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**Immigration Policy Debates and their Significance
for Multiculturalism in Britain**

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Introduction

Multiculturalism in Great Britain developed as a response to cultural diversity that resulted from post-colonial immigration. It was patterns of immigration and the political debates around it strongly defined the development of multiculturalism. This paper sets the context for the further discussion of British multiculturalism. It pays tribute to the path-dependence theory and historical institutionalism (Putnam, 1993; Mahoney, 2000) which help social scientists understand the development and persistence of institutions and policies and focus on historical legacies and traditions that shape future political decisions and public institutions. I do not want to overemphasise historical factors against contemporary political ones, which Favell (2001a) warns us against. But discussing British multiculturalism without this background would mean stripping it from a very important context. Without it we would be unable to understand multiculturalism trajectories in Britain, including such seemingly paradoxical situations where for example, diversity is celebrated, but the source of diversity, that is immigration is feared; where Sikhs are regarded as a “racial” category; or how Britain manages to combine its exclusiveness, the “splendid isolation”, that is its insisting on Britain’s being a very special case unlike the countries of the continental Europe with “proselytism” (Favell, 2001b) in the matters of immigrant incorporation practiced by multiculturalism and “race relations” activists, policy experts and scholars precisely in the continental Europe.

In what follows, I will focus on the development of immigration policy being the source of diversity which British multiculturalism was a response to. But instead of discussing it chronologically, I will rather devote some attention to certain ideas, idiosyncrasies, terms of policy frameworks, discursive frames of the policy debates. This discussion will be centred around four areas. The first is the path of Britain from being a world power an empire occupying one quarter of the world to becoming a nation-state with limited boundaries that had not only to delineate its borders but also decide upon who belongs and who does not to it. This was especially challenging in the face of a lack of any clear notion of territorial citizenship. The next section will discuss how the notion of “race” has framed the debates on immigration and immigrant incorporation, and ultimately policy solutions and institutions. Next I will look at a peculiar disjunction of the debates on immigration and on immigrant integrations which resulted from attempts to “depoliticise” race and achieve a bipartisan policy consensus on matters of immigration. Finally, this background would be very

incomplete without saying a few words about the troubled relation of Britain to the EU and what it meant for the development of British multiculturalism.

In order to provide a point for reference for the discussion of the debates around immigration will first present an outline of the British immigration legislation.

1905 Aliens Act

It was the first piece of legislation that limited immigration of some “undesirable” groups of migrants. The Act placed the responsibility for all matters of immigration and nationality within the powers of the Home Secretary who gain the power to deport immigrants considered beggars or criminals. In fact the Act’s main purpose was to limit the immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe.

1914 Aliens Registration Act

The Act made mandatory the registration of all aliens with the police.

1919 Aliens Restriction Act

The Act extended the wartime restrictions and added new ones to the civil and employment rights, making it a criminal offence for an alien to “promote industrial unrest” or cause “sedition and disaffection” amongst the military or civilian population. It mainly was concerned with alien seamen in British merchant ships.

1920 Aliens Order

Under the 1920 Aliens Order, The Home Secretary gained powers to deport any foreign national whose presence was not considered to be “conductive to the public good”. . What is more, as a step to protect employment opportunities for British nationals, foreigners could be employed only if they were issued a special permit by the Ministry of Labour, subject to condition that it was shown that no British labour was available

1948 British Nationality Act

It made a distinction between British subjects who were citizens of the United Kingdom and its colonies and those who were Commonwealth citizens, however, it confirmed the right of all British subjects to enter and settle in Britain.

1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act

It was the first piece of legislation that challenged the automatic right of all British subjects to abode Britain. The 1962 Act granted British subjects the right of enter and abode in Britain depending on the way their passports were issued. Britons and colonial British subjects continued to enjoy identical citizenship, but only citizens with British issued passports could exercise their full citizenship rights. In other words, immigration controls were introduced to all holders of Commonwealth passports except those: (a) born in Britain; (b) holders of British passports issued by the British government¹; (c) persons included in the passport of

¹ This involved a large number of European settlers as well as a considerable number of East African Asians in Kenya and Uganda (Solomos, 1993).

one of the passport holders excluded from immigration controls. For others a need- and qualification vouchers system² from the Ministry of Labour was introduced.

1965 First Race Relations Act

It was the first piece of anti-discrimination legislation. The Act made unlawful to refuse access to public places, such as hotels, schools, restaurants and pubs to anyone on racial grounds. Moreover, incitement to racial hatred was also made a criminal offence.

1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act

The 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act which extended immigration controls to UK passport-holders without “substantial connection” with the UK, an attempt not to limit immigration from the Old Commonwealth. Those Commonwealth citizens with a “substantial connection” to Britain were automatically allowed to enter and settle in the UK. The Act was a response to the fear of a considerable inflow of Asian refugees, holders of British passports, from East Africa escaping the growing black nationalism in such countries as Uganda or Kenya.

1971 Immigration Act

The 1971 Immigration Act limited migration even stronger, for the first time treating Commonwealth citizens on par with aliens. The idea of “substantial connection” was developed even further and replaced by the notion of “patriality”. “Patrials” were UK citizens with at least one UK-born parent or grandparent. Under the Act, few non-white Commonwealth citizens qualified as “patrials” even if they were born in the UK, whereas most white Commonwealth citizens, no matter where they were born, qualified as “patrial”.

1976 Race Relations Act

The Act made direct or indirect discrimination on racial grounds unlawful in employment, provision of goods, services and facilities, education, housing. The Commission for Racial Equality was set up under the Act.

1981 The British Nationality Act

The British Nationality Act of 1981 ostensibly was not about immigration but nationality and citizenship, but in practice it once again defined who was entitled to the right of entry and abode in the UK. The composite “citizenship of the United Kingdom and Colonies” was broken into three separate types of citizenship: British Citizenship, British Dependent Territory Citizenship, and British Overseas Citizenship. It was only the first type that conferred the right of abode, the remaining two are “citizenships” only nominally, by which the government wanted to acknowledge its responsibilities to the members of its former and existing colonies.

1988 Immigration Act

The Act made deportation easier and swifter. It also withdrew the right to family-reunion of long-settled Commonwealth citizens. The immigration from Commonwealth was further limited during the 1980s, when visas were introduced for Sri Lankans in 1985 and visitors from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria and Ghana in 1986.

1993 Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act

² There were three types of vouchers: Category A for Commonwealth citizens who had a specific job to come to Britain; Category B for applicants who had a skill or qualification which was in demand in Britain; Category C for all applicants, however priority was given to those who had served in the British forces during the war.

The first piece of asylum legislation. The 1993 Asylum and Immigration act finally introduced an in-country right of appeal for all asylum-seekers³. The act also introduced a “fast-track” procedure for “manifestly unfounded” claims for asylum. But the same act also removed the right of appeal for short-term visitors and students⁴. This Act makes the European Human Rights Convention (EHRC) directly enforceable in the UK courts.

1996 Asylum and Immigration Act

The 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act aimed to deter asylum seekers further on by introducing a new provision allowing asylum seekers to claim welfare benefits only if they applied for asylum at the point of their entry⁵.

2002 Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act

The Act introduced new controls on entry, proposed for separate induction/accommodation centres. The section 55 of the Act enabled the Home Office to refuse asylum support to any childless people seeking asylum in the UK who did not submit their claim “as soon as reasonably practicable” after arriving in the UK.

2004 Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants) Act

It introduced a new system for the treatment of claimants, appeals, removal and detention, further immigration offences, the prevention of sham marriages.

2006 Asylum and Immigration Act

The Act enabled greater control over asylum seekers, detention or electronic tagging for failed asylum seekers, and introduced separate procedures for different nationalities. Under the Act refugees can be granted temporary to permanent status reviewed after five years.

2007 UK Borders Act

The Act gives more powers to immigration officers and creates more duties and penalties for those subject to immigration controls. Any foreigner who commit any of a range of “specified offences” or who are sentenced to a twelve-months imprisonment is automatically deported, unless the deportation breaches their human rights or they are refugees.

From Empire to a Nation State

At the end of WWII, eight hundred million people, born outside the UK, coming from a territory that covered one-fourth of globe could claim the status of British subject and the right to settle in the UK (Joppke, 1996). This was possible due to the lack of a clear notion of British national citizenship, and thus the notion of “who belongs”. As it was becoming more

³ Since the Aliens Restriction Act of 1914 and 1919 asylum was the area of sole responsibility of the Home Office. The previous conflation of immigration and asylum rules also meant the lack of an appeal procedure on the territory of Britain for those refused entry, which resulted in the possibility of *refoulement* at the discretion of immigration officers.

⁴ This once again highlights the conflation of asylum and immigration policies in Britain.

⁵ As the majority of asylum seekers apply for asylum later, the new regulation effectively condemned the majority of asylum seekers to the life of destitution for at least a year (they cannot apply for a work permit for six months and it takes another six months to obtain one).

and more clear that the days of the Empire are numbered, Britain faced the challenge of the re-definition of the British nation and the citizenship. Joppke is right to say that the logic of British immigration policy was determined by the devolution of empire (1996), but it also meant that subsequent immigration acts by default were defining Britishness, and British national citizenship. Thus, immigration policy and the ongoing re-definition of Britishness have been intertwined throughout the 20th century. This situation had an important influence on the politics and the process of immigrant incorporation, with regard to the status of immigrants, their rights, the conception of them as ethnic minorities rather than immigrants as well as the very concept of Britishness, something immigrants are supposed to integrate into.

The dilemma that haunted Britain after WWII was how do the impossible, to eat the cake and have it, that is how to preserve its imperial grandeur and a “special relationship” with a quarter of the world, but not let its subjects to take the full advantage of that relationship and come to the mother state. As Gary Freeman pertinently observed: “one may interpret much of post-war immigration policy in Britain as an attempt to remove rights of citizenship too generously extended during the colonial period” (1979: 38). Indeed, the development of the British immigration policy was predominantly an attempt to limit the previously granted rights of entry and settlement of *de facto* co-nationals, former subjects of the Crown. This peculiar situation was derived from the lack of a safe and clear ground for belonging to the British state, the citizenship.

Citizenship is a very new concept for Britain which simply did not exist in the Empire times, and was not properly articulated until the 1981⁶. Its place was assumed by the notion of allegiance to the monarch, the subjecthood. The all-encompassing notion of the subjects of the British Empire – living in the vast territory “where the Sun never set” who could claim allegiance to the British Crown as well as the right to abide in every part of the Empire, including the British Isles – was challenged by decolonisation on the one hand, and actual exercise of that right by these subjects on the other. As a consequence, the development of the British immigration policy and gradual introduction of immigration controls has become strongly interpreted as a response to the unwanted “coloured” immigration.

⁶ Until then there were Citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies (CUKC), British subjects without citizenship (BSWC), and citizens of Commonwealth countries, all of who belonged to Commonwealth citizens, whereas there were no British citizens. (For a good discussion of the history and intricacies of the British nationality see Karatani, 2003).

Decolonisation implied the replacement of the huge Empire with watery identity boundaries by a number of modern nation states. It was a process of shifting from the archaic, feudal and dynastic principle of the allegiance to the crown to a modern political principle of territorial citizenship. Significantly, it was not only about former colonies gaining independence: Britain, the mother country, was faced with the need to define who belongs and who does not belong to the relatively small island and consequently who can exercise their political, economic and social rights on its territory. As Joppke noted, this shift was not just a requirement of political modernisation, but also the fulfilment of the right of a political community to control its boundaries (1996).

This shift by its nature was exclusive and did not come easily. The British Nationality Law of 1948 confirmed the same status of all citizens of Britain and its colonies. The Act made a distinction between British subjects who were citizens of the United Kingdom and its colonies and those who were Commonwealth citizens, however, it confirmed the right of the majority of British subjects from the colonies and dominions the right to enter and settle in Britain (Solomos, 1993). In the sixties, parts of the British political elite still believed in Britain's unity with its colonies and thus in the right of (post)colonial population to settle in Britain. Yet, as Joppke aptly notes: "Since it was fused with the creation of boundaries to define and encompass the British nation, immigration policy was necessarily restrictive and discriminating vis-à-vis members of its former colonies" (1996: 479). The fact that the core British nation was white and the colonies populations were "coloured" certainly did not help defining the membership across and not along the colour lines.

In ideological terms, the British government had traditionally supported the free movement of people within the Empire. The often evoked notion of *Civis Britannicus Sum*⁷ implied that immigration controls were against the spirit of the Empire, even in case of the reversal of the flow of migration. However, it was rather assumed that they would not want to exercise these rights, the flow of people would be from Britain to the colonies and not vice versa, or at least there would be no settlement immigration. In the words of a Tory politician: "we thought that there would be a free trade in citizens, that people would come and go, and that there would not be much of an overall balance in one direction or another" (quoted in Joppke, 1999: 107; also Layton-Henry, 1984).

⁷ According to Hanson (2004), the phrase was first evoked by Lord Palmerson, in the "Pacífico Affair". Lord Palmerston made the well known declaration that a British subject should feel protected by the British government no matter where he goes, just as Roman citizen felt protected from any foreign power.

After the British Nationality Act of 1948 was passed, nations one by one were becoming independent states and some also republics, as a consequence, repudiating the monarch as the head of the state. However, the fact that states became independent republics did not automatically mean restrictions on immigration. Citizens of Commonwealth of Nations countries, including the Republic of India, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and Caribbean islands had extensive rights to settle in the UK (until they started to exercise their right of settlement to the dismay of the majority of the British public). In other words, the process of decolonisation did not immediately trigger Britain's wish to control its national boundaries.

The reluctance to introduce immigration controls, as well as the gradual nature of the development of border controls and limits on immigration to a large extent was conditioned by the attachment of Great Britain to its white-settler dominions. As Hansen (2004) claims in his well-researched book, the fact that there was no immigrant regulation until 1962, so for almost two decades after the WWII, was largely due to the strong reluctance of British politicians to limit the immigration from the Old Commonwealth⁸. Besides, this procrastination to was up to a point associated with the process of decolonisation itself. Britain was keen on preserving good relations with its former colonies and ensuring that decolonisation was a peaceful process, which the imposition of harsh immigration control could impair. Many leading West Indian politicians strongly criticised controls which in their opinion would be devastating for the islands' economies (dependant on the revenues sent back home by migrants), and would undermine "not only Britain's leadership of the Commonwealth but the foundations of the Commonwealth itself" (Layton-Hentry, 1984: 96).

Since the umbilical cord tying Britain and its (former) colonies was not severed, and thus, there was no good definition of territorial citizenship, the 1962 Act attempted to limit the right

⁸ The Commonwealth originated from the Imperial Conferences created in the late 1920s. The Balfour Declaration at the Imperial Conference in 1926 stated that "Britain and its dominions agreed they were equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any respect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations". The Statute of Westminster formalised this relationship. The pre-1945 dominions, including Canada, Australia and New Zealand, became known as *the Old Commonwealth*, to differentiate these (predominantly white) states from the *New Commonwealth*, the Caribbean, African and Asian states that became decolonised after WWII (predominantly non-white, and much poorer than the Old Commonwealth). In 1949 the London Declaration issued in 1949 changed the membership based on the common allegiance to the British Crown to on based on the members' recognition of the British monarch as the head of the Commonwealth, the symbol of their association. This allowed a number of dominions to become republics, with India being the first republic with a president as the head of the state. (For more, see McIntyre, 2001).

of abode in Britain on the basis of what authorities issued passports. Britons and colonial British subjects continued to enjoy identical citizenship, but only citizens with British issued passports could exercise their full citizenship rights. The 1968 legislation, and consequent acts, basically applied the principle of *ius sanguini* and limited the right of entry and abode only to birth or descent (possessing a parent or grandparent born in the UK). What became known as “the grandfather clause” had to encourage re-emigration of the British “diaspora”. The result was that particularly in the newly independent countries of East Africa there were citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies who had the right of residence nowhere. As Joppke noted, the exclusion of East African Asians meant the creation of a “second-class” citizenship on the basis of “race” (Joppke, 1999). It was possible precisely because of the lack of clear grounds for territorial citizenship.

The 1971 legislation was based on the same principles and intentions and introduced the “patrials” clause. Thus, on the one hand, the immigration policy was moving towards eliminating the peculiar distinction between “aliens” and Commonwealth citizens. This shift was described by some scholars as a change towards the migrant worker system present in other European states (Castles and Kosack, 1985) with short-term contracts rather than settlement and thus, towards a “normal immigration policy” (Joppke, 1999). However, again for the lack of an adequate citizenship notion, the Act did not differentiate between “citizens” and “aliens”, but rather introduced different types of citizens, those with the right of abode and those without it.

The British Nationality Act of 1981 set out to resolve the question of “who belongs”. However, it was still tainted by Britain’s wrangles with its imperial past. The only right the new British citizenship granted was that of abode. In that sense, the Nationality Act was not much different from simply a transposition of immigration law. Even political rights, like the right to vote, were still attached to the common law concept of British subject (Joppke, 1999; Karatani, 2003). As Joppke pointed out, although this was a legal act on nationality and not immigration, any nationality reform had to be driven by the logic of immigration policy, which meant that it perpetuated “the spell that it had set out to exorcise” (1999:112). In other words, there was still no clear notion of territorial citizenship that would confer social, political and economic rights upon its holders, and the debates on nationality and belonging still could not be divorced from the debates on immigration.

The fact that Britain never established a complete national citizenship, based on nationhood with obligations and rights granted only to its holders (Karatani, 2003) led to a situation where Commonwealth citizens arriving in the UK enjoyed full economic, social and political rights⁹. Thus, principle of *Civis Britannicus Sum* also had a different and very tangible dimension. On the one hand, this fact shaped the debate on immigrant incorporation very strongly, as the political struggle from the onset was about the fulfilment of rights already granted, the exercise of the equal citizenship that immigrants could in theory enjoy the moment they stepped on the British soil. In practice, Commonwealth citizens all too often were denied their *de jure* rights because of racial discrimination. This was very different from e.g. France and Germany, where citizenship became a vital political issue. One consequence was that immigrant incorporation policy was understood not as granting special rights to newcomers, immigrants, but making sure that co-nationals, fellow citizens get a just and equal treatment, in accordance with their status. Another, as Malik notes, was a significantly greater black presence in politics, the media, the professional and business as in e.g. France (1996). There was a certain feeling of obligation towards the (former) colonies as well as guilt for the past wrongs, especially that many of the political elite were attached to the former colonies via their service as administrators, politicians or soldiers as well as via family connections (Layton-Henry, 1984), especially so on the part of left-leaning politicians.

In a symbolic sense, the Empire never completely disappeared, its influence upon “Britishness” remained significant. The longing for the Empire was well illustrated by a number of books and films¹⁰ as well as by Britain’s response to the Falklands’ crisis. Even if there was no Empire in a corporal sense, illusions of Empire, imperial attitudes, nostalgia remained part of the national image. As Powell put it: “saying that Britain had lost its empire without fully ceasing to be an imperial power... may not be too far from the truth” (2002: 232).

Yet, simultaneously, the significance of the Empire, and most importantly the sense of responsibility towards former co-nationals was diminishing at a high pace in the second half of the 20th century. Still in 1954, Henry Hopkins, the Colonial Secretary, told the House of

⁹ Plans to revamp the British national citizenship by the Labour government in the first decade of the 21st century have started the discussion about limiting political rights of Commonwealth citizens resident in the UK. I will discuss this in the next chapter.

¹⁰ Including such novels as *Jewel in the Crown* (1966) by Pail Scott about the life in India under Raj, made into an eponymous television series in 1984; and films as *Laurence of Arabia* (1962), *Zulu* (1964), or *Khartoum* (1966).

Commons:

in a world in which restrictions on personal movement and immigration have increased we can still take pride in the fact that a man can say *Civis Britannicus Sum* whatever his colour may be, and we take pride in the fact that he wants and can come to the mother country (quoted in Hansen, 2004: 251).

As Hansen sarcastically comments upon this statement: “by 1962, the tradition was abandoned with agonizing regret; by 1971, no one was prepared to defend such a position publicly; and by 1991, it is doubtful that few people could even conceive of such an argument ever being made” (2004: 251). Indeed, already in the 1980s, Alfred Sherman, former advisor to Margaret Thatcher wrote: “Britain is not a geographical expression or a New-World territory open to all comers with one foot in their old home and one foot in the new. It is the national home and birthright of its indigenous people” (quoted in Malik, 1996:186).

The fact that immigrants were immediately granted equal status with the indigenous population also prompted the question of “who we are”. Significantly, the question was popped by the Conservatives, and most famously phrased by an ultra Conservative politician, Enoch Powell, who immediately put in doubt the immigrants’ loyalty towards their new country. As Powell: “The presence of a common status where there was no common nationhood has produced in the cities of England a concentration of other nationals who assert the contradictory claim to belong – and not belong – to this nation” (quoted in Malik, 1996: 185). What characterised the interlocked debates on immigration and Britishness was the assertion, especially by conservative politicians that immigrants do not really belong to Britain. They were here, but they were different, foreign, and could not really learn to love Britain as their motherland, to have an unalloyed loyalty. Powell was not expressing only his own opinion when he was explaining: “A West Indian or an Asian does not by being born in England become an Englishman. In law he becomes a United Kingdom citizen by birth; in fact he is a West Indian or an Asian still” (quoted in Malik, 1996: 186). Hence also the attempts to show that immigration always lead to contradictory sense of belonging, where the populist Norman Tebbit’s cricket test was a case in point. Tebbit demanded that immigrants would rather support English teams than teams from where they came from, e.g. Bangladesh or Pakistan, if England played their mother country team in a cricket match.

Immigration “denies the singularity of... vision on culture” (Malik, 1996: 186). Yet it is the exclusive and particularist vision of culture – based on the definition of the past that is

“determinist and teleological” (Malik, 1996) delineating the present through rootedness and tradition – that made it impossible for immigrants to belong to it, to share it. According to this understanding, different people have different cultures, and it is impossible to acquire culture. Since the popular answer to the question of “who we are” was perceived as jingoistic, exclusionist and often verged on racism, to put it mildly, the left was wary of joining in the debate on Britishness for a long time¹¹. In this way, the political Right was able to appropriate the debate on the national identity that became a no go territory for the post-colonial guilt driven left that associated this debate with jingoism, a sense of superiority and varieties of racism.

What is more, in this debate on national identity, immigrants came to play a special role, that of the hated reminder of Britain’s toppled glory. As Malik emphasises, the common idea of the British identity could not longer be sustained by the notion of the imperial grandeur, and the nation’s “special mission” (1996: 184) or the white man’s burden. However, for the lack of the positive vision of the contemporary nation, the identity had to be recast through the past greatness, which immigrants upset. In this sense, immigrants became “symbolic of the time that the nation lost faith in itself and stopped believing in its essential greatness” (Malik, 1996: 185). It is worth noting the paradoxical nature of the imperial legacy in case of both critics and admirers of the Empire. The majority of critics of colonialism postulated the exemption of Commonwealth citizens from immigration controls and defended equal citizenship of all Commonwealth citizens, even though the justification for this derived from colonialism. Those nostalgic for the Empire times saw immigrants from the ex-colonies as a threat, and wanted to bar all immigration from non-white territories.

Moreover, what Koopmans and Statham aptly call “the particular mixture of paternalism and guilt that describes the countries’ postcolonial hangover” (2000: 27) also had an important influence on the way immigrant incorporation policy developed in Britain. Although the authors write rather about the Netherlands, it is also true for Britain that a sense of postcolonial guilt, enhanced by the guilt for the introduction of immigration controls and the fear of the authorities of being accused of racism helped to marginalise immigrants. Immigrants were conceived as a problematic disadvantaged group, incapable of improving their situation, as “lagging behind” in a language reminiscent of the colonial times, not only in

¹¹ A renewed interest in national identity debate, and the initiation by Labour politicians this time did not come before the 9/11 and 2001 riots in Britain.

the eyes of the majority population but also in the eyes of migrants themselves and immigrant organisations. As Koopmans and Statham write: “To the majority population, migrants thus appear as a group deserving help, respect, tolerance, and solidarity, but not the kind of people that anyone in his or her right mind would want to employ or would want one’s child to be in school with (2000: 27-28). The ambiguous way in which immigrants from the colonies were seen: as co-nationals and unwelcome guests; almost the same, and equal, yet different, and exotic; possessing rich cultures but deserving special treatment shaped the development of multiculturalism.

Here, the conservatives’ understanding of culture as something innate, inherited, unchangeable as well as the left’s fear of any possible accusations of cultural imperialism and racism helped them to ultimately converge on the notion of multiculturalism. After all, many multicultural measures were continued and many new introduced by the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher. Besides, this was only consistent with the cultural policy of the British Empire. The British did not rely on assimilation, and to a large extent encouraged diversity. After the fall of the empire, Britain as if managed to embrace and recreate the imperial diversity in one nation, with re-located colonial subjects, what Favell called “multiculturalism-in-one-nation” (1998a).

“Race”, Immigration and Immigrant Incorporation

It is impossible to discuss the immigration and integration policies in Great Britain without discussing the role played by the notion of “race”. Populist media and politicians soon started to interpret conflicts between newcomers and the locals in racial terms (Miles, Phizacklea, 1984). Immigration was cast as the source of the very dangerous “racial disharmony”, a threat to social order. Such a definition of the situation allowed the anti-immigration lobby to demand quenching the source of trouble by halting “coloured” immigration. More progressive politicians, activists and scholars acknowledged the diagnosis of the problem, but started to seek solutions in order to establish “good race relations”. Even if “No dogs, no blacks” shop signs could be easily spotted well into the 1950s (Joppke, 1996), despite its everyday occurrences, racism did not chum in well with the British national self-image, at the heart of which lie the ideas of decency, tolerance and moderation. George Orwell’s notion of the “gentleness of the English civilisation” (1982) as well as the fear of social disorder, resulting from playing “race” as a voting card led to a consensus between the main political parties about the need to depoliticise “race”. In other words, ultimately both main political parties

agreed to refrain from using openly racist remarks in order to attract votes, as well as agreed on the need to introduce anti-discrimination legislation. Yet, “race” entered the debates on immigration and integration for good, and remained seen as the challenge to immigrant incorporation. Here Bleich (2003) it right to use “race” as a paradigmatic lens through which we can understand the development of multiculturalism in Britain. What is also significant here, since “race” as such does not exist, it is an empty meaning, it could mean what, according to the Humpty Dumpty’s rule, the speaker chose it to mean, including skin colour, ethnicity, religion, national origin. As we will see later, over time “race” developed a very encompassing meaning, which could not leave the policies and institutions of British multiculturalism.

A number of researchers agree that the British immigration debate and policy have become “racialized” after 1940 (Solomos, 1993; Spencer, 1994). According to this understanding, the arrival of more considerable numbers of, in the language of the day, “coloured” immigrants from the (former) Empire triggered an official response that aimed at clamping down on immigration of conspicuously different immigrants, economic factors notwithstanding.

Racialisation occurs when certain biological traces, real or attributed, become defining for people of a given origin and are associated with negative patterns of behaviour. Racialised approach to immigration provides a rationale for a certain hierarchy of more and less desirable immigrants according to their appearance and their country of origin. As Miles puts it:

“It serves to identify certain populations as acceptable as a migrant labour force and others as unacceptable by reference to, and by the attribution of meaning to, real or assumed biological characteristics. And where a notion of biological difference is accompanied by the attribution of negative characteristics to a population, or to the consequences of its presence, racism becomes an active moment in the process of selection” (Miles, 1988: 234).

There are different approaches as to how the process of racialisation of immigration has happened. Foot (1965), or Rose et al., (1969) see racialisation of immigration in the context of the pressure of the public opinion. This approach is supported by arguments of key politicians involved in the immigration control debates (Solomos, 1993; Jopkke, 1999). Miles and Phizacklea see it as a response to the activities of pressure groups of a limited number of politicians as well as members of the wide public concerned about the competition for limited resources (jobs, education, housing, healthcare) (1984). The authors, however, do not give a conclusive answer as far the British public is concerned. They see them as influenced by a

small number of racists, but later present the majority of the British population as an important part of the anti-colonial movement. It seems only logical that if large sections of the society were strongly prejudiced against “coloured” migration, the political elites would also not be completely free from racist attitudes. A letter of Labour MPs to Prime Minister of 1947 seems to illustrate this point well: “An influx of coloured people is likely to impair the harmony, strength and cohesion of our public life and bring discord and unhappiness among all concerned” (quoted in Weight, 2003). Solomos, point out, it is naïve to see the role of the state as simply responsive to the public opinion or economic interests. As he shows the state was actively involved in regulating the arrival of black immigrants in 1948-62 (1993), before there was any significant inflow of “coloured” migrants, and before the public had time to become scared of the “invasion” from the colonies (also Kay and Miles, 1992; Layton-Henry, 1992; Joppke, 1999). Sivanandan, believes that racialisation was the result of the activities of the capitalist state that initially wanted to attract the labour force it needed from the colonies, and subsequently decided to restrict migration, when it was unable to provide jobs for all workers. He sees the introduction of immigration controls as a means of “subordination” of the “coloured” immigration (1982). This may be a far-gone conclusion, after all, it is easier to control or “subordinate” the labour force in a situation of high competition for the same jobs and uncontrolled migration secures a source of inflow of new labour force. But it is not my intention to resolve this debate here. What is important, racialism, racism and xenophobia of both political and intellectual elites and the society at large has been well documented (Solomos, 1993; Julius, 1995; Kay and Miles, 1992; Layton-Henry, 1992; Joppke, 1999), and certainly has played an important role in defining the British immigration policies.

It goes without saying, that “race” has made a staggering carrier in the 20th century British immigration policy debates. It is striking how often in the debates over immigration of the first half of the 20th century the focus is put on “breed”, “stock”, “race”. One has to note here that racialisation of immigration policy is not strictly a post-war phenomenon and racist thinking has underpinned the response to migration for a much more considerable time.¹² The

¹² Barzun demonstrated how long and continuing the present of racist thinking has existed in Britain (1965). Banton emphasised that racist attitudes permeated Europe long before any sustained relations developed between Africa and Europe (1977). Thus it seems more sound to argue, as Solomos and Small (2006) do, that racialisation occurred much earlier, yet it has become much more explicit and public with the arrival of post-war migrants from the colonies and ex-colonies of the British Empire.

As Solomos notes, the perception of racial and cultural inferiority of the Irish was not only based on the particular construction of the image of the Irish Celts, but also, on the particular self-definition of Englishness or Anglo-Saxon culture “in terms of particular racial and cultural attributes” (1993:43). The emphasis on the

Second World War policy that aimed at securing only the most prominent Jewish people for Britain (Marr, 2008) and barring all the rest of Jewish refugees, or the strong preference for Lithuanian over Polish workers recruited as part of the European Voluntary Scheme (Kay and Miles, 1992; Ostrowski) may be cases in point. It is not only about colour, but also ethnic origin, with an informal “hierarchy of desirability” (Kay and Miles, 1992: 234), where Estonians were considered of better “stock” than Poles, and Poles are better than Jews, and all are much better than the “unassimilable” (Layton-Henry, 1998) West Indians and South Asians¹³. Thus, while black people and Asians were considered as least desirable, restrictions based on a racialized approach to newcomers were also exercised towards other migrants.

It is significant that immigration controls did not come immediately after the war. In fact, experts’ opinions differ with regard to almost two decades just after the war and before the introduction of the first act curbing immigration. Some analysts of the British immigration policy, e.g. Favell, (2001) claim that in the immediate post-war period immigration was largely uncontrolled and was not seen as a disrupter of the national identity, or a problem for societal cohesion. This implies that if there were concerns over immigration, they were not of racial nature but rather pertained to welfare. Competition for scarce resources between the native population and immigrants as well as a combination of political and economic factors, especially the slow-down of the economy can explain the problematisation of immigration. Joppke, among others, calls this period “the age of innocence” (1999; see also Solomos, 1993; Favell, 2001). Indeed, as compared to the later developments, immigration in the late 1940s was not an issue of significant political salience. However, Carter, Harris and Joshi (1987) as well as Spencer (1997) show that the government instituted a number of administrative measures to discourage “black” immigration. The British government representatives in the Empire/Commonwealth declined to issue passports valid for settlement in Britain to those who did not have a direct relational link to the British Isles; Commonwealth and colonial governments were encouraged to continue this policy (Spencer, 1997). As it was already mentioned, Britain was unwilling to limit the immigration from the Old Commonwealth and at the same time, reluctant to formulate any openly racially-discriminatory restrictions. Thus,

uniqueness of the English “race” also demanded the insistence on the preservation of its purity. These perceptions proved important later in political debates about immigration and settlement from West Indies or South Asia (Rich, 1986).

¹³ As Kay and Miles poignantly point out: “On this racialized criterion of skin colour, all Central Eastern European populations (or “stock”), whatever other negatively evaluated characteristics they were believed to possess, were considered to be more suitable than the population of the Caribbean islands, not only as a labour force but also as members of the British nation” (1992: 234).

despite the official equal status of Commonwealth citizens, not all of them were equally desired as immigrants, and preferences fell strongly along the colour lines long before the “race problem” was spelled out.

The turning point for the immigration debate in terms of problematisation of “race” was what became known as Notting Hill “race riots” of 1958¹⁴. The 1958 riots between “white” working class people and immigrants in Notting Hill in London and Nottingham, were interpreted as “race riots”, and the political conflict became defined along the skin colour lines. The politicisation of “race” reached a climax during these riots, and in an attempt to depoliticise “race” the two main parties agreed to stop competing over these themes for a little while (Bertossi, 2007). The disturbances prompted the demands for immigration controls, which were understood as vital in order to preserve peace and harmony. Cyril Osborne, a Conservative MP wrote: “To bring the problem into this country with our eyes open is doing the gravest disservice to our grandchildren, who will curse us for our lack of courage” (Bleich 2003:44). As a result, the introduction of first restrictions in 1962 was not seen as a natural consequence of decolonisation, but rather a fear of “coloured” immigration. Tory Home Secretary Butler declared that “the Bill is drafted so that there is no racial discrimination”, but elsewhere also admitted that “its aim is primarily social and its restrictive effect is intended to, and would in fact operate on coloured people almost exclusively” (quoted in Joppke, 1999: 108).

The response to the 1962 Act predictably was not all favourable. Sections of the press as well as a number of Labour party politicians were highly critical of it, especially on the grounds of it being racially biased. The bill was seen as racist not only because it was a response to public statements about the need to preserve Britain as a “white” nation, but also because it did not restrict Irish migration which was very considerable at the time (Foot 1965: 139-40). The Hugh Gaitskell, the Leader of the Labour party led a particularly strong attack on the legislation while it was still a bill in Parliament for its implicit merger of race and immigration (Patterson, 1969; Solomos, 1993). Gaitskell denounced the proposed legislation

¹⁴ The riots started on the 30 of August, when a group of white youth attacked a white woman, married to Jamaican man. Later, several hundreds of white people attacked the houses of West Indian residents, the disturbances continued for almost a week.

as a “miserable, shameful, shabby bill” which was “a plain anti-colour measure” (cited in Bleich 2003: 45). As Bleich claims Labour “loosened all of its rhetorical and procedural canons in an effort to sink this project” (2003: 45), with no success, though.

Parts of the Labour leadership felt guilty about the party’s submission to the Tory anti-immigration legislation of 1962. In a way, it was also a disenchantment with the sense of British tolerance. Until the 1962 legislation, Britain could pride itself on being open and tolerant towards immigrants (despite some earlier facts denting this self image, be it the responses to Irish economic migrants or Jewish refugees), the increasing tensions on racial grounds showed the opposite. However, this opposition to immigration controls was not unremitting and the situation did not change significantly with the Labour party’s electoral victory in 1964. Hardly surprising so, as immediately after the 1962 Act was passed, there was a considerable outcry questioning its effectiveness in stopping “coloured” immigration, when in power, the Labour party had to deal with it.

So, after the 1964 elections, Labour quickly stepped back on its promises to repeal the legislation passed by their political opponents which closed the door to co-nationals from colonies. At the same time, it was keen on removing “race” from the political and electoral agenda and to forestall the “race dilemma” that could be observed in the USA. As Home Secretary Frank Soskice summarised the rationale behind the new legislation: “it is far better to put this Bill on the Statute Book now, before social stresses and ill-will have the chance of corrupting and distorting our relationships” (quoted in Joppke, 1999: 226).

The event that boosted the political consensus on the need to depoliticise “race” were political campaigns by Tory politicians who tried to politically benefit from explicit racist propaganda. In the Smethwick affair, in 1964, a safe Labour seat was lost to a Tory candidate who used explicitly anti-immigration and racist campaign. One of the slogans commonly heard during the campaign was “If you want a nigger for a neighbour, vote Labour”, which the Tory candidate himself called “a manifestation of popular feeling” (Layton-Henry, 1980). As many analysts show, the Smethwick events helped to shift political debate and attitudes towards emphasis on strict controls on “coloured” immigration in both parties (Layton-Henry, 1980; Solomos, 1993).

The introduction of exceptions from immigration controls for the “kith and kin”, the strong reliance on the *ius sanguini* of the 1968 and 1971 legislations also did not help to whitewash the immigration policy from its racist tint. A Tory politician justified the “grandfather clause” referring to the responsibility to the concept of “diaspora” and the need to recognise “special and residual obligation towards them” which could not be considered as racial discrimination (quoted in Joppke, 1999:110). This was not incorrect in theory, but in fact encouraged predominantly white immigration. During the election campaign of 1970, Tories pledged to halt “large-scale permanent immigration to Britain (Solomos, 1993; Joppke, 1999), which was realised by the 1971 legislation and the introduction of the notion of “patrials”. Based on the same principle as the grandfather clause, it made the re-emigration of white Commonwealth settlers a priority. In the decade between 1961 and 1971 the primary “coloured” immigration from (former) colonies was brought to a halt, allowing potentially millions of white Commonwealth citizens to settle in Britain without any restriction under the “grandfather” and then patriality clause. At the same time, those non-patrials were almost sure to be “coloured”. Thus, even if immigration policy was presented as neutral, and Britain was introducing restrictions on entry that many other countries had already had, British immigration policy could not escape the stigma of racism, since the fear of “racial disharmony” and the ensuing need to limit the inflow of “coloured” immigrants was the main motivation behind the restrictions, whereas the majority of “white” Commonwealth citizens could still enjoy the right of abode in Britain. As Joppke noted: “The lesson had to be that without a safe base for citizenship, the curse of racism could not be shed”, (1996: 110).

As already mentioned, both major parties were keen on depoliticising “race”. The attempt was successful in the sense of eliminating “race” as the subject of political dispute or conflict between the main political players. But it does not mean that it was completely eradicated from the political debate. It remained in the form of anti-immigration rhetoric (since it was already established that immigration controls are about barring “coloured” immigrants); in the form of coded messages and more tongue-in-cheek language; in the recasting of “race” as “culture”. When it was difficult to see how immigration controls could be made tougher after 1968 Act, Enoch Powell, a Tory Shadow Cabinet politician, was spreading the message that even tougher controls were not enough to help the already existing “race problem” (Solomos, 1993: 67). In his most infamous and inflammatory “rivers of blood speech” he was trying to warn against the unparalleled inflow of “coloured” immigrants which he saw as an anticipation of the US-style racial conflict:

As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I seem to see “the River Tiber foaming with much blood”. The tragic and intractable phenomenon which we watch with horror on the other side of the Atlantic, but which there is interwoven with the history and existence of the States itself, is coming upon us here by our own volition and our own neglect (quoted in Solomos, 1993: 67).

It is interesting to see that while he accepted that the “race problem” of the US was rooted in the country’s history (of slavery), he was as if absolutely blind to Britain’s imperial past and the fact that all those people in the far away colonies were in fact the Crown’s subjects, while white immigration to these colonies was going on for a couple of centuries. Powell did not see immigration controls as sufficient, and claimed that repatriation of those already settled in Britain should be considered. As Solomos points out, his speech also acted as focus for those who called for action to facilitate repatriation (1993).

A trope that has become very pronounced in anti-immigration rhetoric was the image of the British people, increasingly “strangers” in their homeland:

They found their wives unable to obtain hospital beds in childbirth, their children unable to obtain school places, their homes and neighbourhoods changed beyond recognition, their plans and prospects for the future defeated (ibid).

On one hand, as Malik notes, his speech was seen as alien to “the culture of moderation, compromise and consensus that supposedly characterised the British polity” (1996: 191). The uproar caused by his speech cost him the place in the shadow cabinet. On the other, the press extensively discussed the issues covered by Powell in his speech well up the general election of 1970, which turned in a Conservative government again after a brief Labour break. The attempts to depoliticise “race” resulted in the elimination of references to “race” in election campaigns, in the 1980s and 1990s (Malik, 1996). At the same time, the Conservatives preserved the image of being “tough on race” (Malik, 1996) thanks, to a number of politicians infamous for their racist rhetoric (even if they often were isolated after such political pranks) as well as a modified, more tongue-in-cheek language. Thus, it does not mean that “race” has been completely eliminated from the immigration debate, it rather went underground – the case in point can be the 2005 Conservatives’ election campaign billboard parading a slogan: “It’s not racist to impose restrictions on immigration” and below “Are you thinking what we are thinking?” (Fomina, Frelak, 2008).

When outright racist remarks were deemed absolutely unacceptable, “race” was reformulated as a special understanding of “culture”. As a result, fundamentally racist reasoning can be here hidden by the culturalist façade. Indeed, when asked if he was a racist, Powell

maintained: “If by a racist you mean a man who despises a human being because he belongs to another race, or a man who believes that one race is inferior to another or that only one has the capacity for civilisation, then the answer is emphatically no” (quoted in Malik, 1996: 186). In this particular understanding, culture is something one is born into, something unchangeable and unacquirable. Thus Powell, a self-proclaimed non-racist, explained: “A West Indian or an Asian does not by being born in England become an Englishman. In law he becomes a United Kingdom citizen by birth; in fact he is a West Indian or an Asian”¹⁵ (quoted in Malik, 1996: 186). As Malik succinctly puts it: “Viewed in this fashion culture inherits the role of race in the nineteenth century, and history the power of biology” (1996: 186). In this understanding, Englishness is something that runs in one’s blood, and no amount of will, cultural and linguistic competence, years of residence and even the fact of being born in the country can let one become English. Thus, ultimately, “culture” is a matter of descent and, consequently, of biology. If one assumes that a political community needs some degree of cultural unity, such culturally deterministic view makes any sort of immigration other than “kith and kin” very disruptive and eventually catastrophic for the polity.

All in all, the issue of “race” has entered public policy discussions as well as later legislation for good. What is most striking, “race” from an issue that has defined immigration control discussions it has also developed into a term describing immigrant integration policies, with a number of legal acts being termed Race Relations Acts. The anti-immigration background of the early 1960s, and the passing of the first Act limiting immigration was a very important context for the passage of the first race relations legislation. As it was already described, the challenge of the Commonwealth immigration was defined in the terms of “race”, these terms were accepted by the liberal politicians and activists, as a result, the challenge of incorporation of immigrants was understood as ensuring good “race relations”. After the war there was a rising interest in “race” issues among both experts and politicians. The Labour party commissioned two reports on the issues of racism. Both of them recommended anti-discrimination legislation. Party literature also contained some statements against racial discrimination. Moreover, there was a number of private member bills introduced by Labour MPs, yet especially under the Conservative government (1951-64) they had no chance of getting through.

¹⁵ Disturbingly enough, this reasoning is not very different from the “This is their culture and we have to respect it” argument used by many advocates of multiculturalism. This was also noticed by Malik elsewhere, he claims that multiculturalism in fact has racist underpinning (2001).

To a large degree this was due to the influence coming from the United States. Many liberal political activists and experts understood the situation in Britain as analogous to the one in Northern America. Here the study of Swedish social scientist Gunnar Myrdal on race relations in the US (*The American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, 1944) appeared to be exceptionally influential. As early as in 1962, the Institute of Race Relations called for “A Myrdal for Britain while there was still time” (Bleich, 2003:171) and commissioned a landmark study on race in the UK. Both politicians and experts were paying much attention to the developments in anti-discrimination legislation as well as race and ethnicity academic debate in America. The academic input from anthropologists and sociologists who started to investigate “race” defined around colour lines as a sociological concept, e.g. *Negroes in Britain* (Little 1948), *Coloured Quarter* (Banton 1955) justified the future policies. Labour lawyers sent their representative to study anti-racist provision in the US in 1964. About a decade later, the Home Secretary Jenkins flew to United States before submitting the landmark Race Relations Bill. All subsequent legislative acts aiming at effective incorporation of immigrant population were also called Race Relations Acts. What is more, thanks to a particular interpretation by courts, the legal definition of “race” encompassed ethnic, national, cultural and even religious differences (when a religious groups is also an ethnic group, which includes Sikhs and Jews, but not Muslims), as it was the case where thanks to a particular interpretation of race relations legislation a Sikh boy who was allowed to wear his turban as part of his school uniform (for a discussion see Barry, 2001). Anti-racism also developed in the way, as to include ethnic, cultural as well as religious difference, as for example radical Muslims’ protests against Salman Rushdie and his book burnings were portrayed as anti-racist and progressive by British MPs Keith Vaz or Bernie Grant (Solomos, 1993). In this way, the conflation of culture and “race” was characteristic not only for conservatives but also for progressives.

In fact, anti-racism is also a very important context for the discussion on the immigrant incorporation in Great Britain. Orwellian decency and tolerance became fundamental characteristics of the British self-image, for both left and right. National identity understood in this way not only helped deny any accusations of racism by insisting on the historically and almost biologically encoded sense of justice, as it was put by a conservative newspaper: “We are a sovereign country, also a rather descent, humane country which owes nobody an apology for the treatment of black or brown people. Orwellian decency runs very deep in the

British” (quoted in Malik, 1996: 191). Nor it simply evoked a deep sense of guilt, and a need for making up for the past wrongs among the more left-leaning activists and politicians. The discourse on the Britishness has managed to incorporate antiracism itself into the British national identity and even to “appropriate antiracist themes for chauvinistic ends” (Malik, 1996: 191). British culture is often paraded as superior to others exactly because of its innate tolerance and antiracist stance, also by rightwing politicians with rather murky credentials such as already mentioned Norman Tebbit, the father of the cricket test.¹⁶

Even though, for a period of time, antiracism and multiculturalism were two different and competing approaches to the challenge of diversity in Britain, by 1990s they became strongly intertwined. Rhetorically, multiculturalism won, but it became strongly informed by antiracism in terms of claims and policy solutions, and institutional infrastructure, a camp of advocates and activists. In the end, both antiracism and multiculturalism became consequently incorporated into the understanding of the British national identity.

As I tried to show, British multiculturalism cannot be fully understood and appreciated without paying attention to the role of the notion of “race” in the debates on immigration and immigrant incorporation. The attempts to depoliticise “race”, to prevent it from becoming a socially divisive issue paradoxically resulted in anchoring it strongly to the understanding of the challenges of immigrants integration in Britain and consequently to proposing policy solutions. At the same time, due to the fact that “race” is not an objective empirical phenomenon, and can be understood differently, including skin colour, ethnicity, culture, many race equality policy solutions were underpinned by cultural relativism that ultimately earned the British multiculturalism much criticism.

The negative coupling of immigration and multiculturalism

Many scholars have pointed to the vast incongruence between Britain’s ever more restrictive immigration policy and a very pro-active immigrant integration policy (Favell, 1999; Layton-Henry, 1997; Solomos, 1993; Husband, 2005). Indeed taking into account Britain’s “obsession” with immigration numbers, (Fomina, Frelak, 2008) its celebratory approach to

¹⁶ In this discourse antiracism is cast with anti-fascism and used to express xenophobic, especially anti-German sentiments, as it was the case with Norman Tebbit and Nicholas Radley, two conservative ministers who warned of “jackboots marching across Europe” in the wake of German unification ensued by the rise of fascist groups. By contrasting Britain to Germany, they could take pride in Britain as the epitome of tolerance and anti-racism. (Malik, 1996).

diversity seems almost paradoxical. One cannot help wondering how Britain can one moment be so proud of its diversity resulting precisely from immigration, and next moment indulge itself in enumerating the perils of immigration and demand a zero-immigration policy. As if immigrants already here are a source of great benefit, yet the arrival of ten more immigrants would tumble down the carefully crafted harmony of the diverse society. Yet, this negative coupling of immigration and integration was the outcome of a political consensus between the two major parties on the need to depoliticise “race”.

Immigration has become one of the most salient concerns of the British voter (Fomina and Frelak, 2008). The island mentality,¹⁷ a sense of being already “overcrowded” result in the British population’s fear of large numbers of immigrants¹⁸ and (whereas what this “large number” is basically any number) have been prevalent among the British society for decades. As Ward and Humphrey commented in 1974:

“The island people are peculiarly prone to persuade themselves that they are overcrowded, and when words like ‘invasion’ and ‘Asian flood’ appear in the morning newspapers they fear their standards of living will deteriorate and their material expectations be that much harder to realize (quoted in Fomina and Frelan, 2008).

The settlement of visibly different persons, even if they shared the same legal status as the rest of the population in Britain has always evoked negative reactions. The arrival and settlement of immigrants who, in the words of Reginald Maulding, a former Home Secretary, “in appearance, habits, religion, and culture, were totally different from us” (quoted in Evans, 1983: 21) started to be perceived as a threat even when the numbers were completely insignificant, and not only among the conservative sections of the population. Labour backbenchers wrote to Prime Minister in reaction to the arrival of *Windrush*¹⁹: “An influx of coloured people domiciled here is likely to impair the harmony, strength and cohesion of our public and social life and to cause discord and unhappiness among all concerned” (quoted in Marr, 2008). Thus, the *modus vivendi* of the British political elite’s responses to the Third World migration was the depoliticisation of “race”, banning it from mainstream politics. After heated debates, the consensus was reached which assumed that the only way to contain social

¹⁷ The fact that Britain is an island is often invoked in the immigration debate even today, which is rather peculiar, since continental states have no less expandable borders than washed-around-by-the sea Britain.

¹⁸ As Layton-Henry put is: “The perception was that of an already overcrowded island with limited resources facing a potentially limitless stream of immigrants from the Indian subcontinent, rather than that of a dynamic and growing economy held back by a lack of young, fit workers” (Layton-Henry, 1985: 98).

¹⁹ The *Empire Windrush* ship arrived in Britain in 1948 carrying 492 passengers from Jamaica. They were the first group of West Indian immigrants after the WWII.

order was to limit immigration and then introduce some measures aiding the situation of “coloured” immigrants.

Ever since the Smethwick Affair political elites, including those more liberal minded understood, that they simply could not afford being too liberal and “soft” on immigration. As Richard Crossman, a leading Labour politician once famous for opposing the Conservatives’ immigration bill as a “shameful piece of colour bar legislation”, admitted: “Ever since the Smethwick election it has been quite clear that immigration can be the greatest potential voteloser for the Labour Party if we are seen to be permitting a flood of immigrants to come and blithe the central areas of our cities (quoted in Cloake and Tudor, 2001: 59). And Richard Crossman explained the further consensus saying that the Labour Party felt they had to “out-tramp” the Tories by making their policy a bipartisan policy (in Pilkington, 2003: 227).

As Spencer explains, the bi-partisan consensus was grounded in the belief that the precondition for “good race relations” was convincing white people that the entry of black and Asian people was firmly controlled, otherwise, their hostility to them would be only aggravated (1994). This threat was phrased as a concern with social order. (Favell, 1999; Layton-Henry, 1992; Solomos, 1993). The justification for limiting the settlement of immigrants of the “less desired” ethnic background was twisted: since the majority of British population is biased towards people of certain origins, their settlement may result in racial tensions and violence, thus in order to prevent any tension it is necessary to curb their immigration. Part of the reason for this was the influence coming from America, which was struggling with its “race” problem at the time.

The essence of the new consensus was well formulated in the famous maxim coined by Roy Hattersley, a Labour Party politician in 1965: “Without integration limitation is inexcusable, without limitation integration is impossible” (quoted in Husband, 2005: 130). In this way, the success of integration was strongly coupled with the numbers of immigrants in a negative way: the less, the better. The two policy areas started to develop in an significant symbiosis. The mid-1960s saw the first legislation limiting immigration as well as the first legislation counteracting discrimination. What is more, when the Labour returned to power and issued the 1965 White Paper, it not only preserved the immigration controls so criticised by the Labour when in the opposition, but also introduced new limitations coupled, however, with integration measures. It turned out that it was easier to be liberally-oriented party while in

opposition, than when in government. A sense of obligation, even guilt toward its postcolonial immigrants has not been absent among the British elites, and it was channelled into the build-up of a liberal race-relations regime.

The circumstances of the passage of the 1968 Race Relations Act point even stronger to the complex relation between immigration controls and immigrant incorporation policies. In this case, one could say, the act was introduced to a large extent as a consequence of Powell's inflammatory anti-immigration and racist speeches and the fear of violent reactions that they could stir. As Favell writes, both parties tried to distance themselves from Powell's words and "[a] chorus of liberal condemnation - and affirmation of the progressive toleration of ethnic minorities - followed" (Favell, 2001a: 106), culminating in the legislation that banned incitement to race hatred and discrimination in employment among other things.

By the 1970s it has become a routine to treat immigration policy as „secondary” to „that basic problem of community relations”, in the words of a Tory Home Secretary Reginald Maudling (quoted in Joppke, 1999: 111). It was implied that only firm controls could be conducive to good community relations. This somewhat schizophrenic balancing between a strong anti-immigration rhetoric and a pragmatic support for multiculturalism was particularly visible among the Conservatives. For example, after the publication of the report on multicultural education in the 1980s, despite Tory education minister, Keith George's claims that there was “precious little evidence of any racist prejudice” among teachers, and Norman Tebbit scorching attack on “anti-sexist, anti-racist, gay, lesbian, CND rubbish at school”, the Tory government pledged its support for multicultural education. Chris Patten, the schools minister of the day, emphasises that anti-racist training programmes and multicultural education had to be embraced even by “all-white” schools, as otherwise they might become a breeding ground for racism (Malik, 1996: 189-190). As we will see later, the Tory government was supportive of a number of multiculturalist policies, despite its seeming reserve with which the whole issue was treated.

This seeming incongruence of the policies of entry and politics of diversity is present in more recent developments. The conflation of immigration and asylum policies as well as the already well known “good race relations” justification are illustrated by the way the government rationalized the first explicit asylum legislation in 1992: “strengthening our system of controlling entry and excluding people not entitled to be here. Good race relations

are heavily dependent on strict immigration control” (quoted in Joppke, 1999: 129). Michael Howard the Conservative Home Secretary repeated this formula a few years later: “This country has a proud record on good race relations. I am determined to do everything that I can to maintain that record. Firm control of immigration is vital to achieve that objective” (Michael Howard, Conservative Home Secretary, in 1995 (quoted in Spencer, 1994:74).

The New Labour has been very keen on promoting the idea of a new Britain that is future-oriented and not only sits comfortably with diversity but also “celebrates” it (McGhee, 2005). The “celebrating” of diversity was among other things performed by funding multicultural education, ethnic organisations and multicultural events and festivals. In their rhetoric they have also tried to establish a clear blue water between themselves and the Tories on immigration and asylum issues. Yet, the 1998 White Paper *Fairer, Faster and Firmer* (Home Office, 1998) bore resemblance to the Thatcherite era not only in its title (the famous “firm but fair” Thatcherite slogan). The main strategy behind the White Paper as well as the eventual 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act was “deterrence”. It was important to show that Britain was not “a soft touch” on prospective asylum seekers, and to “deter” those who would try to lodge ungrounded applications or those who might apply for asylum in a different country. Since there was an assumption that the majority of asylum seekers were just economic migrants, the idea behind the legislation was to make Britain as unattractive for them as possible. As McGhee argues, the result of this legislation was the “formalisation” of suspicion towards asylum seekers, which had sweeping consequences for the debate on asylum in the press and defining the “asylum problem” in Britain (2005). Fekete also notes, by making “deterrence” the fundamental principle of new legislation, the state has sent out a signal that “anti-asylum prejudice is socially acceptable” (quoted in McGhee, 2005: 68). Considerable sections of the press reinterpreted the message portraying asylum seekers and refugees as “bogus”, i.e. illegal and economic migrants rather than people fleeing political persecution, wars or natural disasters. As Joppke noted:

The cleavages and discursive metaphors of immigration policy became exactly mirrored in asylum policy: asylum advocates calling racist the government’s assumption that most refugees were economic migrants, and the government defending its get-tough approach towards asylum seekers as in the interest of firm immigration control and good race relations” (1999: 128).

However, all the attempts to depoliticise race resulted in making immigration one of the most inflammatory issues. As Jim Rose aptly put it, the emphasis on the need for control “helped to create the anxieties it was intended to calm, with the curious result that public concern was eventually prayed in aid of policies that had helped to create it” (quoted in Spencer, 1994: 75).

And if the rationale behind limiting immigration from the colonies was to produce a proper atmosphere for “good race relations” and integration, it failed because of persistent politisation of the issue of immigration.

Britain and Europe

As it was already said, despite loosing the Empire, Britain remained a nation with imperial aspirations and a global outlook. These global pretensions as well as a general suspicion of any European alliances helps to explain why Britain was trying to remain on the margins of Europe for most of the 20th century. The road from “head of a vast Empire” to reluctant integration within a European Community was not a smooth one. The story of the troubled relationship between Britain and Europe has been well documented (Pilkington, 2003; Powell, 2002; Favell, 2001a; Cohen, 1994). Here I would like to focus on what it meant for immigration and immigrant incorporation debate.

One of the reasons of Britain’s reluctance to join the EU was a sense of compromising the obligations towards its former empire and a situation where European citizens would replace the citizens of the Commonwealth in having rights to enter and settle in Britain.

The indulgence in its “splendid isolation” predictably influenced the way British immigration and immigrant incorporation policies developed. What is more, the course of their development also reinforced Britain’s sense of exceptionalism and superiority. The conviction that “Britain has got it right” with regard to the approach to immigrant incorporation in contrast to all other European countries has permeated the multiculturalism debate for many decades. The Britain-centrism of the academic research in immigration was reinforced by the proliferation of British cultural studies that have provided a specific language and policy framework for immigration and integration debates.

In fact, as Favell aptly emphasises, discussions of pan-European experiences are exceptional in the British literature on immigration (2001), as if the colonial and post-colonial not to mentioned immigration experiences and challenges were exceptional for Britain. If, however, other states are mentioned, it is usually in order to provide a contrasting background for the relative success of British policies.

The status quo with regard to multiculturalism “race relations” is often criticised from both conservative standpoint, where critics like to indulge themselves into ranting about excesses of political correctness, as well as from progressive positions where critics insufficiency of the existing solutions and are determined to find racism in every aspect of public life. Yet, for both sides Britain becomes the paragon of virtue in terms of treating “race” and culture issues, once there is Europe in the horizon²⁰. It is striking how a mixture of Europhobic sentiments and jingoistic complacency makes even most fervent right-wing politicians praise the British achievements in this area and warn against any EU encroachments in the British status quo due to Europe’s alleged inferiority, inexperience and incapability with regard to immigrant integration. This is how Michael Howard, the Tory Home Office Minister commented on the plans to harmonise the anti-discrimination legislation throughout the EU:

Many of the proposed measures are unnecessary and often would be counter-productive. The UK already has effective legislation. It would mean changing our laws in a very significant way for reasons that do not have much to do with the circumstances we encounter in Britain. We have a longer history of laws affecting race relations than almost any other country in the EU, more comprehensive legislation than any other country, and better race relations than almost any other country. (*The Financial Times*, 25-26 Nov 1995).

This opposition to harmonisation of anti-discrimination legislation cannot be simply explained by certain enduring ideas about British insularity, exceptionalism and grounded in history scepticism towards everything European, as Miles would want it (1993). What is striking here, is the unison of voices from the right and the left as well as generally “progressive” (Favell, 1998) terms used to defend the British steering clear from any harmonisation of legislation. Europe has been seen as an intruder that was trying to impose its regulations on Britain, which would set the cause of the British “race relations” twenty years back. Once again, we see a political consensus over the issue of immigrant incorporation policy framework among mainstream political forces that is dependant on an agreement about strict immigration controls.

The situation has changed up to a point after the 2001 “race riots”, but until then Britain saw itself as a missionary that has to convert the rest of Europe to its way of dealing with

²⁰ Consider for example a comment by a well-know journalist and a spokesperson for anti-racism and multiculturalism issues, Yasmin Alibhai-Brown: “When you travel in Europe you are not protected by the Race Relations Act. Travel in Europe can often be a traumatic experience for Britain’s ethnic minorities - even when they have British passports. You could be hassled by an immigration officer, the police or racists in the country you are visiting. Unfortunately there’s not a lot that can be done to help you from here...’ (quoted in Favell, 2001b: 32).

immigrant incorporation. Indeed, as Favell pointed out, Britain was very active in pushing for new anti-discrimination measures in the Amsterdam Treaty precisely because it was seeing it as an opportunity to “see Europe buy British-style race relations and anti-racist thinking” (Favell, 2001b: 34). For the same reason, Britain boycotted the Commission-sponsored Forum for Migrants and set up a competing Standing Conference on Racial Equality in Europe in 1990 (Bernie Grant Archive). Britain also famously opted out the Schengen Agreement, justifying its decision by its island status, and has a right to opt out from any EU asylum and immigration legislation it dislikes.

Political and academic debates usually shape each other, and it is not my intention to decide which is more important. But it is certain that one of the important embodiments of Britain’s exceptionalism as well as one of the factors that enhanced it concerns academic research on immigration and immigrant incorporation. As Favell emphasised, the majority of British landmark texts in this area are very Britain-centred (2001b). Indeed, such works as *The Coloured Quarter* (Banton 1955), *Race, Community and Conflict* (Rex and Moore 1967), *Between Two Cultures* (Watson 1977), *The Empire Strikes Back* (CCCS 1982), *There ‘Aint No Black in the Union Jack* (Gilroy 1987), *Race and Racism in Contemporary Britain* (Solomos 1989), *Not Easy Being British* (Modood 1992), *Racialized Boundaries* (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992), *Young, Female and Black* (Mirza 1992), *Cartographies of Diaspora* (Brah 1993), *New Ethnicities and Urban Culture* (Back 1995) are based on the material almost exclusively from Britain, and normatively and politically engaged with the British reality. Conceptual and theoretical frameworks developed in these works have not been tested in any other European state context, as if Britain’s encounter with (post-colonial) immigration was a phenomenon one of its kind. As Favell aptly notes, “they have not checked whether their formulations have in fact been exclusively determined by their narrowly British (or British Commonwealth) contextual origins, and might thereby be fatally limited to this situation” (Favell, 2001).

I have already discussed how important “race” has become for the academic research and for British policies. Terms related to immigration have become very politicised. The way people use the terms “immigrant”, “black”, “minority” distinguishes adherents of different approaches to immigrant incorporation and different political attitudes, in contrast to what was happening in Europe. As a result, British academics with the help of “race relations” activists developed their own conceptual apparatus, setting British debate aside from the rest

of Europe. Just after the WWII the word ‘immigrants’ was an objective term without an imbedded meaning. However, due to the anti-immigrant propaganda that started in 1950s and was directed at a particular sort of immigrants, those who were not white, the word “immigrant” has acquired a racist tune to it. There is also a difference in the use of the word “minority”. If in the rest of Europe it has predominantly meant ethnic and linguistic groups of European origin within the citizen population, e.g. Hungarians in Romania, or Ukrainians in Poland, in Britain it was exclusively used to escape the unloved term “immigrant”. In general, the language used to describe and theorise the situation in the wake of post-WWII immigration in Britain has become very hermetic, specific for its own academic and political debates, policy solutions, thus putting Britain aside its European obvious points of reference and comparison, such as France or the Netherlands, both struggling with the challenges of post-colonial migration.

The emergence of the specific language and theoretical framework is largely due to the pervasiveness of British cultural studies. The British cultural studies originated in the 1970s and have become very influential in the 1980s and 1990s and are popular until today. Their pervasiveness is what puts Britain aside from other European countries, and even the US, where such colossuses of cultural studies as Homi Bhabha, Guyatri Spivak, Stuart Hall or bell hooks belong to literary studies departments and not to sociology of immigration. The specific language and understanding of immigration and immigrant incorporation issues has been internalised by multiculturalism activists and NGO workers, teachers and academics, public officials, politicians, social workers. For many of them it was the result of their education. As Favell aptly notes: “In European terms, their unmistakable language of anti-racism and multiculturalism – of race and blackness, of the resistance of post-colonial culture, of struggles of identity and difference, of the politics of representation and articulating voices – is very specific to Britain and its evolving race relations debates” (2001: 36). The development of cultural studies has shaped not only the academic debate, but also political debate and policy framework. After all, many graduates who have internalised this specific languages, become policy experts, educationalists, as well as academic researchers.

Favell (2001) is rightly critical of the “parochialism” of the British race and ethnicity studies and especially of the British cultural studies turn in the academic analysis of race and ethnicity, where in the age of globalisation, transnationalism and increasing interdependency of European states it is not possible to talk about Britain as a self-contained society. Indeed,

on one hand, the exclusiveness and superiority towards the rest of Europe of the British race and ethnicity studies makes meaningful comparative studies very difficult. On the other, the overt politisation of academic circles and their scepticism towards “conventional disciplines and rigid scholarly standards” (2001: 37) lead to compromising quality academic work in favour of political activism, or in Favell’s words, “unapologetically hijacking academic means to political ends” (2001: 37).

The persistence of the old paradigm limits the opportunities to find adequate solutions to the challenge of new migrations, especially the migrations from the new EU member state, who may also face discrimination which, however, cannot be explained by the “pervasive racism of the British society and institutions”.

Conclusion

British multiculturalist policies did not develop in a vacuum, and so their formulation and development and ambiguities that accompany them cannot be understood without an excursion into history of decolonisation and immigration policy in Britain. Without British Empire and the way it was dissolved, there would not have been contemporary Great Britain, a multiethnic, culturally diverse state, as well as multiculturalist policies it has adopted to tackle this new diversity.

Britain’s farewell to its empire was never a one, decided move, but rather a gradual, often unwilling process. For decades the issues of citizenship and belonging were unresolved, as a result, a coherent and fair immigration policy could not be formulated. Despite the fact that all Commonwealth citizens had an equal status, not all of them were equally desired as immigrants. The debates on immigration became *de facto* debates on whether Britain had to be a land of white people only or it not. As a consequence, the main challenge of immigrant incorporation became understood as establishing good “race relations”. One can only speculate if immigration policy debate would have been so much racialised if Britain had introduced immigration controls to all its ex-colonies and dominions immediately after their independence. I am inclined to believe “race” would not have become the frame through which all immigration and immigrant integration policies are interpreted.

Despite the fact that both main parties were keen on depoliticising “race”, it became the kernel of immigrant incorporation policies understood as establishing “good race relations”. The US experience certainly played an important role here. Multiculturalism inherited “race relations” approach and infrastructure initiate earlier. Since “race” is an empty banner, in the British legislation it came to mean skin colour, and other biological differences, as well as national, ethnic, cultural and religious differences. Due to this, it became possible to call any criticism of cultural practices “racist”, which helps explain the large degree of cultural relativism that characterised British multiculturalist policies.

The fact that political, economic and social rights were bound to subjecthood and not to national citizenship put the Commonwealth immigrants in a special position. On the one hand, it empowered them, in comparison to immigrants in other countries, Commonwealth immigrants were already granted these rights, at least formally, and the struggle for equality was focused on the execution of already existing rights. “Race relations already assumed the existence of a number of separate groups between which it was necessary to establish good relations”. This was also enhanced by the formulation of immigrants as ethnic minorities in Britain (in contrast to other European states, e.g. France or Germany), as a result, it was easier to justify multiculturalist special measures aimed at “black and ethnic minorities” than at the immigrant (and thus inherently alien) population. Yet, a mixture of post-colonial guilt and paternalism, a sense of responsibility for the former co-nationals and a belief that they need to be treated with a special care also strongly influenced multiculturalist policies. The conception of immigrants as disadvantaged groups also helped to marginalise them. Besides, immigration remains one of the hottest political issues, which is certainly not conducive to immigrant integration.

A vast amount of multiculturalist policies was implemented during the long decade of the Tory’s “reign” which is less surprising when one takes into consideration a very conservative, deterministic understanding of culture as something inherited and immutable. As Powell emphasised, a West Indian is a West Indian and in no way he can become an Englishman. The only logical response of a liberal democratic state in such a situation was special treatment of immigrant groups. This also explains why Malik (2002) criticised multiculturalism as being racist.

Euroscepticism and self-righteousness in the area of immigrant incorporation have mutually reinforced themselves in Britain. The academia helped to create a specific language to frame the discussions and policy solutions, making the British approach even more outstanding, different from other modes of incorporation of immigrants. At the same time, this sense of being different does not prevent British politicians, policy-makers, activists and scientists promote the British multiculturalist approach as the best way to approach diversity.

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