconi’s People of Freedom Party, which is a member of the EPP group.

The British National Party also made a significant breakthrough, winning two seats, compared to none in the previous Parliament. Nevertheless there have been declines in some member states, such as Belgium, France and Poland. In France, the National Front lost four seats and is now down to three MEPs and in Belgium the separatist Vlaams Belang lost one seat and now only has two seats in the European Parliament. In Poland, the League of Polish Families, which had a significant number of MEPs in the previous Parliament, has not won one single seat.

The progress made by the far-right is an extremely concerning indicator of the current state of racism in Europe, exacerbated by the current economic crisis and the increasing insecurity that people feel about their future. ENAR’s 2007 shadow report on racism in Europe showed a rise in extremism and racist violence and an increase in political parties expressing racist sentiments, not only on the margins of politics but increasingly within the mainstream. These findings have been confirmed by the results of the European elections.

Indeed, a new hard-right Eurosceptic group, the Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) group, has been formed

An economic recession has impact beyond the purely economic. There appears to be some correlation between economic hard times and the electoral success and public prominence of far-right parties. The street brawls that have accompanied the efforts to agitation by the English Defence League are reminiscent of the 1930s and 1970s – periods in race relations to which we hope to never return. In this Bulletin we report on the electoral success of far right parties across Europe and hear from MEPs across the mainstream political spectrum about their response to the arrival of Nick Griffin in Brussels/Strasbourg. Robbie McVeigh reports from Belfast about the Roma who were effectively expelled from the city by racist thugs. Part of the BNP’s success was due to the exposure of the failings of our mainstream politicians. Nonetheless, parliament remains a crucial institution for leadership of social change. We look at the ethnic representation gap and try to assess what difference it makes to have greater Black and Asian participation at the highest political levels.

In this Bulletin, we also consider the routes to migrant integration by reflecting on the community studies series and returning to update readers on the campaign for Gurkha citizenship rights. Our work on financial inclusion continues with the publication of an online report and the announcement of a major conference which will be the focus of the next Bulletin. Helen Mills reports on research which considers the range of voluntary sector approaches to working with young black people.

Recent funding and advances in publication and communication technology have allowed us to make some significant improvements to the Bulletin. From the start of 2010, the Bulletin will be supported by Runnymede Online – enabling us to reach wider audiences while maintaining the Bulletin as a resource that builds on its 40 years of charting race relations in the UK and beyond. This will mean some changes to the format and to subscriptions. We aim to make the Bulletin an even more insightful read and more effective platform for ideas and analysis on race equality. We hope you’ll like the changes.

Rob Berkeley
Director, Runnymede Trust
in the European parliament on 1 July, stemming from the Independence/Democracy group which was founded after the 2004 European elections. The new group consists of national parties strongly opposed to EU integration and immigration policies, and who favour returning power to sovereign nations, including the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), the Italian Lega Nord (Northern League), the Danish People’s Party, the True Finns party and the Mouvement pour la France. A number of the parties in the EFD have been described as far-right, anti-immigration, xenophobic and in some cases, racist, by both national and European media. It seems that the party is still in negotiations with several other parties around Europe as to their potential joining of the political group.

Although the members of the group are not ‘classic’ far-right parties, some of these parties’ programmes are very concerning from an anti-racism perspective. The creation of the EFD in the new Parliament could be seen as being in contravention of the philosophy of the Charter of European Parties for a Non-Racist Society, which was signed by the majority of EU political groups in 2001. The Charter explicitly states that the signatories commit to ‘refuse to endorse in any way views and positions which stir up or invite hostility or division between people of different ethnic or national origins or religious beliefs’ and to ‘refrain from any form of political alliance or cooperation at all levels with any political party which incites or attempts to stir up racial or ethnic prejudices and racial hatred’. It also enables these hard-right parties to use EP resources such as funding and committee chairmanships to push their agenda through (as ‘non-attached’ members, i.e. not part of any political group, they are not entitled to these benefits).

It seems that for now the ‘classic’ far-right parties do not have sufficient MEPs from the minimum of seven countries to form their own group.3 However, it remains to be seen whether they will in the future be able to bring in MEPs from the new EFD group or whether some of the far-right MEPs will try to join this new group. On the other hand, because these different far-right parties are divided between the far-right ‘classic’ and the far-right ‘lite’, as British MEP Glyn Ford puts it, they may not be willing to club together on a common programme. In addition, personal rivalries and competing nationalist narratives add to the complications.4 A far-right group had already been established in the previous European Parliament, in 2007, when far-right and nationalist parties managed to establish their own political group. This group - named Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty (ITS) - was anti-immigration, anti-EU Constitution and anti-Turkish membership of the EU. Members of IST included Front National (France), Vlaams Belang (Belgium), the Greater Romania Party and the Freedom Party of Austria. However, after only ten months the group dissolved due to nationalist bickering between its Italian, Romanian and Austrian members.

**Low turnout**

The turnout in the European elections was particularly low at 43.08% of voters, marking a record as the lowest since direct elections were introduced in 1979. Nevertheless, the difference was not significant compared to the last European elections in 2004, which had a turnout of 45.47% of voters. The lowest figures were in the Eastern European member states, the lowest being in Slovakia at 19.64%. This shows the continuing disconnection between the European Union and its citizens, despite the increasing powers of the European Parliament over the years, raising issues of the credibility of the European Parliament.

**Looking towards the future: what prospects?**

The domination of the centre-right and the creation of the anti-EU integration ‘European Conservatives and Reformists’ group (ECR), becoming the fifth largest group in the European
Parliament after the Socialists, the Liberals and the Greens, will mean that the Parliament will be much more conservative than in the previous legislature. It will also be more difficult for the other main groups, the Socialists, the Liberals and the Greens, to take the initiative on key issues and to reach an opposing majority with the possibility of the EPP and the ECR forming a bloc.

In terms of issues relating to anti-racism, the reinforcement of the right might have a negative impact. The European Parliament has consistently been quite active in furthering the fight against racism and discrimination in Europe but this shift may change the balance. The EPP has generally been quite reluctant to introduce new anti-discrimination legislation, arguing that it would put too much burden on companies and increase red tape. If it can count on the support of the far-right and populist parties, now ever more present in the Parliament, this does not augur well for further legislative or non-legislative initiatives in the field of anti-discrimination.

In addition, in the field of immigration, there may be an even sharper shift than is currently the case towards policies that are very restrictive, favouring more border controls and more security. This will be all the more relevant if the Lisbon Treaty is ratified by all member states and comes into effect, as it will give the Parliament many more powers in the field of Justice and Home Affairs. The Parliament is currently only consulted on most issues relating to justice and home affairs, including migration (although it does already have ‘co-decision’ powers on asylum and irregular migration dossiers), but the Lisbon Treaty foresees that it will be on an equal footing with the Member States in the decision-making process on such crucial issues and many others. It is also possible that the Parliament will be more divided on fundamental rights-related issues, where tensions might emerge between the right-wing populist parties, and the PES, ALDE, and the Greens, with the EPP somewhere in the middle.

For anti-racist civil society across Europe, it will therefore be all the more important to remain vigilant and ensure that MEPs do not convey messages fuelling xenophobic and racist attitudes, in particular in times of economic downturn and that such messages are not allowed to become a legitimate political voice. Instead of falling into the easy ‘trap’ of xenophobia, politicians should convey the message that equal access to jobs, accommodation, schooling are crucial to build a prosperous, dynamic and cohesive society that can use its resources to their full potential to find innovative ways to step out of the current crisis.

Despite these potentially negative prospects, it is to be hoped that the European Parliament will continue to play an important role in the fight against racism and discrimination in Europe and to show its commitment to anti-racism and anti-discrimination.

For the full results of the European elections, visit www.elections2009-results.eu.
Welcome to Brussels?

As part of a focus on the challenges posed by far right parties, we asked four MEPs for a short comment on the recent election of two British National Party MEPs to the European Parliament, and how each - and other British MEPs in the other parties - are going to deal with their arrival in Brussels. We asked Baroness Sarah Ludford, Sajjad Karim, Jean Lambert and Claude Moraes how they have responded/interacted with/shunned Far Right MEPs from other parties in the past. Given these MEPs’ interest in issues of equality and diversity, their insight will be instructive to those working in local government in the UK who are also facing similar challenges.

Baroness Sarah Ludford MEP (Liberal Democrats)

I completely share in the dismay at the election of two BNP MEPs from the UK. They are widely seen as ‘fascist thugs’ with an ignorant and dangerous agenda. It is clear that they and their ilk will struggle to have any influence on the legislative agenda in the European Parliament because they are peripheral in both their number and odious views.

The BNP’s success must not be over-hyped: they did not benefit from any absolute increase in their vote and in fact there was a slight reduction compared to 2004. Their election resulted from the fact that their votes represented a greater proportion of total votes cast in 2009 than last time, as Labour’s support in particular fell away.

But it would be irresponsible to ignore the fact that this is the first time that BNP candidates have been elected as parliamentarians. Their election, whilst extremely disheartening, was not wholly surprising and their presence is a wake-up call. We must listen even harder to our constituents to find out why these extremists were elected, and work harder to represent legitimate grievances.

For some people, voting BNP is motivated by straightforward racism and hatred, let’s not obscure that fact. For others, the impulse seems to be more of an anti-establishment protest, born either out of the immediate MP’s expenses scandal or out of a more diffuse sense of ‘the system’ letting them down. Liberal Democrats share a lot of that feeling: we are the party which stands for cleaning up and reforming politics, including EU politics, not least so that for Westminster every person’s vote has equal weight in a fair system.

I do not personally buy the argument that blames apathy for extremist voting: people who are apathetic don’t bother to vote at all. Lib Dem canvassers (and I’m sure those of other parties) have a column for ‘non-voters’ and a column for ‘Antis’, those who are hostile to us but will not profess to be voting Labour, Tory or Green. It is among these Antis that BNP voters are to be found: people who are angry, alienated and looking to blame someone.

The Liberal Democrats have always championed the benefits of immigration, multiculturalism and integration. But we understand that a society at ease with diversity cannot happen without education, discussion and understanding, and without addressing the struggles that people of all kinds face on a daily basis. It certainly can’t happen through the promotion of cheap slogans such as Gordon Brown’s dishonest ‘British jobs for British workers’.

We have a society now in which extremes of wealth and poverty are greater than for half a century at least. Disaffection must be addressed through the construction of a fairer, more equal-opportunity and more cohesive society in which people can focus more on what they can get out of their own lives and less on finding a scapegoat for their discontents. The best route for mainstream parties to fight the BNP is through competing vigorously with each other, with different political programmes, so there are no ‘safe seats’ or ‘rotten boroughs’ in which only the BNP offers a repository for an alienated vote, and where anger can be expressed positively for effective and constructive change without hate.

Sajjad Karim MEP (Conservative Party)

The BNP at the European Parliament

In the European elections of 4 June 2009, Nick Griffin and Andrew Brons, both candidates from the British National Party, were elected as Members of the European Parliament for the North-West and North-East regions respectively.
There have been many descriptions given to the BNP over the years. It has been described as racist, extremist, fascist or as a legitimate political party representing the views of a minority of British people. Whichever description is the most fitting, and however the party has evolved, it is clear that the BNP is the most extreme of all UK political parties. Its policies include a complete withdrawal from the European Union and, according to its website, ‘an immediate halt to all further immigration’. Its ideology also appears confused on how nationality can be defined. It has created worrying distinctions, such as Nick Griffin’s assertion that someone from an ethnic minority may be ‘civically British’ but not, for example, English. Ironically, in contrast to the belief that the BNP is a far-right party, many of its policies are actually very left wing and protectionist.

The Conservative Party will not share a platform with the BNP unless an issue arises on which all parties from across the political spectrum agree. We abhor the values and views of the BNP. The BNP thrives on hatred and division in our communities and presents entirely the wrong proposals for Britain today. Many of the BNP’s extremist policies have similarities with those of fascist parties and this country has a proud anti-fascist tradition. No country has done more to defeat extremism in the past than Britain. We do not want extremist parties to become prominent in British politics.

How the European Parliament Works
In contrast to Westminster, the European Parliament operates on a system of compromise and agreement conducted through the many committees and working groups whose job it is to scrutinize new laws and initiatives proposed by the European Commission. Politicians debate and exercise their voting rights in a semi-circular plenary hall, known as the ‘hemicycle’, reinforcing the contrast with Westminster (where the main political parties face each other). Politicians from different parties and political groupings often work together; however, this is only possible where elected members can identify with the aims and policies of their colleagues and find common ground. Members must also have a genuine interest in the work pursued by the European Parliament. This was not the case for the United Kingdom Independence Party in the previous term and their MEPs therefore exercised little influence.

It will be interesting to see whether, after the initial publicity opportunities have faded, the BNP representatives attend parliamentary sessions, despite their party’s opposition to Britain’s membership of the European Union. In my view, though the new BNP MEPs have stated that they will be present, it will be difficult to retain this stance. Their core voting group may accuse them of ‘gong native’. Besides the extremist parties of EU politics, it is unlikely that political groupings in the Parliament would want to co-operate with such a party, I believe that the BNP will be ineffective in the Parliament but the real problems will be back in the UK where party activists will use the BNP’s new elected status to try and gain respectability to cloak their true beliefs.

The Future
I hope and believe that, come the next election, the British public will choose other candidates to represent them. However, it is up to the Conservatives and the other mainstream political parties to earn the trust and support of voters and thereby reverse the low voting trend in European elections. There needs to be more emphasis on explaining how the European Union functions and specifically what Members of the European Parliament do. The British public deserves to have candidates with sensible and balanced views representing them.

Jean Lambert MEP
(The Green Party)

It was devastating to watch the results unfold on election night and learn that the BNP had won two seats in the European Parliament, especially since Nick Griffin’s victory in the North West was secured by only 5000 more votes than our eminent Green candidate.

Sadly, low turnout was the main factor for their wins, with a drop of around 9 per cent in the two regions where a BNP MEP was returned. In fact the number of people voting BNP went down compared to 2004: in Yorkshire and Humber from 126,538 to 120,139 and in the North West from 134,959 to 132,094.

The expenses scandal certainly depressed support for Labour and the other mainstream parties, and despite concerted campaigning by groups like Hope not Hate to encourage people to vote, those who stayed at home essentially ensured the BNP’s victory. I’m quite sure this wasn’t their intended outcome, but the lesson is clear: if a majority of people don’t vote then extremists can win.

The BNP are also very good at cloaking who they really are. They have made every effort to appear reasonable and balanced, but merely scratching the surface of their policies and political mindset reveals a party mired in fear, cynicism, distrust, bigotry and lies.

This is the party that does not allow black members, that wants to outlaw mixed-race relationships, that believes that ‘racism’ is part of human nature. They want to stop immigration to the UK and introduce voluntary repatriation by paying legal immigrants to leave. If they could they would remove every non-white person from the UK and haul up an imaginary drawbridge.
There are clearly considerable socio-economic problems that contributed towards the result too: a lack of social housing, rising levels of inequality, employment insecurity, financial impacts of the recession and perceived high levels of immigration. Many people and communities do feel forgotten by the main parties.

But the far-right is not gaining ground everywhere: while the election of Geert Wilders Freedom Party (PVV) in the Netherlands was widely reported, losses by the Front National in France and Vlaams Belang in Belgium didn’t get the same coverage - obviously good news does not make a good story. However, not all the racists are in the parties of the extreme right. Lega Nord of Italy is sitting with UKIP, for example.

Regrettably, it is nothing new to have extreme far-right MEPs in the European Parliament.

In my experience these members are rarely seen and they steer clear of the nitty-gritty of legislative development. Indeed they have been far more active in their own countries and I predict that this may also be the approach of the BNP members. The fact that they have failed to find enough allies to form a political grouping is significant since this will mean they will have fewer resources in terms of staff and financial support for parliamentary work.

Civil society groups can play a crucial role in monitoring their activities in the UK, and in the Parliament the challenge will be to strengthen our policies on equality and anti-racism given its more right-wing composition. Islamophobia is one particular area of concern for the Greens and it will be a focal point for some of our work on prejudice and discrimination.

The European Parliament proclaims that it is United in Diversity and I believe that all political groups must now stand up to the challenge presented by the far-right. We must positively and unequivocally make the case for equality laws that respect universal human rights and deliver the best outcomes for all those living in Europe. That is our job, no matter who else appears on the political platform.

Claude Moraes MEP
(The Labour Party)

The European elections saw an increase in support for the far-right in many countries across Europe. In the UK, we also saw the election of fascists for the first time in a national poll. However, the two BNP members were not elected on a wave of popular support; in fact Nick Griffin was elected on fewer votes than he secured in the 2004 European election. The BNP secured two MEPs on the back of the unpopularity of national government and the expenses scandal - not on a surge in support for their racist and homophobic agenda. This electoral success for the BNP was also part of a wider European story of wins for the far-right in many member states. However, now that the new parliament has convened, and both BNP members have now taken their seats, the question should be “How do we deal with this new situation?”

The key issue around dealing with the BNP for other politicians from the UK is to understand that the BNP are different from all other political parties in Britain. Only the BNP have a racialized view of how Britain should be governed. This means that they prohibit membership of their party to non-white UK citizens (this was recently conveyed in a BBC interview) and have in the past advocated voluntary repatriation of non-white UK citizens. These policies are fundamentally undemocratic yet the BNP have been elected democratically. Herein lies the confusion amongst many as to how we should deal with them. My clear view is that we should monitor their extremism and take on their arguments. For example, recently on the BBC Nick Griffin spoke about ‘sinking several’ boats containing migrants to serve as a warning to others.

This will be part of a process, as up till now many on the centre-right, centre and left have advocated a ‘no platform sharing’ policy. There has also been a view that we should not ‘talk them up’. I was recently speaking in the European Parliament about Justice and Home Affairs issues including the right to family reunification for some legal migrants and asylum seekers. Andrew Brons, the BNP MEP and Krisztina Morvai of the Hungarian Jobbik Party were both in attendance. I feel it is important to make arguments in front of these types of people as well as adopting other measures to expose and take on their extremism. In the European Parliament, the new Europe Minister, Baroness Glenys Kinnock, recently adopted a policy of not inviting any extreme right or new-Nazi party to certain official functions. This does not stop the BNP carrying out their electoral mandate, but it does send an important signal that the BNP are not like any other UK political party.

The BNP presence in the parliament has certainly been noticeable and they have attracted a high degree of media interest. It has come as a shock to British members and their staff to suddenly find themselves sharing a lift with Nick Griffin and Andrew Brons. But, unfortunately, this is something we are going to have to get used to. Therefore, it becomes critical that mainstream politicians, the media and civil society at large highlight their repugnant views and make sure that the BNP only have one successful European election. ❍
Parliament has been discredited over recent months. Duck houses, moats, flipping homes and the like have entered into the political lexicon, and have been the source of much mirth and the focus for public disappointment with Westminster politics. One unsung casualty of the parliamentary expenses scandal has been the debate on representation. The new speaker no longer wears breeches, but the drive for improved representation of minorities appears to have stalled. There is a clear argument for greater representation of people from Black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds in parliament based on social justice – all people of talent should have an equal chance of serving in parliament. But what difference would a greater representation of BME people in parliament have on the level and quality of debate on issues of race equality in parliament?

It is widely understood that Black and Asian MPs and peers are not expected to only focus on issues of race equality, but claims about their presence in parliament often suggest that they will bring insights into, and increase the prominence in public debate about, issues impacting in particular on minority ethnic communities. Here, we investigate how far this aspiration might be true by assessing the quality of debate in relation to the number of BME MPs and peers.

We analysed the extent to which BME issues are currently being addressed in both houses of parliament and by whom. To do so we assessed the frequency and quality of debate on BME issues within the House of Lords and the House of Commons over the past decade, and identified the members raising these issues to see if they belonged primarily to BME groups themselves.

We used the Hansard parliamentary records on the UK parliament website¹ as the source for our analysis. This database allowed us to select a topic and search for the number of times it is addressed in debates and written answers in the House of Lords and the House of Commons, but did not provide a detailed overview of the breadth and depth of discussion, which is necessary in order to assess the quality of debate.

In order to obtain search results for the relevant area we entered the word ‘ethnic’ (including ethnicity) into the database. We excluded those issues associated with international politics and focused upon those relating to race relations in the UK. We identified a two month period when parliament was continually in session in each of three selected years in the past decade which were not election years. For continuity we used the same two month period in each year (October and November). This provided us with a manageable sample to look at in more depth. The periods we selected were:

October and November 2002
October and November 2004
October and November 2007

After identifying a list of relevant entries from the debates and written answers within both houses during these periods, we then looked at each entry in detail in order to assess the extent and quality of engagement with BME issues and recorded the names of

Table 1. Debate and written answers including ‘ethnic’ in three periods

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1 http://www.publications.parliament.uk/cgi-bin/semaphoreserver
those contributing. We deemed the highest quality debates and questions as those which had BME issues as the main discussion point or central focus of the question, and the lowest as those where BME issues were raised as a small part of a larger debate or question on a different issue.

There is some variation within the periods chosen; notably in the final period reviewed, October and November 2007, there appears to be comparatively less debate on BME issues in the House of Commons in particular. However, each period does show that there is considerably more consideration of BME issues in the House of Commons than in the House of Lords, whereas the past decade has seen a consistently higher proportion of BME members in the Lords than the Commons (currently 4.1% and 2.3% respectively).

It is important to look more closely at the quality in order to make an accurate comparison. Although the figures appear similar in 2002 and 2004, if you weight the highest quality entries more heavily, it shows that in 2004 there was significantly more engagement with BME issues than in 2002. It is notable that in the periods selected there was not a single question on BME issues directed at the Prime Minister. This perhaps indicates a lack of priority for BME issues.

However, it is clear that many members of the Lords and Commons, regardless of their ethnicity, do take BME issues into consideration in connection with a wide variety of topics, both in debates and in written questions. This was particularly noticeable in requests for statistical information. Such questions highlighted disparities, for example, in the dearth of BME fire fighters or the over-representation of BME groups in prisons.

Many non-BME members brought up BME issues as the central point of their debate or question. Therefore it is clear that it is not only BME members who raise these issues and instigate high quality debate into them. However, BME members were represented more frequently amongst the Lords and MPs instigating the highest quality of debate or asking the most direct questions pertaining to BME issues. This was particularly true in the House of Lords where BME Peers accounted for almost half of high quality contributors.

There are clearly limitations to this method of analysis. For example, the comparatively few written answers in response to questions by Peers on BME issues may be a reflection of the fact that written answers are directed at government ministers, fewer of which sit in the House of Lords.

When looking just at the number of debates, the Lords more or less match the Commons in the number and quality of debate on BME issues. Further, debates offer the opportunity for more in-depth coverage of the subject matter, whereas written answers are a response to a direct question, and are often of less quality. An exchange of ideas, making them difficult to compare. A more accurate picture may have been gained through looking at a larger number of periods over the past decade, considering debates before 1997, or through looking at longer periods throughout the year.

Even taking into account the limitations connected with this short study it is clear that race equality is already being discussed more than has been appreciated. However, there does not appear to have been any significant increase in coverage over the past decade. If anything, engagement with BME issues in both Houses may have fallen slightly since 2002.

The results from the Lords and Commons, which show a lesser coverage of BME issues in the Lords despite the relative higher numbers of BME Peers, suggest that increasing the number of BME members does not necessarily lead to more coverage of BME issues. However, the results do show that BME individuals, and Peers especially, were more likely to instigate a better quality of debate, or ask questions with a central focus upon BME issues, rather than non-BME counterparts.

These results suggest that, although increasing the numbers of BME parliamentarians may not necessarily lead to more discussion of BME issues, it would almost certainly increase the quality and depth of debate on race equality in parliament.

As we consider the prospect of an election in 2010, with psephologists predicting a significant change in the membership of parliament, there is a possibility of considerable change in who represents us at Westminster. Such change, however, should lead to parliament not just looking more like the British citizenry, but also to the concerns of all (and in particular the marginalized) being given more regular and detailed consideration at the highest levels. This study suggests that work to make parliament more ethnically diverse can make this more likely to happen.

### Table 2. Contributors and ethnic background to high quality parliamentary debates in selected periods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total number of contributors to high quality debates &amp; questions</th>
<th>Of which BME</th>
<th>BME contributors as % of high quality contributors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>House of Lords</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House of Commons</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*disparity with number of entries due to more than one person contributing to some debates.

3 http://www.parliament.uk/about/how/business/written_answers.cfm
First They Came for the ‘Gypsies’…

Robbie McVeigh\(^1\) reports on the disturbing recent events in Belfast, where, following a week of sustained racist violence, the Roma were removed from their houses in the community in South Belfast, first to a leisure centre then to an undisclosed location from which they were removed to Romania. Belfast was back across world headlines for all the wrong reasons.

As fascists and neo-fascists made significant political gains across Europe earlier this year, anti-Roma pogroms in Belfast offered an example of practice to accompany the theory of the Far Right. The broad narrative of events in Belfast is fairly uncontested.\(^2\) Following a week of sustained racist violence, the Roma were removed from their houses in the community in South Belfast, first to a leisure centre then to an undisclosed location from which they were removed to Romania.\(^1\) They returned to a situation of racism, poverty and exclusion in Romania so extreme that, despite what happened to them, they are considering a return to the north of Ireland.\(^3\) The level of concern represented a worry about the damage that was being done to ‘Northern Ireland PLC’ as it did genuine solidarity with the victims of racist violence. Racism had once again spoiled the mood music of post-Good Friday Northern Ireland.

Belfast was back across world headlines for all the wrong reasons. For all the expressed surprise, however, this was not completely unprecedented or unexpected. Northern Ireland has seen a rising tide of racist violence over the last ten years — Northern Ireland has been identified as the ‘race hate capital of Europe’ and Belfast as the ‘most racist city in the world’. This was not all journalistic hyperbole; there have been period, systematic attacks on migrant worker communities across the north, particularly in loyalist working class areas. The BNP’s national call centre is tucked away in an industrial estate in Dundenald — right under the nose of First Minister Peter Robinson, who lives just minutes away.\(^4\) Moreover, Belfast has a long history of ‘ethnic cleansing’ — despite the peace process and the Good Friday Agreement, Irish Catholics have never been able to move into those areas from which migrant workers have been ‘cleansed’. In other words, there is a longstanding tolerance and institutionalization of ‘ethnic cleansing’ which prepared the way for what happened to the Roma in Belfast.

This history is inextricably linked to the affinity between British nationalism in Northern Ireland — ‘unionism’ and ‘loyalism’ — and organized racism and fascism in the UK. There are two key elements to this. First, Northern Ireland unionists have never particularly worried about their connections to the Far Right. Notoriously Enoch Powell found a political home within unionism after his racism moved him beyond the pale of British conservatism. When John Taylor was a Unionist MEP he sat with the Front National and the MSI in the Group of the European Right, almost without notice. In other words, while much has been made of the election of the BNP, the UK generated an MEP comfortable with a political association with European fascism through Northern Ireland unionism decades ago. This overlap with fascism combines with a more general appeal to British nationalism. For example, unionist election ephemera — with it preponderance of union jacks and defence of national identity — looks like a product of the extreme right in the context of multicultural UK.\(^5\) Northern Ireland must have been the only part of the UK to have a mass mobilization in support of the war against Iraq, replete again with union flags in a sad echo of the jingoism anticipating the Great War. In other words, Northern Ireland is a part of the UK in which British nationalism has long assumed mass and toxic proportions. It is hardly surprising when this spills over into straightforward racism.

Second, British fascists have long identified a specific political opportunity in Northern Ireland — the National Front used to argue, ‘the British revolution starts in Ulster’. Links between loyalist paramilitary organizations and British racists and fascists are well-established. Moreover, loyalist paramilitary organizations have been specifically associated with and responsible for racist violence in Northern Ireland over recent years. So the attacks on Roma in Belfast connect to a long history of affinity between British Fascism and Ulster Unionism and Loyalism. This connection has also fed a more specific anti-gypsyism. Of course attacks on ‘Gypsies’ and Travellers are also far from being a new thing in Belfast. But at times this assumed the crudest and most offensive forms of all.

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\(^1\) Dr Robbie McVeigh is a Derry-based human rights activist and researcher on racism and sectarianism, equality and human rights. He is Joint Chairperson of the Taskforce on Traveller Education. He is currently working as the Senior Expert on an international research project on Roma and Freedom of Movement for the European Roma Rights Centre.


\(^5\) See the Guardian ‘Belfast LIAR 14338489. html#ixzz0Qgn02tjG

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For example, a loyalist deputy Lord Mayor of Belfast called for ‘Gypsies’ to be sent to the city incinerator – referencing established genocidal practice towards Roma. His mainstream unionist coalition partners may not have shared his views but none of them criticized him let alone forced him to resign.

Despite this history, however, there was an exemplary formal response from mainstream political parties in Northern Ireland – both unionist and nationalist – to the attacks on the Roma. All the parties in the Executive – DUP, UUP, SDLP and Sinn Féin – condemned the attacks. Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness of Sinn Féin joined the DUP’s Equality Minister Jeffrey Donaldson to repudiate the attacks as criminal and call for prosecutions and convictions. Donaldson was keen to repudiate the ‘Northern Ireland is the race hate capital of Europe’. Leaders from outside Northern Ireland were just as outraged. Irish President Mary McAleese made an international intervention on the issue. Gordon Brown added his voice to the general condemnation. Even the BNP condemned the violence, albeit in the context of its analysis of a ‘failed UK immigration policy’. This begins to hint at the limitations of all this hand-wringing. Everyone was keen to condemn the events but nobody was able to prevent the pogroms. The irony was that while these Roma may not have received much of a welcome, they received a tremendous public send off. Belfast proffered a new, caring face to ethnic cleansing. While all the sympathy and solidarity was laudable enough, when the dust had settled it was still a pogrom and the Roma had still been forced out of this part of the UK. There is no mistaking that it was a victory for racism in just as real a way as the electoral victories of the Far Right in the European Parliament elections.

While it is difficult to unpack the reasoning behind this kind of racist violence, Roma in this instance were probably attacked less because they were Roma than because they were ‘Eastern European’. The ‘Village’ area of South Belfast has had a long and specific association with racist violence. Tensions in the area were recently heightened following clashes between Loyalists and Polish fans at a Poland/Northern Ireland soccer match; there was a general ‘cleansing’ of Eastern Europeans from Loyalist areas after this match. There was also a wider dynamic with this non-identification of the Roma. While treatment of the Roma often provides a classic case of ‘pathologized absence/normalized presence’ going on in this context. Most of the coverage of the pogroms was sympathetic to the Roma victims. Yet most of it never mentioned the ethnic identity of the Roma involved – in this context they were ‘Romanians’. This normalized absence/pathologized presence is very specific to the case of Roma. As soon as there is any perceived problem with the Roma presence, ethnicity immediately kicks in – both formally and informally ‘Gypsies’ or Roma identity serves to define the situation and the negativity of the presence. Yet when their treatment is so appalling as to make sympathy unavoidable, their Roma-ness is immediately ignored.

The BNP response to the pogroms did, however, clearly make these connections situating its ‘sympathy’ for the victims in a host of traditional anti-
RACIST ATTACKS


gypsy stereotypes. Institutional antigypsyism also kicked in as soon as the violence occurred — because at this point the non-response of the PSNI (Police Service of Northern Ireland) appears to have been informed very directly by their attitude towards the Roma community. This is the key issue to emerge from this whole episode. The threat of racist violence is hardly specific to Belfast – sadly there are racist and fascist youths all across Europe happy to attack Roma families alongside other minority ethnic groups. But what was unusual in the Belfast context was the total refusal of the police to take any responsibility for defending people from racist violence. The PSNI only became proactive in helping the families move out and return ‘home’ — in other words their key interventions was to facilitate the removal of the Roma. There has been organized racist violence against people of colour and Eastern Europeans in Belfast for over six years and yet the PSNI have failed to come up with any strategy for protecting these communities. Moreover, the PSNI response seemed much more concerned about how the violence was to be read than with the victims of that violence. Here there are important resonances across the UK and beyond – any strategy that persists in thinking it does not know who is involved in racist violence but it absolutely knows that they are not ‘organized’ suggests a profound problem with both its credibility and competence.

But the collusion with denying loyalist involvement was much more widespread than with the PSNI. This has been definitive of the state response to racist violence in Northern Ireland over recent years. So long as it continues, the possibility of further violence remains immediate. There should be no underestimating the scale of this threat. As the pogrom against the Roma proceeded, Northern Ireland’s only minority ethnic MLA – who led opposition to the anti-Roma violence – was being death-threatened by loyalists and UDA’s youth wing was sending signed bomb threats to minority ethnic organisations across Belfast: ‘The threat against the Islamic Centre, which was signed Ulster Young Militants [the youth wing of the UDA] and Combat-18, stated: ‘Get out of our country before Bonfire Night. If you don’t, your building will be blown up. Keep Northern Ireland for white British people. For God and Ulster’.

It is tempting to ask what more a Loyalist paramilitary organization has to do to prove that it is involved in racist violence. It is equally tempting to ask what further evidence would be needed before the state begins to acknowledge a problematic relationship between loyalist paramilitarism and British fascism. Yet neither fact attracted the UK or international headlines that were associated with the Roma pogroms. The reality in Northern Ireland therefore bears emphasis – minority ethnic, anti-racist elected politicians are being death-threatened by loyalist and fascist organizations; minority ethnic organizations are being bomb-threatened by loyalist and fascist organizations; and they are getting away with it. Moreover, these organizations – at least on the loyalist side – have a track record of effective use of violence including mass murder, these cannot be dismissed as ‘empty threats’. Yet we hear no sense of moral or political urgency to mirror that which accompanied the election of the BNP in the UK.

We can insist that this should be the most important lesson of all from Belfast – of course these pogroms must be condemned; of course there should be sympathy with the Roma victims – but they must be analysed and this violence must be taken seriously. In this sense, what happened in Belfast was emblematic of a resurgent racist violence across Europe. While political racism may be in the ascendant, its violent paramilitary descent has not gone away. This has important lessons for all of us. Events in Belfast were a particular warning in terms of the ways in which these forces can be mobilized in an Irish and British context. Resurgent European racism and fascism is rooted in contemporary anti-gypsyism; to paraphrase Pastor Niemoller, ‘First they came for the Gypsies’. People across the UK in particular ignore the lessons of the Belfast anti-Roma pogroms at their peril.

Many of the Roma have now returned to Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission recently provided an overview of how the attacks impacted in the specific area of welfare support: ‘Northern Ireland became the focus of global media attention as a result of the racist attacks against members of the Roma community. However, following the racist attacks, although homeless, the legislation meant that the victims were not entitled to welfare benefits or homelessness assistance. [. . .] This episode served as a stark illustration of the urgent need for legislative change and clear guidance on the responsibilities of statutory bodies for non-UK nationals facing homelessness.’ These remarks were particularly prescient – by the end of August some of these families had been made homeless again – this time by eviction rather than racist violence. Once again the PSNI were in attendance ‘because of concerns for the families safety’. The outcome was the same as that which followed the racist violence – Roma men, women, children and babies – homeless on the streets of Belfast. Yet this time there were very few voices of sympathy or solidarity. This is perhaps unsurprising – in this regard Belfast was no longer atypical. It was behaving like the rest of Europe with its studied unconcern for the situation of the EU’s poorest and most marginalized ethnic group.
Gurkhas Win Equal Rights to Settlement

Jessica Mai Sims, who wrote the Runnymede Community Study Soldiers, Migrants and Citizens - The Nepalese In Britain, provides an update to the Gurkha Justice Campaign.1

The Gurkha Justice Campaign

At midday on 21st May, Home Secretary Jacqui Smith made the announcement to the House of Commons that the Gurkha Justice Campaign have been fighting for for years. All ex-Gurkhas who have served more than 4 years in the British Army will have the right to settle in the UK if they wish. After such a long fight, with huge ups and downs, this is a superb announcement.

We simply would not have won this fight without the massive, overwhelming support of all those who have supported our campaign. To the hundreds of thousands of people who have signed Gurkha Justice petitions, lobbied their MP, campaigned, attended rallies and marches - thank you so much to you all. This is your victory. It would not have happened without you.

The Government has now responded to that campaign after court cases, votes in Parliament, a huge media campaign and, most importantly, massive public support. I am delighted, and humbled, at what has been achieved by our remarkable team.

The whole campaign has been based on the belief that those who have fought and been prepared to die for our country should have the right to live in our country. We owe them a debt of honour - a debt that will now be paid.

In May 2009, Gurkhas who retired before 1997 won the right to live in the UK with their family. Until then, only Gurkhas who retired after July 1997 – the year that their headquarters left Hong Kong - were allowed to become resident in the UK. Those who retired before this date were only given this right under special circumstances.

The Brigade of Gurkhas comprises the units of the British Army that are composed of Nepalese servicemen. The Brigade evolved from Gurkha units that originally served in the British Indian Army, prior to Indian independence, and prior to that in the East India Company. Entry into the Brigade of Gurkhas has always been a high honour, as indicated through the high competition of entry. In 2008, out of over 17,000 applicants, only 230 were enlisted.

The inclusion of the Brigade is unique within the British Armed Forces, as the Royal Irish Regiment is the only other foreign national specific unit. As of 2006, nearly 10% of the Army was made up of foreign personnel, with the largest group being from Nepal. Despite their large numbers, long history and record of bravery (receiving 13 Victoria Crosses between them) historically they have not received the same benefits and entitlements as service personnel from Commonwealth countries.

It was not until 2004 that Gurkhas with more than four years of service, and who retired after 1997, were able to settle permanently in the UK. In 2007 they won the right to equal terms and conditions of service within the Army which increased their pension six-fold – although payments were not retrospective. In September 2008, a high
court judgement ruled that the government’s treatment of Gurkhas who retired before 1997 was unlawful and needed to be revised. Despite the ruling, it was not until May 2009 that the government changed the residency rules.

The Gurkha Justice Campaign, a campaign taken on by the Liberal Democrat Party and various Gurkha grassroots organizations, fought hard to extend the residency policy. But even demonstrations of veterans and the return of Victoria Crosses to the government had been ineffective. However, between September 2008 and May 2009 the campaign was able to mobilize widespread media attention and support. Newspapers that were traditionally unsupportive of immigrant rights began to speak in favour of Gurkha rights. So what changed?

A large part of the victory was due to British actress Joanna Lumley’s support of the campaign. Lumley was able to attract and keep media attention on the issue, and publicly challenge government. She was a perfect spokesperson for the campaign; she was a well-known celebrity, her father had served with the Gurkhas in Burma, and she had spoken previously on human rights causes. Lumley’s involvement was in many ways instrumental to the success of the cause – with her fame she was able to arrange interviews and press conferences with ease as well as private meetings with both the Immigration Minister Phil Woolas and the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown. In one press conference with Woolas, it seemed at times as if she was dictating policy to the UK Border Agency.

While Lumley’s messages appealed to emotions, ethics and civil rights, government’s argument relied on cost-benefit analysis which most of the time just appeared to be crude and unfair. The guidance that had been released in April 2009 stated that there would be no automatic right for retired Gurkhas pre-1997 to settle in the UK, and that some could as long as they met certain conditions. Brown, Woolas and Kevan Jones (veterans’ minister), maintained that the cost of changing those rules would be £1.4 billion for a range of social benefits for an alleged 100,000 retired Gurkhas and their dependents – figures that had been criticized as exaggeration. If these rules were changed, they argued that those Gurkhas would then demand equal treatment on pensions costing a further £1.5 billion.

An amendment was introduced calling the rules ‘restrictive, morally wrong and offensive’. Five days after the release of the rules, an Opposition Day debate on the subject was called. The debate was carried by 267 votes to 246, with 27 Labour rebels voting with the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives, with up to 75 other Labour MPs abstaining. The press were quick to highlight Brown’s first significant defeat in the Commons.

At the time of the policy change, there were approximately 1300 outstanding applications for settlement. It has been estimated that as many as 10,000 men (plus their families) are eligible to apply for settlement. Nepalese community organizations have estimated that currently there are as many as 50,000 Nepalese people in the UK.

Overall, the vote and policy turnaround is a victory for the Gurkha justice campaign. However, as the veterans’ minister pointed out, inequality persists in relation to pensions for those who retired before 1997. The MoD stated that the current pension, £173 a month, would be a good professional salary in Nepal. In the UK it would just meet the minimum standard of living for a pensioner (if other credits and benefits are included).

The ruling may have consequences for the future of the Brigade of Gurkhas. Government may decide that supporting more retired Gurkhas through immigration arrangements and access to equal pensions and benefits in the UK may not be cost effective. Additionally, much of foreign currency earnings in Nepal come from remittances. It is suspected that if more retired Gurkhas leave for the UK there will be an economic impact in Nepal.

Soldiers, Migrants and Citizens - The Nepalese In Britain
Jessica Mai Sims

In this Community Studies report, Jessica Mai Sims explores the experiences of the UK Nepalese population. Beginning with an overview on the population, settlement patterns and grassroots based initiatives; the report describes some of the migration routes and experiences of Nepalese in the UK. The report then focuses on retired Gurkhas and their families, because of the recent change in settlement restrictions, and their experiences in accessing local services. As many families live and work in mainly white areas, their settlement adds a unique perspective to multi-ethnic Britain.
Reconnecting Race Equality and Immigration Policies

Runnymede’s Community Studies programme is coming to a close. Here, Kjartan Páll Sveinsson discusses the implications of the series for immigration policy.

As an increasing number of migrants arrive in the British Isles from all corners of the world, the nature of multi-ethnic Britain is changing. Whereas previous waves of migration came primarily from former British colonies and Commonwealth countries – most notably from the Caribbean and South Asia – people are now coming to Britain in great numbers from countries which have little or no previous history or administrative links with the UK. In addition to former Eastern Bloc countries, many migrants come from previous French, Spanish or Belgian colonies, and would in the past have tended to migrate to these countries. The established routes of migration from the Global South to the Global North, previously determined largely by colonial links, are being disrupted and re-channelled. As a result, it is no longer appropriate to speak of ethnic groups in Britain in terms of the monolithic blocks of black, Asian, white and ‘other’.

The Runnymede Trust’s programme of Community Studies seeks to shed light on these developments. The programme has taken the shape of eleven small-scale studies, collecting in-depth interviews, narratives and accounts from nearly 300 individuals throughout the UK. Eight of these studies have explored some of Britain’s smaller, more hidden, and often voiceless communities and ethnic groups – Bolivians, Vietnamese, Francophone Cameroonians, Romanians, Thais, South Africans, Nepalese and Moroccans. In addition, in order to contextualize the lived experiences of the many different groups who live in Britain, we also conducted three place-based community studies, exploring how diversity is lived within the framework of a specific locality – a university student community, a multi-ethnic council estate, and a street market.

The diversification that we are exploring is part and parcel of what Steven Vertovec has called ‘super-diversity’. In defining this, he notes how diversification is not only confined to ethnic diversity. It is true that one of the most noteworthy features of the new migrants is the great variety of immigrants’ countries of origin. But while this ethnic diversity is one of the hallmarks of super-diversity, it is not the only one. Channels and means of migration, and legal immigration status, are also important markers, and shape a range of factors such as group identity formation, life chances, differential participation in the labour market, family reunification, discrimination and to what extent people can make use of public services and resources (including schools, health, training and benefits).

As a result, ethnicity is not the only, nor in many cases the primary, identity marker. This has been apparent in all our community studies. How these different markers – sometimes overlapping, sometimes contradictory – shape individual and groups trajectories, as well as the shape and dynamics of multi-ethnic Britain, is not fully understood. Although there are signs that the British government is waking up to the reality of super-diversity, many of the policy responses the Home Office is forging are alarming. Through our Community Studies programme, Runnymede has argued that public policy has been slow to get to grips with super-diversity. What we have found is that the lived reality of many of the new migrant groups include experiences of severe discrimination, exploitation and violation of rights. In the last report of the series, we discuss the policy implications of the evidence we have collected.

The development of a super-diverse Britain once again calls into question the relationship between immigration policies and race equality. This relationship has always been contentious; the extent to which institutional and official racism has shaped immigration policies is not entirely clear. What is unmistakable, however, is that the immigration policies of the latter half of the 20th century have played a pivotal role in shaping today’s multi-ethnic Britain. Even if British politicians have historically been more liberal than the British public, as Randall Hansen suggests, and did not construct immigration policies based on overt racism, there was a clear racial bias in 20th century immigration policies with unambiguous consequences for ethnic inequalities today. In spite of these historical lessons, there is a growing consensus – on the left as well as right of the political spectrum – that debates about immigration and race equality need to be separated. Politicians and pundits of all persuasions complain that talk


2 All reports are free to download at http://www.runnymedetrust.org/projects/communityStudies.html.


4 Ibid.: 4


of immigration automatically engender charges of racism, thereby stifling any chances of an honest and open debate. In this attack on a politically correct straw man, the argument has been turned into its opposite – that immigration issues and policies are never racist – thereby creating a logical fallacy.

At a time when the ‘biggest shake-up of the UK’s border security and immigration system for 45 years’ has in fact been characterized by a messy and chaotic development of policy and ‘non-stop, unplanned reform’,8 it is imperative not to allow the immigration debate to proceed without a clear understanding of the implications for race equality. The final report in the Runnymede’s Community Studies series draws on eleven qualitative studies – and the accounts of nearly 300 individuals – to argue that the migration policies that have been implemented in recent years have a clear racial bias, and are therefore likely to have a negative impact on the future of multi-ethnic Britain. The two flagship policy developments of this shake-up – the Points Based System (PBS) and the Borders, Immigration and Citizenship Act 2009 – both introduce significant unequal treatment which will have severe repercussions on ethnic inequality for years to come. In spite of claims to the contrary, these policies have clear discriminatory and racist consequences. A system which discriminates and distinguishes between different types of workers, with a hierarchy of rights pertaining to the structural position of migrants, will reproduce within Britain the global inequalities that drive migration in the first place. The PBS corral migrant workers from the global South into dirty, dangerous and demeaning work and leaves them open to exploitation, while the Borders, Immigration and Citizenship Act further restricts their rights and means to defend themselves from discrimination. This places some groups at a disadvantage in the labour market, belittles their contribution to society, and prevents them from engaging with major British social institutions and taking full part in society.

These two recent immigration policy developments are in many respects an attempt to respond to Britain’s super-diversity. As a number of commentators have noted, the official response to increased diversity has been to demand sameness on the basis that difference is dangerous.9 In this sense, we are witnessing a return of the 1960s posture that good ‘race relations’ depend on strict migration control. ‘Community Cohesion’ has become the guiding light and the ultimate purpose of migration policies; yet its obsessive focus on ethnic identity, and its discounting of rights and principles of equality, is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the trajectories and aspirations of migrants. Our Community Studies clearly confirm that migrants do not need to be forced to integrate; it is in their own interest to do so. Their greatest barrier to full participation in society – and thereby integration – is racism, discrimination and disempowerment. Migrants want to participate in society, but society does not always allow them to participate as equals.

It is disheartening that the government’s policy responses to Britain’s super-diversity tend to ignore the actual experiences of different groups and individuals, how they interact amongst themselves and with others, and how they see their place in Britain. Instead, the value of equality and diversity – and subsequently rights, social justice and respect as well – is being eroded in policy by a view from above that minority ethnic groups and migrants naturally self-segregate and that multiculturalism therefore necessarily leads to ethnic segregation. These policy developments clearly have an impact on race equality in the short term, where the focus is shifting away from tackling ethnic inequalities towards eradicating cultural difference, but the long-term effects are no less significant. The systematic rounding up of migrants from poorer countries into low skilled and low waged employment is ‘generating a new transnational labor force, stratified not only by skill and ethnicity but also by immigration status’.10 The effects of this can already be clearly seen in the London labour market, where 90 per cent of people working in low paid ‘elementary jobs’ are migrant workers from Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe.11

Unfortunately, the call for separation of immigration from race equality debates is no longer confined to the right wing of politics. In the last ten years, it has slowly moved leftwards to develop a broad political consensus that restrictive immigration policies need not verify their race equality credentials. The strapline ‘it’s not racist to talk about immigration’, and the logical fallacy it gives rise to, has been allowed to win the argument. The association between anti-racist and migrants’ rights movements appears to follow this pattern. Too often, it seems as though migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are excluded from the equals agenda. When the Equality Bill was introduced, for example, it contained no mention of migrants, refugees or asylum seekers, and the government was not vigorously confronted on this by equality groups. It is important that race equality organizations take the damage to migrants’ rights seriously; the future of multi-ethnic Britain, and the shape of ethnic and racial inequalities, starts here. 


Financial Inclusion and Equality Conference

Last year Runnymede published the results of a study, Financial Inclusion and Ethnicity: An Agenda for Research and Policy Action, into how Black and minority ethnic people experience financial exclusion (available on the Runnymede Website: www.runnymedetrust.org). In order to share the findings of the report Runnymede is holding a one day conference on 20 October 2009.

The aim of the conference is to bring innovative thinkers and policy makers together to advance financial inclusion and to address some of the following questions:

- How can reforms in financial products and services respond to those most at risk of financial exclusion?
- Are some people too costly or risky for mainstream financial institutions to provide services to? If so, how should they be provided with important financial products and services?

Runnymede has provided evidence of BME financial exclusion, but we have also tried to explain the various reasons why people are financially excluded. Social disadvantage and discrimination are not the only reasons that BME may be financially excluded. Like other people in society, they may have different preferences or behaviour that leads them to value certain investments or products as more or less risky.

Research has found that statistical risk scoring results in more risky profiles for Black and minority ethnic people. Financial institutions, however, do not allow ethnicity to be factored in as a variable for risk-scoring or for costing financial products. Similar decisions have been made with respect to sexual orientation and life insurance – where gay and lesbian people were once required to pay more based on the assumption that they were more likely to practice unsafe sex. In other cases, however, such as older people paying more for travel insurance, or younger men paying more for car insurance, or various kinds of postcode ‘lotteries’, certain groups are required to pay more for a product because they belong to a more ‘risky’ category.

We need a genuine discussion about how existing financial institutions can do better to offer affordable products to disadvantaged people, or people within a certain risk category, and how far we can or should accept other institutions, perhaps including government, to cover some of these costs. At the same time, the race and equality sectors haven’t fully addressed these difficult questions. We must accept that there will be cases where some people may be more risky or costly for a financial institution; we must then make a decision on how to distribute those social costs. By having an honest and open discussion with financial institutions, policy makers, the financial regulator, academics and the equality sector we can hopefully expand and take forward the financial inclusion agenda. We might also reflect on how principles such as individual well-being and social inclusion can guide the scope and nature of financial regulation so that Britain’s financial sector serves all of its residents.

Our conference will seek to address these areas and discuss the practical solutions that can be found to reduce the injustice of financial exclusion. The cost of attending the conference will be £150. There will be a small number of bursaries available.

Confirmed speakers include:
- Brian Pomeroy, Chair of the Financial Inclusion Task Force
- Kate Humphris, Head of Department, Consumer Affairs, Strategy and Evaluation, The Financial Services Authority
- John McFall, MP, Chair of the Treasury Select Committee
- Lord Freud, Shadow Minister, Department of Work and Pensions

Black People Pay More to Get Their Own Money Out of the Bank

Black and minority ethnic people are more likely to live in areas where they have to pay fees for withdrawing cash from cash machines, according to new research by the Runnymede Trust. The research was conducted by Omar Khan and Ludi Simpson and is based on quantitative analysis of all of the 64,000 bank machines across the UK, whether they are located in high street banks, petrol stations, grocery shops or pubs.

With the closure of many high street banks and post offices, there is increasing concern about whether people living in rural and disadvantaged areas will be able to access cash easily. Runnymede’s new research suggests that Black and minority ethnic people are more likely to live in areas with fee-charging cash machines. This can add additional banking costs of £120 a year if customers use their nearest bank machine. Areas with large BME populations have fewer cash machines, meaning that people in these areas have to travel further to access cash.

The number of people using cash machines to access cash is increasing every year. Because people in poorer areas are less able to access non-fee paying machines, a parliamentary working group chaired by John McFall MP has recently ensured that over 600 machines will be placed in disadvantaged areas. Runnymede’s research argues that government needs to ensure that Black and minority ethnic people are also well served by this scheme in particular and by financial institutions more generally.
Peer Learning for Young People by Young People

Angela Narney examines the system of learning whereby peers consciously assist others to learn and in so doing, learn themselves.

The concept of peer education is a simple one; we learn from each other continuously and a benefit of this is that the interaction is timely. It has the advantage of taking place in the context of equal status - in the absence of the power of position that teachers, for example, may hold. There is also a high level of empathy as peers have a shared experience, culture and language, which facilitates the flow of information.

The earliest written example of the peer education approach can be traced back to Dr Andrew Bell in Madras in India in the early 1800s. Bell developed a monitorial system whereby older boys were trained to teach younger boys. Even earlier examples have been traced back to Aristotle in Ancient Greece.

Early examples of peer education tended to be implemented for cost-efficiency reasons, but there were advantages beyond just saving money. The Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre) at the Institute of Education conducted a review of 26 published studies and found positive outcomes in pupil attainment across a range of subject areas for nine out of 15 studies. Increased pupil self esteem was noted in seven of the nine studies and increased engagement with learning was reported in 17 out of 20 studies. The Centre note that whilst measuring qualitative outcomes such as enjoyment and well-being can be difficult, these outcomes should be noted in addition to educational achievement.

Peer learning is of value as the act of participation alone enables both parties to develop independent learning skills. Pupils are supported in learning how to learn. The more informal style adopted amongst peers is more interactive and less didactic and encourages critical and reflective thinking. The skills developed by both parties include critical enquiry, teamwork, and communication, all skills which although not formally taught, become increasingly important as young people move through the education system and into the workplace.

A key limitation of the research in this field is that the literature base has focused on peer learning in higher education or for health education. There is a further gap in the research in that whilst there are a number of guides published on how to implement peer education and how to train students to become peer mentors, there is seldom reference to programmes and activities designed by young people for young people. Sinclair Goodlad's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threat (SWOT) analysis of student tutoring and mentoring gives a useful strategic understanding of the possibilities for peer education. The key strength is essentially the simplicity of the concept; a weakness can be the complexity and cost of systems of delivery. Opportunity can be drawn from the high range of activities possible, whilst threats can arise from expecting too much or too little from the programme. With such potential strength and opportunity, it is interesting to note that peer learning has not typically been embraced or formalized in the secondary sector, thus highlighting the threats and weaknesses outlined. The transition from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 involves pupils developing skills such as learning how to learn, and time management. What advice, however, would an older young person choose to give to someone at this crossroad and how would they choose to present that information? What would such a programme look and feel like? An interesting study would be an assessment of the merits of such a programme, and an exploration of the potential for peer education to raise achievement and increase educational motivation.

Peer learning has tended to take place along informal lines, and so a benefit of formalizing the process is that it could offer all students the opportunity to participate and not just those with the social capital to do so. Although peer learning has traditionally been delivered face-to-face, the high popularity of internet-based technology amongst young people offers interesting opportunities for offering new formats of peer learning. The shy learner who may not fully engage with traditional peer learning formats could benefit. This opens up a wide arena for the development of new and existing peer learning formats, and indicates a new area for research.


Policy, Purpose and Pragmatism: Voluntary Sector Dilemmas and Tragic Bargains

New research conducted by the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (CCJS) with voluntary and community providers predominantly working with black young people affected by crime highlights the tragic bargains those in the sector are making in a constant struggle for resources.1 Helen Mills, the report’s author, discusses some of the research findings.

Over the last year CCJS has explored the experiences of voluntary and community organizations (VCOs) that predominantly work with black young people affected by crime. Based on interviews with individuals involved in running 16 VCOs in four English cities, our report draws attention to key tensions and challenges that such organizations are facing. We suggest that VCOs’ ability to provide quality practices with young people is undermined by contradictory governmental agendas and a persistent competition for limited resources within a conservative funding environment.

‘Ethnicity? It’s really nothing to talk about to be honest with you’

The organizations interviewed were approached based on the perception that they were offering something to black young people affected by crime in particular. However, with a few notable exceptions, we found providers consider ethnicity an inappropriate way to define their role, approach or practice. There were concerns that defining interventions by ethnicity is stigmatizing for young people and that it would limit the relevance of their organization. The accounts of longer-established voluntary and community practitioners suggest an alternative explanation for this rejection of ethnicity. They consider policies on

‘community cohesion’ have created an environment in which an ethnicity-specific focus has become impossible to sustain. Organizations that define themselves as having something to offer black young people in particular have therefore been displaced over the past decade by VCOs working with young people in which ethnicity is not overtly discussed.

‘Playing football can stop someone from shooting somebody? Taking them on an activity can? No and I’ve always said that’

The voluntary and community providers we interviewed clearly express their values. They believed in providing holistic, flexible support, and building relationships with young people based on trust, engagement and the life experience they and others at the organization had. However, the institutional arrangements for voluntary and community work were considered to stand at odds with this preferred approach. Providers described funding exchanges which focused on quantity not quality, and with a questionable ability to fully address young people’s needs. Indeed, despite many claims of interest, really innovative practice was considered too expensive, too ‘outside the box’, or too long-term a commitment to be supported. Additionally, in seeking sustainability for their work, providers found themselves having to make significant compromises regarding how they presented their role. As one provider explained when discussing funding applications, “You need to know where to put the word gun crime in”.

Future scenario?
The VCOs in this report have to contend with an ambiguous and uncertain contemporary policy environment for their work. Ambiguous because the role of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) to address the overrepresentation of black young people in the criminal justice system is emphasized, but uncertain because statutory contracts and commissioning constitute a new regime for the VCS with important, and as yet unknown consequences. While this unpredictability is not an issue unique to VCOs working with black young people affected by crime, the VCOs interviewed were often uncomfortably positioned between hard-pressed local communities and statutory agencies. Adapting to contracts may fundamentally warp the values these organizations pride themselves on: autonomy and legitimacy with young people.

1 ‘Policy, Purpose and Pragmatism’ by Helen Mills was funded by the Barrow Cadbury Trust and published by the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, King’s College London, 2009, ISBN 978 1 90600 317 3.

To download the report for free please see CCJS’s website: http://www.criminologyandpragmatism.html
This book presents findings from a research project involving the testimonies of children aged 9-10 years across four schools in the Midlands, focusing on a series of conversations, interviews and classroom/playground observations surrounding diversity, religion, identity and Britishness. It provides an array of very rich data from fairly young children able to articulate their thoughts and beliefs about a range of issues about race and, in the process, reveals a great deal both about childhood, and the long-lasting and often pernicious effects of the influence of family on the notions of difference that young children develop.

The book raises sets of both interesting and worrying areas for debate. For example, the continued reluctance of a proportion of schools with low numbers of Black and minority ethnic children to pay more than cursory attention to issues of race equality and cultural diversity; the inability of schools more generally to reach beyond their gates to attract the support, or indeed often to counter the views, of the parents of the children they teach; the simplicity of ‘contact theory’ – the premise promoted by some academics within social psychology, that increased contact between those from different backgrounds will reduce and ultimately eradicate racial hostility; and, importantly given the ages of the children represented within the text, how little attention is given to the overriding power relationship between pupil and teacher, and the barriers to learning about difference this can create for children when a teacher is unsympathetic, or even hostile, to a particular cultural/religious practice or point of view.

Many of the young children profiled within the book talk about the essential ‘sameness’ of being a child and of accepting others for themselves, often revealing a capacity for empathy that is both encouraging and refreshing amidst some of the more confused suggestions by others about the ‘Hindu’ background of Osama bin Laden. However in the recommendations of the book, Elton-Chalcraft challenges not only the ‘colour blind’ view of this discourse of sameness but also the limitations of ‘being nice’ within the context of racism, highlighting the worrying effects of paying scant attention to the issue of diversity within schools. Looking beyond the micro level of being tough on racist bullying towards creating an institutional climate in which broader inequalities are looked at, discussed and challenged even by the very young, is an important issue and one which is raised well here.

What the book doesn’t do as well, however, is to interrogate some of the policy areas that the author introduces in order to provide context for the testimonies. This tends to detract from the overall message of the discussion and indeed at times poses a question as to who its targeted audience may consist of. There is some discussion about Britishness and the outcomes of the Macpherson report for example, but there is an implicit assumption that the reader is familiar with these areas to an extent that these are issues that are simply acknowledged rather than given any detailed attention. This is problematic because it appears that issues to do with the ethnic background of teachers or the place of religious education in schools are placed as ‘hooks’ around which the testimonies of the children are framed. The result of this is that though the voices of these children are, quite importantly, given a central position within the book, the policy areas, which can provide important points of discussion for both newly qualified and existing teachers, appear rather simplistic.

As a tool for teachers, reading about the complex way that children interpret and absorb the information they receive about race is essential, as it can be used to ensure teaching practice provides the opportunity to reflect on what is taught. The testimonies in and of themselves are thus fascinating and informative. However, teachers themselves need to be able to develop their own means of critical analysis, and there is therefore a responsibility within texts targeted for their use, to ensure that they are equipped with good information about policy development in the area of diversity. Brief mention of citizenship, Britishness and the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000), as occurs within the book, is of great use. This could also have been assisted, perhaps, within concluding comments, by some acknowledgement of the legal (as of September 2007) duty to promote community cohesion, which the featured schools in the book would need to adhere to, and an assessment of how this would fit within their general approach to the promotion of cultural diversity among the student body.

Books of this nature remain necessary, especially as the voices of the very young can often become lost in wider debates about race – however it is also essential that the way such testimonies are discussed pays heed to the larger impact they have on our understanding of what remains to be done generally within education.
Mixed-Up Kids? Race, Identity and Social Order

Tina G. Patel
Russell House Publishing, Lyme Regis, 2009
Reviewed by Jessica Mai Sims

Transracial adoption and fostering placements have had a controversial history. Beginning in the 1960s, the practice initially had little regard for questions on the suitability of white parents supporting their adopted children in developing positive cultural identities and combating possible racism. It was only really after this generation of transracial adoptees grew up and began to speak about their experiences that social workers began to question the practice. The preference and practice of same-race placements partly came out of these experiences, which then threw into question the morality of children being forced onto waiting lists because of their ethnic backgrounds. Many have dubbed this ‘reverse racism’ towards white couples and argue that ultimately race does not matter, and that love can conquer all.

As of 2005 there were approximately 65,000 children in care in England and Wales, of which 80 per cent were white. Because children from ethnic minorities are over-represented in the care system, and there is a under-representation of carers coming from black and ethnic minority backgrounds, transracial adoption will most likely continue to be a salient issue.

In Mixed-Up Kids? Tina Patel focuses on transracial adoptions where the child in need of placement comes from either a mixed, immigrant or transnational background. She argues that services for these placements have been inhibited by outdated and problematic ideas about essentialized racial identities and the perceived need for children to commit fully to one identity in order to develop positive identities and combat racism. Further, Patel advocates using Symbolic Interactionist theories to understand how identities are formed and maintained.

Patel provides an introduction to transracial adoption, through outlining the relevant theories on race and policy, practice, and arguments for and against transracial placements throughout the years. She also includes the life stories of a sample of transracially or transnationally adopted people, describing their experiences and journey of negotiating identities.

In Chapter 1, Patel explores the concept of racial identities in modern society in relation to the possibility of multiple racial identities. Chapter 2 provides assessments of existing legislation and policies, an overview of placement practice and services with brief comparative mention of the approach taken in the United States. Personal life story testimonies are compared in Chapter 3, comprising of a sample of six adults who were transracially or transnationally adopted. Material from those testimonies are then organized to explore the possibility of a ‘multi-racialized’ identity in chapter four. Chapter 5 provides a consideration of possessing a ‘multi-racialized’ identity which is positive and influenced by life factors such as appearance, religion, and family and social networks.

In the final chapter, Patel states that while ‘an exact race match is not vital’, matches should be as close as possible to cater to the child’s mixed racial biography through, for example, developing resistance against racism and developing feelings of assurance through familial sameness. She then goes on to make recommendations for transracial adoption and fostering policy and practice. Mixed-up Kids? argues that recognizing that identities can be multiple and flexible can improve adoption and fostering services, and that neither politically Black conceptions of identity nor colour-blindness are appropriate.

The book provides a satisfactory primer to deeper explorations on theories on ‘race’ and identity formation and a comprehensive outline of the relevant adoption and fostering legislation, policy and practice. Aside from the briefing on theoretical and practical aspects of the area, the inclusion of life story testimonies allow for more personal insight. This book would be of interest to students and practitioners who are seeking a basic introduction to transracial adoption and fostering placements in the UK.
Complementary schools in the UK

Realising Potential: Complementary Schools in the UK
Tozün Issa and Claudette Williams
Published by Trentham Books, 2009
Reviewed by Angela Nartey

Issa and Williams draw together two significant pieces of research into complementary schools in the United Kingdom. The book presents detailed information on the methodology of these projects and provides a wealth of qualitative and anecdotal evidence based on interviews with headteachers, teachers, parents and pupils at complementary schools. As such the book is particularly useful to those who are not familiar with complementary education. From the outset, complementary schools are defined as voluntary institutions serving a specific linguistic, religious or cultural community (p. vii). The authors explain that these institutions fall into two broad categories, those established by African-Caribbean communities to compensate for the racism in the education system which has led to underachievement amongst African Caribbean pupils and those set up to maintain the languages and culture of linguistic minority groups (p. vii). The introduction contains a brief historical overview referencing the first of these to London in the mid-1800s.

The first chapter provides a backcloth. In giving an overview of the history of migration and immigration in the UK, the authors highlight the social and political factors which were the driving force for the formation of complementary schools. Issa and Williams go on to outline current provision of complementary schooling including structure, management and funding, intertwining this with policy information and, particularly, the Quality Framework programme run by National Resource Centre (NRC) for supplementary schools in London.

In the first study, the authors categorize the range of complementary school provision from a sample of mainly London schools. From these categorizations, the authors go on to provide case study information on London Language Schools (Chapter 4) and African Caribbean and African schools (Chapter 5). The second research piece presents the findings of the National Centre for Languages (CILT) report Teachers in Supplementary Schools and their Aspirations to Teach Community Languages. Here the research project was designed to explore the qualifications held by complementary school teachers and determine if and to what extent these teachers wished to gain qualified teacher status.

It is interesting to note that the book is written with a very personal input from the authors. From Williams’s personal account of her own migration story, to the inclusion of Turkish transcript with English translation in the case studies, the authors do not claim neutrality but, rather, acknowledge their own subjectivity and contribute their own stories.

The final chapters work well to draw together the wealth of research presented. The conclusions and recommendations highlight the significant work that is being done in complementary schools to enhance the linguistic, cultural and national curriculum learning of children from BME backgrounds whilst advocating the need for greater and funding and more training for teachers in complementary schools.

Nomads under the Westway

Nomads under the Westway: Irish Travellers, Gypsies and other Traders in West London
Christopher Griffin
University of Hertfordshire Press, 2008
Reviewed by Kjartan Páll Sveinsson

Nomads under the Westway is a vivid account of an anthropologist’s residence with a community of Travellers living under the Westway in west London. Fieldwork amongst Travellers is notoriously difficult, but Christopher Griffin’s in-depth fieldwork makes him uniquely placed to write a comprehensive account of the lives of the people with whom he lived and worked as a site warden for a number of years.

Apart from being one of only a handful of Travellers ethnographies based on robust fieldwork, the book is interesting for a number of reasons and innovative approaches. For example, the book is historical as well as contemporary in scope; Griffin firmly grounds his ethnographic findings in historical texts and oral history, and weaves these nicely together to present a rich account of past and present. His writing style is also personal and relaxed, and the book is a joy to read. It is the ethnography that matters, and Griffin doesn’t become too bogged down by theory. As a result, the book is accessible to all readers, but still retains a strong value for scholars.

However, the real strength of the book is the way it vividly shows how a community of Travellers sits in the middle of west London, how it defines itself in relation to the wider community, and how the two worlds overlap in some ways while having very clear boundaries in others. As he notes, the Westway Site is not a ‘closed’ community by any means, but a part of the community of communities both in west London as well as Britain as a whole. Griffin’s book will prove to be a valuable resource for whoever wishes to learn about Travellers and their relationship with each other and wider society.
The Politics of Immigration in France, Britain and the United States: A Comparative Study

Martin Schain

Palgrave Macmillan, 2009

Reviewed by Kim Vanderaa

The Politics of Immigration in France, Britain and the United States by Martin A. Schain gives a comprehensive overview of not only the history of immigration in the three countries, but also of the development of policy in immigration and integration. After a general introduction, the three countries are discussed in turn.

Throughout the book it becomes apparent that there are certain similarities but also great differences between the three countries. The European examples tend to be similar to each other, but different from the United States. All the same, on some occasions the US adopt a similar approach to either France or Britain or even both.

The general attitude towards immigration tends to be rather different in Europe than the US. Although initially being open to immigrants, particularly from Europe, France has increasingly closed its borders and even adopted a ‘zero immigration’ policy as the years progressed. Britain never aimed for ‘zero immigration’ but has tried to reduce the number of immigrants from certain countries, particularly from the New Commonwealth and the Caribbean. Where the European countries have increasingly adopted policies aimed at reducing the number of immigrants, the US adopted policies which imposed criteria on immigrants. Interestingly, in all three examples, there seems to have been a preference for immigrants from some countries over others. As Britain tried to reduce the number of immigrants from the New Commonwealth, France attempted to have the lowest number of Algerians enter the country as possible. The US predominantly used quotas to limit the number of immigrants from certain countries, which has predominantly been used to exclude Asians.

The various case-studies each start with a chapter devoted to a historic overview of the waves of immigration into the country and its institutional framework. These chapters are followed by one on the reasons for migration, border control, the impact of immigration on the host country as well as questions around integration. In Britain questions about integration have been framed in a discourse of ‘race relations’, which has had a large impact on the development of legislation and anti-discrimination. The United States is a similar story with federal legislation on immigration and citizenship becoming linked to the civil rights movement. France on the other hand uses an assimilationist model for its integration policies.

Apart from some theoretical discussion, the Politics of Immigration in France, Britain and the United States, contains some very interesting evidence regarding integration. Using indicators including people’s perceived identity, education and inter-marriage rates, the author has tried to estimate the extent of integration in each country. Despite mildly criticizing the French approach, for example, he does show that the inter-marriage rates in France are higher than anywhere else and that French Muslims consider themselves firstly French before they feel themselves to be Muslim or coming from another country.

The case studies close with a chapter on the political context, public opinion and the regulation of immigration in each of the three countries discussed. For France, the rise of the Front National is pictured as an important development for immigration legislation and the path other parties have taken in response. Britain’s story is rather different with various wings within the two main parties. The United States once more represent a rather different case than the European examples, not least due to the fact that the US is a federation and that the individual states have a large autonomy where immigration policy is concerned. These last chapters also address the case of irregular immigration which is very interesting as Europe seems to be very concerned with limiting this type of immigration. The United States however, approach irregular immigration very differently not least in that children of irregular immigrants are legal US citizens if they are born in the US.

Overall, the three case studies provide a good understanding of the directions the countries treated have taken in developing their immigration policies. The Politics of Immigration in France, Britain and the United States provides a clear and comprehensive study in which facts and statistics are put into a wider theoretical framework and political context.
At a time when debates around religion and its role in contemporary British civil society are often sensational and polarized, this calm unpacking of issues relating to faith and the public realm is to be welcomed. The increasing involvement of faith bodies in various forms of public life since the mid-1990s and in particular since New Labour came into power, coupled with the wider ‘political revitalization of religion at the heart of western society’, as phrased by Habermas1 and quoted by Dinham and Lowndes on p.1, have produced tensions and difficult negotiations, which this book explores.

The book’s twelve chapters include contributions from writers from various perspectives, from sociologists to government advisers to urban theologians. The collection aims to clarify and ‘positively problematize’ some of the key issues around faith in the public realm, particularly in the key policy areas of community cohesion, local democracy and public service provision.

A useful preliminary discussion of the nature of the public realm points out that religion cannot belong solely to the private sphere, due to the longstanding role of various faith groups in social welfare. The British religious landscape is mapped, providing important context. Though many see religion in the public sphere as an historical anachronism with a primarily ceremonial or decorative function, self-reported religious affiliation remains high, with 72 per cent affiliated to Christianity, 5% to non-Christian denominations (of which half are Muslim) and 15% reporting no religion. These are figures from the 2001 UK Census. It is important to note, however, that other surveys often frame questions on religion in terms of church attendance or specific beliefs, suggesting that Christianity may be much less significant than suggested by the 2001 Census. Indeed, the Christian Research English Church Census suggests that only 6% of people in England attended Sunday services regularly in 2005.

Although the collection highlights many of the positive aspects of involving faith in the public sphere, the editors add that it is not an ‘apologia for faith’. Rather, it accepts the existing context in which ‘faith has re-emerged as a significant social and political category’. In the absence of any ‘wholly dissenting chapters’, Furbey outlines and critically engages with key secularist arguments in Chapter 2. As well as addressing the argument that religion is inherently irrational and therefore should be excluded from public deliberations, he challenges the concept of the ‘neutral public sphere’. Highlighting the potential for oppression of cultural, linguistic and religious minorities in a secular liberal public realm, he discusses the distinction between ‘ideological secularism’ and the less extreme, more pragmatic ‘moderate secularism’, which multiculturalism requires.

In a discussion of Muslim identity and segregation, the ‘Muslim community’ in Britain is shown to be less coherent than often assumed. Social circles within the Muslim community are often based around language and ethnicity, with social interactions beyond these boundaries being very limited, both with Muslims and non-Muslims. Indeed, different Muslim communities follow different dates in religious festivals, taking their lead from different countries. Simplistic notions of segregation are challenged by illustrating this lack of cohesion within the Muslim community and showing where social interactions with the wider community do occur, such as in the catering industry. However, continuing Muslim disadvantage in terms of employment, housing and income, as well as deep-seated negative attitudes towards Muslims across Europe, indicate continuing segregation at different levels. The focus on Islam adopted by various far-right groups would be widely considered unacceptable if it were based on race. Islamophobia can therefore be understood as a variant or development of racism, with such groups feeling confident about expressing Islamophobic sentiments where they are unable to express nakedly racist sentiments. Other forms of Islamophobia include negative associations with Islam in the media and the ambivalence in British society about the compatibility of being a Muslim and a British citizen.

A policy conversation around the key issue of whether the rise in faith identities poses a challenge to multiculturalism highlights several key milestones: the multiculturalist settlement arising from questions of racial equality in the 1960s; the increasing importance of faith through the 1990s and 2000s, indicated by a rising Christian and Muslim political consciousness; the community cohesion agenda, which grew out of the 2001 disturbances in Northern England; and the increased mainstreaming of faith groups, indicated by stronger inter-faith networks and funding. Dilwar Hussain also points out that since 9/11 Muslims have overshot their sense of political assertiveness, resulting in a current period of entrenchment and introspection.

This collection is successful in analysing controversies relating to faith in the public realm, including faith schools and urban governance. The policy areas of community cohesion, local democracy and public service provision, as well as the potential implications of the rise of faith identities for multiculturalism, are explored throughout the book. The collection is focused on group difference. An exploration of how issues of faith and individual conscience play out in the public realm, for example in the Catholic adoption agencies and civil partnership rows, could be a useful addition. Issues are ‘positively problematized’ through a combination of statistics, historical and international context, in-depth research and critical engagement with arguments from a diversity of perspectives.
At Deaths Door

Death’s Door: Ignorance Likes Company
A graphic novel written and illustrated by Jag Lall
Discovered Authors, 2009
Reviewed by Robin Richardson

‘I only hope,’ concludes Jag Lall, reflecting back on the story he has told in Death’s Door, ‘that our children have enough courage to see that we are all human beings and that makes us all one’. The sentiment is illustrated by an image of swings in a children’s playground. Other concluding remarks intended to summarize the book’s message include: ‘This world is a beautiful canvas for us to paint our lives upon. Why not paint together, with a glorious burst of colour and life?’ And: ‘The difference in the tone of skin, faith or religious beliefs should not be a reason to spill blood. Instead, it should be a reason to celebrate and bring people together with love, not hate’.

The book is graphic novel, telling a story through pictures about violence on the streets of a Canadian city. The violence involves a Sikh man being mistaken for a dangerous terrorist and being shot dead. The young people for whom it is intended will probably find it quite engaging, even gripping. They will not, however, be enlightened about the causes of enmity and violence or about how in practice to tackle them. Yet a skilful teacher may be able to use the book as a springboard for encouraging young people to engage in sustained study, analysis and research, and to understand that idealistic utterances will always be in danger of sounding hollow and unhelpful if they are not accompanied by rigorous debate, and by practical, political, collective action.

Belonging

Belonging: A Culture of Place
bell hooks
Published by Taylor & Francis
Reviewed by Anne Gumuschian

In a special 2008 review of Appalachian Heritage on African Americans in Appalachia bell hooks wrote:

‘Living by those values, living with integrity, I am able to return to my native place, to an Appalachia that is no longer silent about its diversity or about the broad sweep of its influence. While I do not claim an identity as Appalachian, I do claim a solidarity, a sense of belonging, that makes me one with the Appalachian past of my ancestors, black, Native American, white, all “people of one blood” who made homeplace in isolated landscapes where they could invent themselves, where they could savory a taste of freedom.’

Her latest collection of essays, Belonging, a culture of place addresses issues of place and belonging as she takes us around the various places which shaped her sense of identity, before she returns to her old Kentucky home where her journey in search of place ends.

With memories of her family and her childhood, she illustrates her sense of community and loyalty to her people and her relationship to the land where she grew up as inherent to each other. She proclaims it is the relationship to that homeland and the intimacy its settlers shared with it that embodies the connectedness of all human life in its bonds to the land, nature and the environment, giving humanity a sense of history and reverence for life.

The author addresses past and present issues of race and class while reflecting on the history of the agrarian South before industrial capitalism changed the nature of black farmers’ lives and altered communal practices that were at its centre.

In the context of the legacy of slavery, bell hooks focuses on issues of land, land ownership and the reclaiming of black history in relationship to farming in Kentucky before considering present expressions of racism and segregation in housing and the economic realm in the nation as a whole.

It is difficult to draw out policy conclusions from this complicated work, but most of us can relate to the very personal accounts, experiences and feelings that bell hooks uses to explore places of memory and remembering, and that she places as necessary resources to a personal construction of belonging and a collective sense of community.
On 21 May 2009, Manifesta and Runnymede launched Belonging, a Cross-curriculum Experience for Key Stage 3 at Channel 4. The publication, which compiles activities as well as lesson plans for Citizenship, English, History and Geography, is now available online on the Runnymede Trust website [www.runnymedetrust.org]. The launch included a screening of short videos produced in the different project locations – London, Paris and Lisbon.

The selection of 10 Belonging films (out of 43) presented different approaches and interpretations of what determines young people’s sense of belonging and identity, here and now, in specific urban locations.

In ‘A taste of Asia’ Rehana Siddique shows us where she lives, in Green Street in East London. For her, Green Street represents a symbolic meeting point of India and Pakistan – which coincides with her own origins. She demonstrates her attachment to community life, where people from various backgrounds share a space which they have made into a place of their own.

As for Ngoné Hajjar, her sense of belonging is threatened by racism and hostility expressed by some white French people daily in the Paris metro. She makes, however, a strong statement as to her presence in Paris: ‘I’m here to stay’ – the film’s title.

In ‘Veins in a body’, Imran Jabber attempts to describe the process which makes new communities: accumulation of different shared experiences, what he calls ‘the good and the bad’, leading to a sense of cohesion which overcomes differences. Starting with a poetic text, powerful images of Newham’s diverse community are a poignant accompaniment to his words.

Displaced from the neighbourhood where she used to live in the suburb of Lisbon, Brenda Semedo presents, in ‘O meu bairro’, the journey back home, to her old neighbourhood, where she was born and where her heart still is. With the sound of her violin, Brenda shows us the path to re-finding her community origins.

In ‘Un jour de plus’, Yacine Mamouni sets out with humour an ordinary day in a life in a Paris suburb, where two young people chat, phone, wait for their friends... and kill time with humour.

In ‘Circling around’, Veronica Anandaraja uses her personal experience of migration and religious affiliations to define her own sense of belonging – that, ultimately, we are all part of a whole, regardless of the language we speak, our religion or our ethnic group. With three different religions – Buddhist, Hindu and Catholic – and through her multiple migrations, Veronica symbolizes the capacity to develop a sense of belonging, regardless of where she lives.

In ‘Black on White’, Ruben Furtado chose to challenge the police, in a simple interview on the street, led by two teenagers from Casal da Boba, near Lisbon. The questions asked reflect the teenagers’ worries about safety in the neighbourhood and a constant threat of police abuse.

Their answers do not seem to leave the teenagers reassured.

Mohammed Umer Iqbal’s video, ‘My street’, talks about pressures from peers and society to either rebel or conform. His solution is to be happy to be ‘in the middle’ – not to give way to either side. Using the street as a shared space, he expresses the current fear that helping young people have when walking around.

Each of these films encapsulates a different approach and angle to ‘belonging’. Although each local context in the three locations influenced the project and the subsequent video work produced, what we have learnt during the course of ‘Belonging’ is that the way young people feel is determined by different factors, ranging from intergenerational issues, male/female relationships, fear and danger in the streets, to the role of the police (especially in Paris) as well as many other facets of life. Having nothing to do and being bored is a recurrent theme appearing in all three locations; so too are issues relating to peer pressure, and being influenced or manipulated by others.

To characterize succinctly each location’s take or approach on belonging, we can say that young people in Newham took the notion of belonging literally, and talked about identity and diversity; in Lisbon/Casal da Bopa, they talk about where they live (and how it differs from before); in Paris, the young people chose to tackle how they live (and the difficulty of their lives).

Marion Vargaftig is Belonging project Director, and Director of Manifesta. For more information on Belonging, please contact her – marion@manifesta.org.uk.
Publications Received

Appearance in this list does not preclude a review in a later edition.


Real Histories Directory – Website of the Month: Journey Folki

Our Website of the Month for September is Journey Folki (www.journeyfolki.org.uk), set up ‘to promote and perpetuate Gypsy and Traveller communities within Britain’ and to provide a space for stories to be shared. The aim is ‘to continue and further our respective communities with interesting, educational and inspiring articles on heritage, history, culture, customs, crafts and language. We hope to keep the Gypsy and Traveller ways of life alive and to inspire the younger members of our communities to do the same.’

‘Teachers, students and parents will find a lot of fascinating material here since a central part of the website’s mission is to encourage families to participate in the ‘learning is play and play is fun’ scheme for children. The scheme includes storytelling and book learning and furthers the imagination, learning and education of both parent and child.’ To this end, there are arts and crafts ideas, reviews of books and educational resources for children aged 0-11. For older students, there are fascinating articles in the History & Language sections including an A-Z of the Romani language and a feature on the root of the language and the influences. Did you know, for instance that ‘kushti’, the Romani word for ‘all right’, has its roots in the Punjabi and Hindi word ‘kushi’, meaning ‘happy’?

The section on The Holocaust and the treatment of Europe’s Romani population by the Nazis in an attempt to create a ‘Gypsy-free’ Europe is an illuminating – if painful – read giving testimony...
to an often ignored aspect of the Holocaust.

On a lighter note, there are many traditional recipes, including Nettle Soup, Campfire Bread and Stuffed Baked Shooshi (Rabbit) as well as herbal remedies, soaps, beauty products and household solutions. You can also enjoy one of the tales in the ‘Stories around the Yog (fire)’ section. (http://journeyfolki.org.uk/Library/CurrentArticles/tabid/689/articleType/CategoryView/categoryId/165/Stories-Round-the-Yog.aspx)

The site is packed with information about many aspects of Gypsy and Traveller life and culture - there's, music, poetry and art. There are discussion forums (including one for young Romanis) and an events calendar. In fact, there is so much fascinating material on the site that it’s possible to spend a great deal of time extracting nuggets like Barrie Law’s snapshots giving insights into the lives of Yorkshire’s Gypsies. And did you know about the Gypsy heritage of famous people like Yul Brynner, Elvis Presley, Charlie Chaplin and Mother Teresa?

The Journey Folki website is a treasure trove of historical information and contemporary insights for members of the Gypsy and Traveller communities and non members alike. According to the founders of the site, ‘We are devoted to the understanding and communication between ourselves within the Gypsy and Traveller communities and other communities within Britain and welcome all to participate in a spirit of harmony and mutual appreciation’.

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