Race in Britain: Inequality, Identity, Belonging
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Questions about the place of diversity in British society have acquired a new urgency, not least in light of the vote to leave the European Union. In the year that followed the Brexit referendum, reported hate crimes rose by 29%, prompting fears that the vote had given new license to simmering feelings of racial resentment (Achiume 2018). Scholars typically define ‘racism’ as the belief that groups can be defined by certain innate characteristics (Murji and Solomos 2015). There are numerous examples of recent cases in which victims were abused for being ‘illegal’, or told to ‘go home’, regardless of their citizenship status (Jones et al 2017). The beliefs that underlie these incidents of hate crime – that it is possible to tell whether someone is ‘truly’ British on the basis of superficial markers such as skin-colour, ethnic dress or accent alone – reveal the enduring power of racial thinking in society today.

Yet race isn’t the only lens through which minorities in Britain have been understood. As migrants from across the world have come to settle in Britain, and as communities, policymakers and popular sentiment have adapted to their presence, a range of competing discourses have emerged, to characterise diversity in different ways. Cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, tolerance and nativism are just a few of the prevalent discourses for understanding and discussing diversity in Britain.

These discourses exist alongside one another and contend for public prominence, in part because they speak to different experiences and address different issues around diversity. Alongside the challenges already faced by minorities in cultivating a sense of belonging in Britain, the white-British majority has had to rethink its identity and institutions in relation to diversity. Different discourses offer majorities and minorities alike a range of resources with which to grapple with these challenges. In turn, as particular discourses gain prominence, they help to shape broader social outcomes, such as inequalities in sentencing within the justice system or enduring pay gaps between majority and minority communities.

Diversity has also generated significant creativity: new identities and modes of belonging have taken shape in response to the challenges faced by both minorities and majorities. For example, certain neighbourhoods have come to be marked by rich local traditions of cooperation or openness, which transcend the confines of popular discourses around racial or cultural boundaries. Elsewhere, segregation has deepened, as minorities have shunned difficult encounters with the majority or as white-British citizens have fled rapidly diversifying neighbourhoods. In both cases, new identities have been shaped as life in Britain has transformed and been transformed by various minority groups. All the while, on the national stage, new conversations have opened up around what it means to be British in relation to enduring questions of race, ethnicity and diversity.

The arrival of the Empire ‘Windrush’ from the Caribbean heralded the start of modern migration to Britain, and ever since there has been persistent debate about the place of ‘otherness’ within British society (Lunn 1989; Naidoo 1998). This debate is ongoing and becoming increasingly complex as it reflects a growing range of experiences, issues and perspectives. ‘Diversity’ no longer holds a single or unambiguous meaning for the British public. Today, many British citizens consider it to be both a source of strength and pride, as well as a persistent challenge.

‘Diversity has also generated significant creativity: new identities and modes of belonging have taken shape in response to the challenges faced by both minorities and majorities’
Section 2. Contested Histories

Migration in Britain is closely entangled with Britain’s imperial and political history, with the roots of contemporary migration dynamics often reaching back hundreds of years. Migrants have always faced discrimination and prejudice, though the extent of these attitudes and the ways in which they are expressed and justified have changed throughout the years. In the decades following World War II, beliefs in the innate racial or spiritual inferiority of migrants gave way to attitudes that targeted the cultures and beliefs of migrants instead, often treating these as fixed characteristics (Barker 1982; Barkan 1992; Gilroy 2013). In response to these exclusions, migrants have adopted a range of strategies that have likewise transformed over time. These range from a close reliance on existing networks of family and friends, to the cultivation of common ‘non-white’ political identities, or the active embracing of diverse cultural identities as part of a multicultural nation.

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2.1 From Early Migration to Windrush

Migration in Britain is often discussed and presented as a post-war phenomenon, sparked by the arrival of Commonwealth migrants (Naidoo 1998). This often contributes to the enduring perception that Britain is not traditionally a nation of immigrants (Baucom 1999; Cesarani 1992; Jones et al. 2017). It is true that, following World War II, migration to Britain not only increased significantly but also became more diverse, in terms of where migrants originated from. However, migration has always been a significant feature of British history, from the early arrival of the Celts, to that of the Romans, Anglo-Saxons, and Normans in subsequent eras.

Although there is evidence that African soldiers were present as part of Roman rule in Britain, the earliest substantial records of non-white migrants emerge in the 16th Century. These people were often former slaves of other nations or – from the start of the British slave trade in 1562 – of Britain itself. Other early migrants were brought to Britain as interpreters, domestic servants or prostitutes. Their presence was often seen as a threat to British public order, as evidenced by two campaigns led by Queen Elizabeth I to round up and deport ‘divers blackmoors brought into this realme’ at the end of the 1500s (Innes 2000: 8). Other early immigrant groups met with different reactions. For example, Protestant Huguenots fleeing persecution in France in the mid-1600s were widely welcomed, not least for the wealth and valuable artisanal skills that many of them possessed (Gwynn 2001). However, whilst 16th Century, working-class arrivals from Ireland were often stereotyped as ‘criminals’, their wealthier or aristocratic compatriots were often incorporated into the upper echelons of British society (Crymble 2018; Ohlmeyer 2012). There is also evidence of Gypsies living in Britain from as early as 1567. For centuries, Romani migrants worked as travelling farm labourers and traders, and were often treated as indispensable, even though they were met with mistrust and hostility for their itinerant way of life (Cressy 2018).

As British global influence grew in subsequent centuries, and the British Empire expanded, patterns of immigration to Britain increasingly came to be shaped by relations of trade, politics and empire. In turn, these patterns helped to shape migration into the 20th Century. Following a series of pogroms in Russia between 1880 and 1920, around 140,000 Jews fled to Britain. Most of these people had existing links to

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1 In this report, ‘migrants’ are all those who move to a particular place, such as the UK, while ‘immigrants’ refers specifically to those migrants who settle. The line between the two isn’t always clear – for instance, in the case of long-term sojourners – and, as such, the more encompassing term migrants is used in most instances.
the 46,000 Jews already living in the UK. These earlier Jewish settlers largely arrived as part of particular trade initiatives, or on the basis of longstanding commercial relationships which sustained Britain’s domestic and overseas enterprises (Godley 2001). Other groups followed similar patterns. Irish migrants fleeing economic hardship often followed the trajectories of earlier Irish arrivals, and, collectively, the Irish were positioned as an ‘army’ of cheap labour for Britain and its colonies (Ghaill 2000; Howe 2002). Similarly, since the 19th Century, Somalis recruited for their seamanship on British trade and military ships have settled around British ports, often taking up subsequent employment as industrial labourers (Harris 2004). Britain’s port cities have also played home to other groups, such as Indian sailors who were initially employed on British ships but refused passage back home, or West African migrants, ranging from former slaves to the children of colonial elites (Adi 1998; Fisher 2006). This helped to shape these cities, and nearby industrial areas, into popular sites of settlement for 20th Century migrants, in turn.

For these and other early groups of migrants, Britain’s imperial ambitions and political entanglements played a powerful role in motivating, and sometimes even forcing, their move to Britain (Winder 2010). These early migrant groups faced shifting forms of discrimination – within the communities in which they lived and worked, and within the national press and in policy more broadly – often based around race and religion. In the aftermath of World War II, Britain was faced with a struggling economy, significant labour shortages – estimated as at least one million (Kay and Miles 1988: 215) – and an urgent need to rebuild. To support this effort, migration from countries within the Empire and later from across the Commonwealth, was actively encouraged. Britain advertised heavily for positions in the NHS and across the public sector. The arrival of around 800 Caribbean migrants on the ship Empire Windrush in June 1948 has been seen as the symbolic start of an influx of arrivals from the Empire and Commonwealth in the post-war period (Lunn 1989; Naidoo 1998). Meanwhile, shortly after Indian Independence in 1947, significant numbers of migrants started to arrive from South Asia. Between 1946 and 1951, a substantial population of displaced citizens from the Soviet Union were also recruited as ‘European Volunteer Workers’. They were seen by policymakers and by certain sections of the press to be more capable of assimilating and contributing to British ‘stock’ than those coming to Britain from the Empire and Commonwealth (Kay and Miles 1989). These post-war arrivals joined a population of thousands of others from the Empire and the Commonwealth who had arrived during World War II itself, to help the war effort (Fryer 1984).

2.2 migration in the postcolonial moment

Prior to 1948, those living in Britain’s overseas territories and in Britain itself shared the common legal status of ‘British subject’. Many who had grown up under British rule overseas understood themselves to be fundamentally British – a message repeated by British-run schools and by other colonial institutions. For new arrivals, Britain was often thought of as ‘the mother country’. (Webster 1998). To some scholars, policymakers and voices in the media at the time, these new arrivals in Britain were ‘dark strangers’ whose presence was seen as being fundamentally incompatible with British norms and values (Waters 1997). However, others welcomed them as fellow citizens. For instance, in reporting the arrival of the Empire Windrush, the London Evening Standard used the headline, ‘WELCOME HOME’ (quoted in Fryer 1984: 372).

In 1948, the British Nationality Act differentiated British citizenship from that of the Commonwealth for the first time. Those born in Britain itself, or in British colonies that had not yet gained independence, were granted the common citizenship status of ‘Citizenship of the United Kingdom and Colonies’. This meant that, throughout the 1940s and 50s, migrants from countries such as Jamaica or Kenya arrived in Britain as full British citizens. Meanwhile, the 1948 Act also allowed citizens of the newly-independent Commonwealth countries, such as Canada and India, to freely migrate to Britain and to acquire Citizenship of the United Kingdom and Colonies after one year of residence. Despite their equal, or nearly equal, status as citizens, both categories of immigrants often faced intense hostility upon arrival; in practice, their status as British citizens or as Commonwealth subjects did little to counter the widespread belief that people with black or brown skin could not be ‘truly British’.
These new arrivals often struggled to find housing and private sector employment on the basis of their race, and many faced everyday harassment, belittling and even violence (Fryer 1984). At the same time, certain industries were actively recruiting overseas workers as a means of driving down wages in response to dwindling profits, which in turn positioned these new arrivals in opposition to the existing labour force (Amin 2003; Hall et al 1978). Throughout the 1950s, race riots frequently broke out in cities such as Nottingham, Birmingham and London, including the 1958 Notting Hill riots where, for over a week, a mob of hundreds of white British residents ransacked the homes of Caribbean citizens and assaulted passers-by. These riots were driven by complex forces, including the resentment of certain segments of the white-British population to the presence of migrants, and the anger of some migrants over feelings of exclusion (Bagguley and Hussain 2012).

During this period, crime statistics revealed similarly complex patterns. For example, according to records, Irish, Commonwealth and colonial migrants were around 1.5 to 3.5 times more likely to commit violent crimes than the non-migrant population, with the Irish having the highest rates of offence. Reported incidents tended to be concentrated in certain domains – with Commonwealth and colonial migrants over-represented in domestic disputes and frequently under-represented in other areas. Likewise, offenders tended to be concentrated in certain geographic areas, often those marked by high levels of poverty (Bottoms 1967). However, national media and policy narratives tended to focus on migrant crime as if it were a uniform phenomenon, particularly perpetrated by non-white migrants, and offending rates were often exaggerated as being several times higher than they actually were – often by using manipulated statistics or by singling out the most shocking examples (ibid; Gutzmore 1983).

From the late 1940s onwards, there were growing calls for the Government to exercise greater control over ‘coloured immigration’, which were initially resisted but ultimately led to the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act (Solomos 1993). The Act restricted immigration from the Commonwealth and remaining colonies to people who already had existing connections to the UK, who would be granted work permits to enable them to migrate and settle. The required nature of ‘connection’ to the UK was left intentionally vague, leading to an unequal system whereby migrants from different of countries or backgrounds effectively faced different entry requirements and prospects (Hansen 2002; Karatani 2004). Migrants selected on the basis of their professional skills during this period often found that they were unable to obtain professional employment upon arrival in the UK, and instead moved into lower-skilled industries (BBC 2014). Meanwhile, the early 1960s also saw several former colonies in the Caribbean and East Africa gain independence. Many of those who had migrated to Britain as full citizens when their birth countries were still colonies suddenly found their British Citizenship rescinded, with their citizenships defaulting to those of their countries of birth. They were then required to apply for naturalisation, but since they had often lived in Britain for as long as two decades, many were unaware of this change in their citizenship status and hence did not apply (Couper and Santamaria 1984; Cesarani 2002) – which sowed the seeds for the 2018 ‘Windrush Scandal’.

Against the backdrop of these new restrictions, migration patterns shifted towards a greater emphasis on family reunification and ‘chain migration’, where settled migrants would either directly sponsor dependents abroad, or else help them to secure employment to support the application for a work permit. East African Asians also came to make up a larger share of immigration, as several hundreds of thousands continued to retain London-issued British passports that exempted them from the restrictions of the 1962 Act (Hansen 2002). Increasingly forceful ‘Africanisation’ policies in the recently independent countries of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda often lay behind these movements until, in 1968, the UK Government passed the second Commonwealth Immigrants Act, which restricted entry from the Commonwealth further, to those who were either born in the UK or who had at least one parent or grandparent who was born in the UK.

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2 In the data used by Bottoms, Commonwealth and colonial migrants have been grouped together as a single ‘commonwealth’ category – which would have been an accurate designation for the time of writing, but not so for all of the years to which the data pertains.
The two Commonwealth Immigrants Acts of the 1960s sparked a substantial outcry from politicians, minorities, activists and British subjects abroad. The Acts had collectively reversed the status of Commonwealth and colonial subjects as citizens of the UK, in response to the popular sentiment that these people did not truly belong to Britain. Those who opposed the legislation saw it as an undermining of the very institution of citizenship, in favour of a racialized, ‘whites-only’ ideal of British belonging (Hansen 2002).

In the following decade, these changes were consolidated by the 1971 Immigration Act. In an attempt to resolve some of the ambiguities around legal status, the new Act offered ‘indefinite leave to remain’ – but not citizenship – to all Commonwealth migrants residing in the UK. However, The Home Office did not keep records of those who were granted leave to remain and it neglected to issue migrants with any paperwork to confirm their new status (BBC 2018) – another contributing factor to the Windrush Scandal.

2.3 rivers of blood

As Britain’s migrant population grew, so too did anxieties around racial tensions. At times, these concerns were framed in terms of competition over scarce opportunities, including housing and jobs, but often they were voiced in the vague language of maintaining ‘racial harmony’ or ‘positive race relations’. Precisely because the idea of racial harmony could mean everything and nothing, it was often used to encompass anxieties over: changing economic prospects; Britain’s declining global position; the loss of Empire; and broader questions of social welfare and happiness (Miles 1984; Waters 1997). In 1968, the Conservative MP, Enoch Powell, made his now (in)famous ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech, in which he predicted that white Britons would soon become ‘strangers in their own country’. Powell painted a picture of white Britons who were unable to access education or healthcare, or to live freely, constrained by the wilful ‘domination’ of migrant cultures and by race relations legislation that prevented any ‘push back’ (Powell 2007).

‘Powell’s speech marked a turning point in popular discourse, when both members of the public and politicians found it increasingly acceptable to use anti-migrant rhetoric’

Powell’s speech marked a turning point in popular discourse, when both members of the public and politicians found it increasingly acceptable to use anti-migrant rhetoric (Gilroy 2013). In 1969, a Gallup poll found Powell to be ‘the most admired person’ in Britain (Dumbrell 2006: 43). In 1970, the Conservatives won a surprise electoral victory and subsequent analysis has credited this victory to Powell’s impact on positioning the Conservatives as the party most likely to restrict migration (Studlar 1978). Around the same time, popular discourse around crimes committed by members of minority groups reached a new intensity and there was a general sense that Britain was in ‘crisis’. In their study of the 1972-73 ‘Mugging Crisis’, Hall et al. (1978) revealed that, despite these fears, there had not in fact been a rapid rise in violent robbery. They argued that the adoption of the US-American term ‘mugging’ into popular discourse had led to the perception of a supposedly organised and culturally-ingrained phenomenon of crime perpetrated by minorities, which in turn served to justify exclusion and heavy-handed policing against those groups. Public fears were focused, in particular, on dense urban communities with high minority populations.

Family and chain migration often involve patterns of spatial clustering, where migrants choose to settle close to existing connections or migrant communities, particularly to those who share their religions or places of origin (see section 4.1 below). For instance, London’s East End came to be known as a hub of the Bangladeshi community – and especially of those from Sylhet – whilst Pakistanis from Mirapur frequently took up industrial employment in the Midlands, Yorkshire, or in the developing industrial towns of southern
England (Anitha and Pearson 2013). These geographical patterns have served to create areas in which minority groups were disproportionately concentrated. Over time, images and stories from these areas helped to fuel popular anxieties that Britain as a whole was being ‘overrun’ by migrants. These areas also became popular targets for racist agitators. Meanwhile, they faced their own challenges, such as concentrated unemployment, as industries that had once employed migrant workers in such large numbers began to decline (Phillips 1998). At the same time, many of these areas became centres of creativity, solidarity and resistance, within and beyond minority communities (Gilroy 2013). Many of them developed unique local cultures of cooperation, belonging or conviviality (Back 1996; Baumann 1996; Hickman et al 2012; Watson 2006; Wessendorf 2014).

2.4 from political blackness to distinct cultures

From the 1960s through to the 1980s, many of Britain’s minority communities cultivated a growing awareness of the shared struggles they faced, giving rise to the concept of ‘political blackness’. This provided activists and thinkers with a new way of understanding and organising around the notion of a shared, ‘non-white’ experience, identity and politics. This concept was expressed in different ways by figures such as the novelist Salman Rushdie, the scholar Stuart Hall, the novelist, public intellectual and activist Ambalavaner Sivanandan, and the prominent activist group ‘Southall Black Sisters’ (see Modood 1999 for an overview of the concept’s history).

At the same time, public attitudes towards race and difference were gradually changing. In the 1960s, fears about new arrivals were often expressed in racial terms\(^3\), but as claims of innate racial differences came under greater scrutiny and as equality legislation began to target discrimination on the basis of race, these same concerns began to be recast in a language of ‘incompatible culture’, instead. By the 1980s, the governing Conservative party had decisively targeted cultural differences as the source of friction around migration. From this perspective, migrants were welcome so long as they committed to adopting existing British values and cultural markers, and those who failed to do so were seen as threats. However, scholars have since argued that this shift was less of a rejection of racism and its associated prejudices, and more of a reframing, which re-cast pre-existing prejudices in the more acceptable language of cultural difference. This language shifted between recycling the old logic of race (of framing culture as something that was largely innate and inescapable) and embracing a choice-based notion of culture, where minorities were exhorted to treat culture as a matter of choice and to become more ‘British’. The issues of persistent racial discrimination and economic disadvantage, which so often kept minorities from enjoying an equal space in public life, were often overlooked (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991; Barker 1982; Barkan 1992; Gilroy 2013; Hill 2009).

This culture-based perspective no longer suggested a neat racial hierarchy from black to white, but instead suggested a situation in which different groups were marked by a collection of differently valued traits. For instance, Asians and East-African Asians were framed on the one hand as earnest and hardworking, but also as being somewhat ‘closed off’, excessively religious, effeminate or weak; people of Afro-Caribbean backgrounds, meanwhile, were frequently stereotyped as tough and cool but prone to delinquency (Alexander 2000; Modood 1999; Webster 2016). In many cases, an imaginary and ill-defined ideal of ‘Britishness’ served as the implicit reference point for these prejudices, against which the traits of migrant groups were judged. For example, East African Asians often came from middle-class backgrounds and were therefore able to present themselves as middle class and to embrace typically middle-class aspirations, which all helped them to be seen as a ‘model minority’ (Modood 1999). Amongst the differently-valued traits that this new discourse highlighted, religiosity (particularly in relation to Islam) and criminality emerged in the press and in policy circles as particular areas of public concern.

The emergence of cultural racism, along with frustrations about inhabiting an identity that was defined

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\(^3\) The Irish are a partial exception to this, though historians continue to debate the extent to which anti-Irish discrimination was framed in racial (as opposed to religious, cultural or nationalist) terms. See Howe (2000) for a review of some of these debates.
largely in terms of exclusion or oppression, led many within minority communities to reject political blackness. This was also influenced by the ongoing negotiation of relationships of first- and second-generation migrants to their countries of origin. By the late 1980s and into the 1990s, groups of British Asians, Afro-Caribbeans and others embraced the idea that they each possessed unique and culturally-defined identities (Modood 1994; Modood and Werbner 1997). Actively claiming these identities provided a means of speaking back to popular cultural stereotypes. This embrace also enabled minorities to cultivate a sense of belonging that was uniquely their own, rather than one based on emulating white Britishness (which, given the persistence of racial discrimination and economic disadvantage, felt like an impossible and often undesirable challenge (Ali 1991; Gale and Hopkins 2009; Modood and Werbner 1997; Tarlo 2010). Throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, the active embracing of distinct cultural identities, as part of a broader ‘tapestry’ of Britishness, was reinforced through a range of government initiatives and policies, as part of an official vision of multicultural Britain.

2.5 white, but British?

For non-white minorities, ‘whiteness’ (or white-Britishness) is often evoked as an unspoken and vaguely-defined standard against which they are judged (Clarke and Garner 2009; Gilroy 2013). The status and understanding of whiteness have also taken on new meanings in relation to migration and diversity, as non-white migrants have settled in the UK in modern times and society has become more diverse. Since World War II, and continuing to this day, migrants have often been actively recruited as cheaper sources of labour than the existing white-British working class (Hall et al 1978; May et al 2007). As a result, white working-class identities have been increasingly positioned as being in opposition to multiculturalism. Today, many people in former working-class areas express a sense of double injustice: firstly at being undercut in the labour market; and secondly at being denied the sense of national cultural esteem that they feel minorities enjoy under official multiculturalism (Evans 2005; Tyler 2012). Meanwhile others, particularly those of the younger generations, have come to emphasise a shared experience of exploitation or precariousness within the labour market and to find in this grounds for solidarity and sympathy with minority groups (Tyler 2012).

More generally, diversity in Britain has produced a range of challenges for the white-British majority to respond to. In terms of national identity, the scholar Ian Baucom (1999) has written about how encounters with diversity, through Empire and migration, forced a reckoning with particular tensions within English and British identities. Competing commitments to liberalism and tradition, or to global-mindedness and connection to place, have had their delicate and often unspoken balance upturned by the presence of people from other backgrounds, who relate to these elements of identity in different ways. Meanwhile, on an individual level, social psychologists have shown how the presence of visible difference in society can often be experienced as threatening or disorienting. This is not simply a matter of prejudice, but a consequence of how we intuitively judge the potential for common understanding and cooperation with others, and the potential of visible difference to disrupt these processes. Nonetheless, social psychologists have also emphasised that these feelings of threat or disorientation in encounters with unfamiliar groups are not uniform responses within majorities. They are mediated by factors such as the size, familiarity and ‘foreignness’ of the group, by dominant ways of imagining migration and its place within society, and by perceptions of how migrants either do or do not threaten social and economic interests (Brown et al 2011; Dovidio and Esses 2001; Esses et al 2002; Kosic 1999; Montreuil and Bourhis 2001). Finally, within some geographical areas with strong minority presences, such as Brick Lane in London or Alum Rock in Birmingham, local politics and patterns of resource allocation – including access to council housing and funding for cultural initiatives – have fragmented along ethnic lines, creating new forms of tension and rivalry (Karner and Parker 2010; Young et al. 2011). There have also been suggestions that this is also having an impact at a national level, with diversity eroding support for British institutions and the welfare state (e.g. Goodhart 2004). Current evidence presents a more complex picture: although diversity
is associated with diminished support for social welfare, in the UK and elsewhere, this is not necessarily motivated by a feeling that migrants do not ‘deserve’ access to state welfare (Eger and Breznau 2017).

Racial logic – which associates particular groups with innate traits – has also been applied to ostensibly ‘white’ groups: for example, Irish, Polish and Traveller communities all continue to face particular forms of stereotyping, stigma and exclusion. In common with broader tropes of cultural difference, the identities of these groups are sometimes approached by the majority as though they are innate and unchangeable, and at other times as though they are simply a choice that people ought to be able to opt into or out of. For these ostensibly white groups, as well as for others who are seen to disrupt the dominant understandings of ‘culture’ – such as Romani communities – the idea of culture as a choice is sometimes given greater emphasis. This serves to exclude these groups from official multiculturalism and, in turn, from the rights and esteem attached to it (Cressy 2018; Eade et al 2006; Garner 2012; Ghaill 2000; Howe 2002; Kabachnik 2009).

‘Racial logic – which associates particular groups with innate traits – has also been applied to ostensibly ‘white’ groups: for example, Irish, Polish and Traveller communities all continue to face particular forms of stereotyping, stigma and exclusion’
Migration and diversity are part of the everyday fabric of life in the UK today. Even for people living in relatively homogenous communities, diversity is still visible through the media, political debates and everyday conversations. When thinking and talking about diversity, people tend to draw upon prevailing ‘discourses’, or familiar characterisations and framings of the issues. These discourses equip us with tools for understanding and responding to the world around us, but they also colour our perceptions of the world, and help to shape our values and guide our actions, in turn.

‘Migration and diversity are part of the everyday fabric of life in the UK today. Even for people living in relatively homogenous communities, diversity is still visible through the media, political debates and everyday conversations’

Today, explicit public attitudes towards diversity are more open and positive than they have been for much of the past half-century. At the same time, many members of minority groups continue to face prejudice and exclusion in their everyday lives. These experiences are often not the result of explicit public attitudes but of subtle biases and prejudices, which have been shaped by a range of different discourses around diversity. By examining these discourses, we are better placed to understand not only how diversity is perceived by different people, but also how members of both majority and minority groups think of their lives, identities and senses of belonging in relation to diversity.

3.1 why does public discourse matter?

Concepts such as race, citizenship, migration, multiculturalism or belonging acquire particular meanings based on how they are treated by different discourses. Multiple discourses exist, side-by-side, in an attempt to define the same concept. For instance, we might identify a discourse that positions migration as a source of strength. It could be voiced and circulated by policymakers, by community events that celebrate diversity (such as carnivals, melas or Chinese New Years’ festivities), by grassroots organisations and by media outlets with a record of celebrating diversity. At the same time, we might identify a competing discourse that frames migration as a threat, and that could be spread by different policymakers and activists, by mass events such as anti-migrant rallies or speeches, and by publications with anti-migrant editorial slants.

Discourses have a powerful effect on how we think and act. For example, racist attitudes continue to exert a powerful influence on society today. A wide range of studies confirm that members of visible minorities experience notable disadvantage: in hiring and promotion; in the housing market; in treatment by public authorities, including the Police; in their experience of service by private businesses; within workplace teams; and in the everyday behaviour of strangers, neighbours and even friends and family (see reviews in Bonilla-Silva 2013; Brewster and Rusche 2012; Cabinet Office 2017; Coates 2008; Essed 1991; Ndobo et al 2017; Quillian 2006). Yet we also know that people’s explicit beliefs have generally grown less racist (Bonilla-Silva 2013; Ford 2008). The combination of these two trends suggests that if racial inequality persists, then it does so predominantly on the basis of unconscious or, at least, covertly-held beliefs. Social psychologists have documented the impact of everyday discourses in shaping these tacit beliefs (see McKinlay and McVittie 2009; van Dijk 2011).
Prevailing discourses are not alone in shaping public sentiment. For instance, we know that people living in more rural areas, as well as those with fewer qualifications and those in lower-skilled jobs, often hold stronger anti-migrant views (Rutter and Carter 2018). These views are often built on a foundation of everyday experience, where people of other nationalities are an unfamiliar sight, or where difficulties in finding employment create feelings of insecurity and persecution. These experiences can be interpreted in a variety of ways, and public discourses offer us tools for making sense of them, to be used by different people in different ways.

3.2 persistent concerns around migration and diversity

The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford charts trends around the public perception of migration. These records reveal that, between April 2006 and July 2008, when the Great Recession struck, and then again between June 2014 and September 2016, when consequences of the Brexit vote came to the fore, the British public ranked ‘immigration’ as the single most important issue facing Britain (Blinder and Richards 2018). Since 1994, immigration has consistently been named in the top-five most important issues facing Britain. In addition, between 1964 – when public polling on immigration began – and about 2016, the majority of British respondents said they felt that there were too many immigrants in the UK. This figure did gradually decline over time, however, and since 2016 it has dipped below 50%. In 2016, only 27% of respondents felt that immigration had made the UK a worse place to live (ibid).

Although Brexit and the EU are reported as more pressing concerns in 2018, this does not necessarily mean that attention has shifted away from immigration. In fact, opposition to immigration was found to be the single strongest predictor of a ‘leave’ vote – suggesting that, for many, the Brexit referendum was understood primarily as a referendum on immigration (Clarke et al 2017). ‘Leave’ voters were also revealed to be more strongly opposed to non-EU immigration than to EU immigration (Hix et al 2017). It has been suggested that targeting EU migrants, who tend to be white, has come to be seen as a more socially acceptable way of expressing fears about non-white migration (ibid 4).

In recent years, feelings about diversity and multiculturalism have been somewhat more mixed. In 2013, a Lord Ashcroft poll reported that 90% of the British public believed Britain to be a multicultural country, and 70% expressed support for multiculturalism. However, from the same sample, 43% of respondents claimed that diversity had ‘undermined British culture’ (Lord Ashcroft Polls 2013). Similar findings emerged from a 2017 poll, in which 60% agreed that, ‘Diversity is a good thing for British culture’, while the remaining 40% expressed ambivalence or disagreed (Rutter and Carter 2018). A separate 2018 poll, however, found only 37% agreeing that ‘multiculturalism has a positive effect...on British culture’, and 43% agreeing that “Britain is a successful multicultural society where people from different backgrounds generally get along well together” (Carter and Lowles 2018). Meanwhile, a 2010 poll of nearly 100,000 British adults found that only 24% agreed with the idea that, ‘Greater diversity is a source of strength to our society, and means that British identity continues to evolve – which is a good thing.’ In contrast, 67% agreed with statements that expressed a sense of tension between diversity and a fundamental British identity (Darlington et al 2010). These findings vary, but they suggest that between one- and two-thirds of Britons feel some sort of antagonistic relationship between diversity and British culture and identity.

‘In 2013, a Lord Ashcroft poll reported that 90% of the British public believed Britain to be a multicultural country, and 70% expressed support for such multiculturalism’

4 The Labour MP, Frank Fields has been unusually frank about this substitution, when discussing immigration. ‘The truth is, I wasn’t brave enough to raise it as an issue – though I thought it was an issue for yonks – until we were talking about white people coming in. And even then the anger that this was racist was something one had to face.’(Colvile 2017)
Finally, when it comes to opinions around race, a recent survey found that 26% of Britons admitted directly to being ‘very’ or ‘a little’ prejudiced towards people of other races (Kelley et al 2017). However, once again, the results varied: when asked, ‘Are some races or ethnic groups born less intelligent?’, only 18% of participants agreed, whereas when asked, ‘Are some races or ethnic groups born harder working?’, 44% agreed. As the authors noted, this variation was mostly likely linked to an awareness that it is socially unacceptable to publicly share negative prejudices towards other groups, especially on issues of race. More generally, the well documented trend of under-reporting prejudices seen to be socially unacceptable or politically incorrect (Bonilla-Silva 2013) should serve as a note of caution when interpreting any of the data presented here.

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3.3 ‘I’m not racist but…’: public discourses of diversity

The public conversation around diversity is multifaceted, with no single, dominant discourse. Moreover, individuals, organisations, media outlets and political parties almost inevitably draw on more than one discourse when thinking about or characterising diversity. As a result, existing discourses are never clear-cut. They often borrow from, depend upon, or get mixed up with other discourses. Nevertheless, we can best decipher how diversity is understood today by examining some simplified, ‘typical’ discourses that are prominent in the UK today:

- **Cosmopolitanism**: Cosmopolitan discourses remain open to differences as a source of strength, enrichment or pleasure. Discourses of cosmopolitanism can be grounded in the experience of a specific place, or a set of connections, and researchers have found forms of cosmopolitanism adopted by a range of different class, national and local groups (Datta 2009; Massey 1995; Werbner 2006; 2008). Nonetheless, cosmopolitanism is often popularly associated with elite culture and with ‘rootlessness’, and positioned in opposition to national identity.

- **Multiculturalism**: Multicultural discourses see identity and society as being made up of a patchwork of more-or-less distinct cultures. Since the 1990s, it has become common to describe British society as multicultural, although the term has increasingly taken on a negative connotation (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010). Critics of multiculturalism have pointed out that the idea of fundamentally distinct cultures can provide the foundation for suggesting that some cultures have a greater right to belong to a nation than others, that cultural groups are defined by distinct and irreconcilable interests, or that individuals are likely to possess particular positive or negative traits based on whichever cultural group they appear to belong to.

- **Hybridity**: Discourses of hybridity frame society and identity as creative mixtures, made up of many different cultural components. Instead of a multicultural patchwork, or a cosmopolitan commitment to openness, hybrid identities are understood as a particular blend of specific components, which then take on a life and value of their own (Werbner and Modood 1997).

- **Conviviality**: Conviviality comes from Latin roots, meaning ‘to live with’. Discourses of conviviality treat difference as neither something to be actively embraced, nor as a threat or a challenge, but simply as an ordinary fact of life. Convivial discourses often emphasise a ‘live and let live’ approach (Nowicka and Vertovec 2014).

- **Tolerance**: The idea of tolerance suggests that difference is acceptable or valued to the extent that it is sanctioned by a majority group, or by those in power. In this way, discourses of tolerance simultaneously position minorities as perpetual outsiders, whose licence to be different may be revoked at any time, and those doing the tolerating as more authentic in their belonging. Tolerance is often tied to calls for assimilation, where minority groups are expected to become more like majority ones (Hage 1994; 2012).

- **Utilitarianism**: Utilitarian discourses value diversity in terms of specific, often measurable, outcomes. These outcomes are predominantly economic, such as the number of jobs taken from local workers, the extent of benefits claimed, or the contribution of that immigrants make to tax or Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Tatli 2011).
- **Communitarianism**: Communitarian discourses value diversity in relation to its impact on social solidarity and feelings of community, both at a local and a national level. In some cases, migrants have been seen as enriching communities, by making them more vibrant, or cultivating new forms of care (Hickman et al. 2012). In other instances, however, the presence of different languages, cultures, and social or economic priorities has been seen to be eroding community solidarity. Likewise, the formation of segregated minority communities has been seen as threatening to social solidarity at a national level, as segregated groups may not buy into a broader British identity, or into British institutions (Holmes 2000; Worley 2005).

- **Colour-blindness**: Colour-blindness involves the belief that race no longer plays a significant role in shaping life in the UK. For instance, 74% of Britons do not believe themselves to be prejudiced towards people of other races (Kelley et al 2017). As such, it may be hard for this majority to believe that prejudice plays a role in the experiences of others. Assertions that the UK is not a racist country appear frequently within public debate (e.g. Mann 2018; Murray 2018). These discourses often suggest that, if members of minority groups continue to experience disadvantage or discrimination, these experiences are effectively a product of their individual choices – such as their residential choices, or the choice to embrace a particular culture – and as such can be overcome through personal effort or different choices. As such, discourses of colour-blindness often reject systematic or political explanations for disadvantage or discrimination (Lentin 2009).

- **Nativism**: Nativism suggests that only members of a certain group – marked by particular characteristics as skin colour, or a particular set of cultural traits – belong in a specific place, or have entitlement to the rights of citizenship (Malkki 1992). Nativist beliefs are often associated with nationalist political movements, but they may also find mainstream expression. In the UK, a 2017 poll found that 47% of participants were in favour of banning all further immigration from Muslim countries, suggesting that those respondents felt that there was no place for a significant Muslim presence in the UK (Goodwin et al 2017).

- **Localism**: Localist discourses privilege local neighbourhoods or communities as sites of identity and belonging. Sometimes change at the local level evokes a sense of the whole nation being under threat, whilst in other cases, diverse local forms of community can cultivate broader feelings of conviviality or openness. However, it is also possible for people to cultivate inclusive local identities alongside more exclusive ideas of national belonging, or vice versa (Back 1996; Evans 2016; Wessendorf 2014).

- **Post-imperial nostalgia**: A 2014 poll found that 59% of Britons felt that the British Empire was something to be proud of, and 49% agreed that it left the countries it colonised better off – in contrast to 19% who felt ashamed of Empire, and 15% who felt it left colonised countries worse off (Dahlgreen 2014). Ideas of British pride, greatness and relevance on the world stage are still strongly associated with the British Empire (Barnett 2017; Gilroy 2004). Meanwhile, the detrimental impacts of Empire are largely absent from the school curriculum and from popular media (Osler 2009; The Secret Teacher 2018). When the lingering political and economic consequences of Empire are overlooked, it is easier to believe that Britain bears little responsibility for, or connection to, the global inequalities and gaps in opportunities that motivate migration (Duffield 2010; Gilroy 2004). This partisan re-telling of history can also encourage a belief that British attitudes and policies have always been innately benevolent and ‘civilising’, which draws attention away from the consequences of political choices that impact on minorities (Gilroy 2004).

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5 The most dramatic examples of this include the use of indentured labour after the abolition of slavery, the use of concentration camps in Imperial Africa, or the policy to prioritise international grain shipments over feeding hungry populations during subsequent famines in India. Collectively, historians have linked tens of millions of deaths to the actions and policies of the British during the period of Empire (see, e.g. Davis 2000; Tharoor 2018).
3.4 a diverse conversation

No one discourse on diversity dominates the British conversation. In fact, as several polls reveal, individuals themselves often express contradictory views, depending on how they are prompted to think about diversity. Today, it is clear that overtly racial prejudices have declined significantly in the population as a whole, while migration remains a significant concern and feelings towards multiculturalism are a mix of both positive and negative. However, there is evidence from recent polls and other quantitative studies that the British public might hold more prejudiced views than it is willing to directly admit (Bonilla Silva 2014; Reilly 2012; Rutter and Carter 2018).

‘No one discourse on diversity dominates the British conversation. In fact, as several polls reveal, individuals themselves express contradictory views, depending on how they are prompted to think about diversity’

The wide range of everyday, public and government discourses around diversity provide a means of grappling with challenges related to migration and diversity, such as transformations in the fabric of communities, or the changing nature of the labour market. Some of the prevalent discourses colour how we see diversity in the first place, characterising it as a tapestry of distinct cultures, a competition between racially-defined groups, a hybrid mix, or simply as a non-issue. These same discourses often suggest particular value judgements about diversity. Finally, other discourses serve to position how members of the public relate to diversity – by framing it as more or less of a political issue, by ascribing or denying responsibility, and by suggesting different stakes. Each of us, in our own ways, will draw on these discourses in trying to understand the world, in shaping our sense of identity, and in engaging with others.
section 4. structures of belonging

Identities, and the feelings of belonging that accompany them, are not only shaped by public discourse, but by everyday experiences. In turn, these experiences are often the products of broader social and economic forces. Income inequality, residential patterns, differences in access to education or jobs, differential treatment by the police and justice system, and local organisations and culture all play a role in shaping how feelings of belonging emerge and take root, or come to feel threatened and insecure. For example, difficulties in finding employment may threaten feelings of national belonging for both white- and minority-Britons. Likewise, the feeling that other local groups are attracting more public support than one’s own can upset feelings of belonging to one’s neighbourhood or city. Meanwhile, local organisations and culture can play a positive role in building new belongings, by creating connections between individual lives and broader patterns of diversity.

4.1 segregation: myth or reality?

In late May, 2001, violent riots broke out in the struggling, former-industrial town of Oldham, following several weeks of escalating tensions, demonstrations and attacks between white and Asian residents. In the following months, Burnley and Bradford also saw highly damaging riots, following similar lines of division between Asians and whites. In response, the Government commissioned a series of reports into the causes of these riots.

The Ritchie report (2001) focused on Oldham, the Ouseley report (2001) on Bradford, and the Cantle report (2001) on the disturbances as a whole. All three reports found that segregation between Asian and white residents played a major role in fostering the deep resentment that led to the riots. In Bradford and Oldham, certain neighbourhoods were widely known as white or Asian ‘no-go areas’, with these reputations upheld through racist graffiti and occasional violence. Schools were also found to be highly segregated, while access to employment, public services and public office were also found to be frequently mediated along racial lines. These reports revealed that segregation was a source of significant frustration for local people – with each group having cultivated parallel myths about the relative privilege and unwillingness to mix on the part of the other. Based on these findings, the Cantle report raised concerns about segregated communities living ‘parallel lives’ at a national scale.

The Cantle report triggered a lively conversation around the extent, causes and consequences of minority-group segregation in the UK. However, despite official pronouncements that Britain has ‘sleepwalk[ed] into segregation’ (Philips quoted in Brown and Judd 2005), other researchers have been much more measured and ambivalent about the extent of such segregation. Residential and school segregation vary significantly across regions, as well as within groups. Perceptions of segregation or inequality do not always measure up to reality: for instance, in Oldham, white residents, in many cases, believed that the majority of funding for neighbourhoods went to Asian-dominated areas, whereas in fact the significant majority of regeneration funding was going to white-dominated neighbourhoods (Ritchie 2001).

The general trend in the UK has been towards the residential de-segregation of both minority and white-British groups, as both have come to live in increasingly mixed areas (Peach 2009; Catney 2015). De-segregation takes place as migrants of varied backgrounds move into certain areas, making them more diverse, and as settled minorities or white-British citizens move from areas in which their own group makes up a large proportion of the population to others in which it is proportionally smaller. However, evidence suggests that while segregation is generally on the decline, small subsets of minority and white-British populations have become more segregated (Poulsen and Johnston 2006). In cases where segregation has increased, however, the result has rarely been US-style ‘enclaves’, where a single group makes up 90% or more of the population. Rather, for the minority of minorities who do become more segregated, the
tendency is to shift from white-dominated areas to areas dominated by a mix of minority groups (ibid; Carling 2008; Johnston et al 2010; Peach 2009). School segregation appears to follow a similar overall trend, with a long-term decline in overall segregation over time being marked by shorter periods or geographic pockets where segregation has in fact increased (Fitz et al 2010). More segregated areas seem to be associated with the development of cultures of blame and resentment – whether this comes from segregated white majorities who lack contact with minorities, or from segregated minorities who lack contact with the majority (Cantle 2001; Flint and Robinson 2008).

Evidence suggests that both patterns of migration and the make-up of neighbourhoods are shaped by previous networks of relationships, support and knowledge (Bengtsson and Ruonavaara 2010; Haug 2008; Robertson et al 2010; Wilson 1994). Similar approaches have been applied to particular segregated neighbourhoods in the UK, in order to make the argument that segregation needs to be understood in connection to longer imperial histories, political struggles, or patterns of inclusion and exclusion (Amin 2003; Bagguley and Hussain 2012). More generally, we can also better understand minorities’ experiences of belonging to particular places, or within particular visions of what it means to be British, in relation to such factors.

4.2 systems of advantage and disadvantage

In 2017, the UK Government published the initial findings of its first systematic audit into race-based inequalities in the UK. Together with findings from the Equality and Human Rights Commission published in 2015, the resulting report revealed that many minority groups continue to face systematic disadvantage, whilst in certain aspects of life a few minority groups have managed to catch up with, or even surpass the white-British population.

In the most recent, 2011 UK Census, 80.5% of the population identified as ‘white-British’, while the remaining 19.5% identified as belonging to another ethnic group. Within these groups, 77% of ‘white-British’ residents of working age were employed. The only group to exceed this was ‘white-other’ at 81%. In other ethnic groups, employment levels in the working-age population were: 77% for people of Indian origin; 67% for people identifying as ‘black’ (including Afro-Caribbean and African origin), 64% for people of Chinese origin, 62% for those selecting ‘other’ ethnic origin; and 55% for people of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origins. Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers were also more likely than any of the other ethnic groups to be in low-skilled, low-paying occupations. Meanwhile, there were fewer ‘white-British’ people in low-skilled and low-income employment than members of most other groups.

In terms of income, white workers were found to earn around 50 pence per hour more than the average for ethnic minority groups. During the period 2008 to 2013, several ethnic and religious minority groups saw their income fall at a faster rate than either the national average or the white majority, including people identifying as black, those of ‘mixed’ ethnicity, Sikhs and Muslims. Most minority groups were also much more likely than the white majority to be living in persistent poverty (defined as having an income below 60% of the national median for three of the previous four years), with 20% of people from Asian, black or other ethnic backgrounds in persistent poverty, but only 8% of those identifying as white.

While segregation according to race or ethnicity appears to be declining, there appears to be a growing trend of growing economic segregation, particularly in major metropolitan centers such as London (Hamnett 2003; Musterd et al 2017).

All data in this section is pulled from these two sources, which are cited in the references as Cabinet Office 2017 and Equality and Human Rights Commission 2015, respectively. For the both sources, some precise figures have been pulled from the underlying data instead of from the reports themselves. Data for the first report comes from the ‘Ethnicity Facts and Figures’ website, and data for the second report comes from http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20170804152431/https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/britain-fairer-report/supporting-evidence. More generally, expert sources have commented on the inadequacy of data for race-differentiated outcomes in the UK (Achiume 2018), meaning that the overview provided here is necessarily partial.

This group encompasses non-British Europeans, typically including Eastern Europeans, as well as North Americans.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Working-age adults</th>
<th>Pensioners</th>
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<td>8%</td>
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<td>Other</td>
<td>20%</td>
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Source: Department for Work and Pensions | Ethnicity Facts and Figures GOV.UK

Title: Percentage of individuals living in households in persistent low income before housing costs are paid, by ethnicity and age group. Location: UK. Time period: 2012 to 2016.
White-British, Indian and Pakistani households all had relatively high rates of home ownership, at 68%, 68% and 64% respectively. Meanwhile, only 21% of ‘black-African’, 32% of ‘white-other’, and 39% of Bangladeshi, Chinese or ‘black-Caribbean’ households were home owners. Social housing allocations and tenure were skewed slightly towards minority groups, with minorities making up 21% of both. Thanks in part to lower incomes, ethnic minority households in social or private-rented housing were spending a higher proportion of their incomes on rent. Minority groups were also more likely than average to live in overcrowded or substandard housing⁹, with Bangladeshi households having an unusually high rate of overcrowding (30%) and Pakistani or Arab households having unusually high rates of substandard housing (29% and 34%, respectively).

Children of Indian origin and those identifying as ‘mixed-white-Indian’ outperformed white-British children in terms of learning outcomes at the age of five, although by GCSE level, pupils of Bangladeshi, ‘other-Asian’, Chinese, mixed or ‘white-Irish’ ethnic origin also outperformed white-British children. Poverty, which is typically measured in terms of eligibility for free school meals, is understood to have a significant impact on educational outcomes. This seems to make a larger difference for white-British students than for members of most other ethnic groups.

⁹ Officially termed ‘non-decent’ housing, defined as: not in a reasonable state of repair; lacking reasonably modern facilities and services, or with ineffective insulation or heating.

- All: 67%
- Asian: 65%
- Bangladeshi: 62%
- Indian: 73%
- Pakistani: 59%
- Asian other: 65%
- Black: 66%
- Black African: 67%
- Black Caribbean: 65%
- Black other: 65%
- Chinese: 66%
- Mixed: 69%
- Mixed White/Asian: 73%
- Mixed White/Black African: 69%
- Mixed White/Black Caribbean: 65%
- Mixed other: 69%
- White: 69%
- White British: 70%
- White Irish: 70%
- White Irish Traveller: 36%
- White Gypsy/Roma: 24%
- White other: 59%
- Other: 58%
Experiences of dealing with public institutions also vary according to ethnic origin. A significant majority of each ethnic group reports positive experiences of dealing with GPs, with black-African, white-Irish and white-British patients reporting the highest levels of satisfaction. However, documented differences in treatment also exist. Black and Asian women are significantly more likely than others to experience common mental health disorders. However, even when accounting for this, black people are still much more likely to be detained and sectioned under the Mental Health Act. Similarly, people from ethnic minorities are three times as likely to be stopped and searched by the police (for people of black ethnic origin, this climbs to six times more likely). Black defendants, and particularly black men, are more likely to be denied bail, whilst those of white ethnic origin are the least likely to be kept in custody prior to trial. Despite this, the rate of convictions for all minority groups is lower than that for the white population. A recent government review found that, when convicted for drug offences, defendants from a minority ethnic background were 240% more likely to receive a prison sentence than defendants of white ethnicity (Lammy 2017). People identifying as having black or mixed ethnicity were less likely than those identifying as white to have confidence in the local police (71% and 70% respectively, versus 78%).
Official multiculturalism policies, as well as unofficial cultures around dealing with difference, can produce further, unequal outcomes in terms of interactions with public institutions. In Rotherham, where a long-running and highly organised ring of child sexual exploitation was uncovered, largely within the Pakistani community, official approaches to community relations were found to have exacerbated the issue. Officials prioritised working with established, predominantly male, community leaders in their community relations, including when raising concerns about child sexual exploitation. Meanwhile, local politicians expressed a reluctance to confront the issue, out of fears it would ignite racial tensions. This approach made it difficult for women and other members of the community to access authorities and support in order to raise concerns about the perpetrators and to report cases of abuse (Jay 2014: 91-95). Similarly, in 2015, the Government updated its definition of Gypsies (Roma) and Travellers for planning purposes, to only include those who were continually moving. In turn, charities and campaigners have highlighted that this policy seems to have led to the under-provision of authorised encampment sites. By no longer counting those who are temporarily settled in one place as ‘Gypsy’ or ‘Traveller’, and by failing to pay attention to patterns of movement between partially-settled and mobile communities, a ‘housing-crisis’ has emerged, with a significant growth in unauthorised and unfit encampment (Perraudin 2018). In both cases, narrow definitions of ethnicity and ethnic interests, and a failure to take account of internal group diversity have caused harm both for members of these groups, as well as for relationships between these groups and wider society.

Finally, people from all ethnic groups reported a strong sense that the area in which they lived was a place where ‘people from different backgrounds got on together’, with the lowest score (78%) reported by people identifying as black or ‘other’ ethnic origin. Likewise, a majority of all groups, except for the ‘other’ group (at 44%), felt ‘fairly strongly’ or ‘very strongly’ that they ‘belong to their neighbourhood’. Feelings of belonging to Britain were even higher. However, this does not necessarily suggest that members of ethnic minority groups consider life in the UK to be fair: in a separate poll, 56% of minority respondents agreed with the statement: ‘In Britain today, people from some backgrounds will never have a real chance to be successful, no matter how hard they work’. One in five (20%) of minority respondents strongly agreed with it.
4.3 Organising belonging

Patterns of income, housing, education and institutional relations set the broad parameters for how different groups experience life in the UK. On an everyday level, however, this experience is transformed through the people, institutions and spaces that make up particular places.

Arriving in a new country, or even in a new neighbourhood, can be a daunting experience. A range of academic studies have pointed to the role of community and local organisations in fostering a sense of belonging in minority groups. Whether within the communities themselves or closely connected to them, local organisations can help to bridge the gap between existing values, perspectives and experiences, and those of the new or changing area – for both majority and minority groups (Lampert 2009; Vertovec 2004). To take just one example, of Somalis in the UK, new local community organisations – which are often set up to maintain links to traditional cultures, practices or clan affiliations – often end up providing a means of learning language, accessing state support, coming to understand British culture, and building attachments to place. Over time, many of these organisations also transform themselves in order to remain relevant to contemporary experiences of life in the UK. For example, they can help to facilitate changes in household gender dynamics, or to foster new friendships between previously divided clan groups, ultimately generating new feelings of belonging, grounded in the areas in which they operate (Hopkins 2006; Hammond 2013; Lindley 2010; McGown 1999; Samanani 2014). Organisations can also work to build a sense of common belonging between multiple groups as evidenced, for example, by Near Neighbours, an initiative run by the Church of England’s ‘Church Urban Fund’ which sponsors local projects that provide new venues for interactions between residents of diverse areas (Cohen et al 2013).

Many people do not have any links to these kinds of formal organisations, but local cultures, spread through subtle, everyday experiences, can also play an important role in creating a sense of belonging. People often notice how others respond to their public presence, even if it is only unconsciously. Over-long glances, or the squaring of shoulders from passers-by can send subtle signals that communicate doubt as to belonging or equality, just as smiles or simple, indifferent treatment can signal welcome or acceptance. The condition of streets and parks, the signs on businesses, and the behaviour of others, can likewise signal the prospects for acceptance and belonging, or else hint at tension and discord (Watson 2006; Wessendorf 2014; Wise and Velayutham 2009). These unconscious feelings, generated by everyday experience, have been identified as important factors in creating a sense of segregation, ‘no-go’ zones, or discomfort around those who are different (Amin 2013; Swanton 2010). However, in other instances, positive unconscious impressions, which persist over time, can develop into localised forms of cosmopolitanism, conviviality or community, which bring people together across lines of difference (Back 1996; Baumann 1996; Hickman et al 2012; Samanani 2017). Shared reference points, such as local music scenes or the experience of multicultural markets, can help to anchor these local cultures (Baumann 1996; Williams 2017).

‘These unconscious feelings generated by everyday experiences have been identified as an important source in creating a sense of segregation, ‘no-go’ zones, or discomfort around those who are different.

In other instances, however, positive unconscious impressions, which persist over time, can develop into localised forms of cosmopolitanism, conviviality or community, which bring people together across lines of difference’
section 5. new identities

As migrants move and settle, their identities often transform. Even those who maintain a strong sense of connection to their places of origin may find that their relationships with these places are dramatically transformed. Meanwhile, second-, third- and fourth-generation migrants tend to experience further transformations in identity. Over time, successive generations usually develop their identities more and more around the areas in which they live (Cohen 2008). Rather than simply conforming to dominant identities, this process of adaption tends to reimagine identity in light of the experience and presence of minority groups – a process which transforms both majority and minority identities.

‘Overtime, succeeding generations usually develop their identities more and more around the places in which they live. Rather than simply conforming to dominant identities, however, this process of adaption tends reimagine identity in light of the experience and presence of minority groups – a process which transforms both majority and minority identities’

In many cases, local identities have moved beyond the boundaries of distinct national, ethnic or racial groups, allowing for new forms of understanding and social relations to emerge. Meanwhile, on the national stage, activists, public figures and others are working to assert new, more inclusive or open visions of Britain. National activism can also forge new identities. Today, different groups are coming together around common issues, such as inequality, austerity or the status and treatment of refugees (Cohen et al 2017). However, despite these local and national efforts, important gaps remain that continue to position Britain’s minorities as ‘outsiders’, or to produce unequal outcomes across different groups.

5.1 changing community dynamics

Migrant experiences vary widely, and so too do the experiences of new migrant communities in the UK. Bangladeshi communities in the UK – made up of people who first arrived as Victorian-era sailors, later as Commonwealth migrants from Pakistan, and then, most significantly, to flee the destruction of the Bangladesh War of Independence – are chiefly from the Sylhet region of Bangladesh, and largely from particular villages within that region (Anitha and Pearson 2013). As a result, for many first-generation Bangladeshi migrants, employment patterns, the exchange of goods, community dynamics and feelings of belonging are closely connected to life in these villages (Gardner 1993; Zeitlyn 2015). Meanwhile, for Somali migrants arriving in the 1990s and 2000s, distinctions between clans could take on a greater importance in the UK than in Somalia, as clan identities became a way both of holding on to traditional identities whilst abroad, and for making sense of the experiences of the Somali Civil War (Hopkins 2006; Samanani 2014). Meanwhile, while Kurdish minorities are often dispersed and disconnected in their countries of origin, life in the UK has enabled Kurdish refugees to foster a greater sense of unity and collective identity as a distinct, transnational group (Griffiths 2000).

Despite these variations and nuances, common patterns of experiences are identifiable. For instance, many new migrants retain strong emotional attachments to their places of origin. It is common for first-generation migrants to believe that they will return to their countries of origin later in life. All the while, these emotional...
attachments are transformed by the realities of living abroad. What was once a direct experience of a place and a way of life is now mediated through phone calls, text messages, remittances, satellite TV, community centres, or occasional trips back, all of which transform relationships to that place over time. For some groups, homelands take on an imaginary, almost mythical status, divorced from the everyday reality of life there, as well as from ongoing historical and cultural transformations. This can lead to an intensified commitment towards religious, cultural or familial practices, or towards ethnic identities, which may have previously held less importance. On the other hand, some people feel that their attachment to homeland diminishes over time (Cohen 2008; Vertovec 2009).

These patterns also change across generations. The children of migrants, as well as those who migrate at a young age, grow up with a range of different formative experiences, some of which are drawn from mainstream life in the UK, and others of which are drawn from households that maintain particular relationships to their countries of origin — whether in their food, language, values, religious beliefs, family structures, social ties or otherwise. For latter-generation youth, these diverse experiences can sometimes lead to difficulties in experiencing or expressing senses of belonging. On the one hand, experiences of ‘traditional’ cultures, values and relationships can be sources of tension or uncertainty, as younger generations grapple with the expectations of older generations, or struggle to feel at home within traditional environments. On the other hand, researchers have documented how, even for minorities who feel a strong sense of belonging to the UK, these feelings can be subject to continual challenges (either subtle or overt) on the basis of race. For many, this means that they feel continually marked as outsiders (Cohen 2008; Gardner 2012; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Skrbiš et al. 2007; Robinson 2009). These challenges elicit different responses: some people embrace new variations of their ethnic, religious or racial identities; some experiment with new ways of being British; and others try to find ways of juggling multiple belongings. These dynamics can generate new forms of openness and inclusion, as well as modes of closure or even fundamentalism. Almost inevitably, these new identities and feelings of belonging will be hybrids, drawing together a range of different experiences and ideas (Werbner and Modood 1997).

These responses are not only a matter of personal choice: they are often shaped by government policy and the actions of different local, national and international organisations. For instance, in Southall, London, the persistence of strictly separated cultural identities amongst minority groups in the 1980s and 1990s was linked to local government policy. Historically, funding was allocated primarily to groups that could claim to represent distinct communities, rather than to those working across community lines. In turn, as ethnic identities became institutionalised, local politics, arts, and charities also began to fragment along those lines. Meanwhile, everyday patterns of interaction remained mixed and provided locals with some basis for imagining new identities beyond divisions (Baumann 1996).

### 5.2 Local Multiculture

Today, minority communities in Britain are marked by a high degree of creativity and diversity. These qualities mark ostensibly traditional movements just as much as they mark attempts to explore new identities through art, or the rejection of identity labels altogether. In many cases, new identities no longer fit the neat labels of race, ethnicity or culture. The scholar Les Back (1996) has coined the term ‘multiculture’ to refer to a situation in which, instead of a tapestry of distinct cultures or identities (as in multiculturalism), there is a continuous and shifting mix of identifications and feelings of belonging, which becomes difficult to label or segment. These dynamics of ‘multiculture’ are often strongly grounded in particular places and are especially likely to take shape in urban areas, where multiple forms of difference often come into contact with one another (Gidley 2013).

Another pattern has been the shift towards increasing individualism. Insofar as members of minority groups continue to identify with particular groups, religions or races, they often do so in ways that are increasingly personal and distinct from the identifications of others. For instance, young Muslims in Britain today voice a range of different Islamic identifications: some position themselves as secular or cultural Muslims, rejecting
the religious dimensions; some connect Islam with different British political traditions, such as socialism or conservatism; others connect through Islam primarily through art and music, through their choices as consumers, or through heritage, or through a personal set of beliefs that might also incorporate other religions; and others still equate Islam with particular national or historical traditions (Abbas 2011; Barylo 2017; Glynn 2002; Samanani 2017). Across all of these variations, it becomes increasingly difficult to refer to the ‘Muslim community’, or even to plural ‘Muslim communities’, in any coherent or meaningful way. As Back (1996) points out, these localised or personalised identities can produce both inclusion and exclusion, often at different scales. Locally, or within individual lives, these dynamics can foster a greater openness to difference, but they do not necessarily work to transform wider discourses or the beliefs they give rise to. Individuals can come to hold a mixture of open and closed attitudes, and behave differently in relation to the diverse others they encounter in everyday life, and in relation to the very idea of diversity at a national level.

5.3 national claims

There continues to be a lively conversation around the place and status of diversity within Britain. Today, a range of voices within and across minority groups are an active and influential part of this conversation, claiming space within national British identities for minority belongings as well as challenging the ways in which such claims can be denied. Within publishing, the newly-founded Jhalak Prize joins the slightly-older ‘The Guardian 4th Estate Story Prize’ in showcasing outstanding ‘Black and Minority Ethnic’ writers on the national stage. Recent acclaimed books by writers such as Afua Hirsch, Reni Eddo Lodge or the rapper Akala, or the edited collection of essays in The Good Immigrant, have vocally challenged the image of a colour-blind or tolerant Britain by highlighting the ongoing struggles faced by many minorities around racism, identity and belonging. In the arts, following a review of equality and diversity in the English arts and culture sector (Parkinson et al 2014), Arts Council England have made a significant effort to support a wider diversity of artists and institutors (Gardner 2017). Across the cultural sector, some voices are calling for greater efforts to include those who are marked by difference, whilst others are advocating a move away from singling out particular categories of diversity, towards producing simply media capable of representing and resonating with the diverse and complex British population (Saha 2018).

Within higher education, following a range of student-led campaigns to ‘decolonise’ curricula, many universities are trialling funds and programmes to diversify teaching materials and approaches. From 2011 onwards, a series of UK government initiatives and reviews have pushed to increase diversity across the business community, and today there are some reports of changing norms, where diversity is increasingly valued by investors and executives alike (Buckley et al 2018). Diversity within the House of Commons has likewise shown an increase (Bengtsson et al 2018), while Parliament has improved its ability to identify and respond to the concerns of minority demographics – a shift which is partly linked to the diversification of parliamentarians (Saalfeld 2001). Across these domains, as in the arts and media, efforts to increase diversity and to better represent the concerns of a diverse populace are nothing new. Historically, these efforts have enjoyed mixed success, and in many cases the outcome of present efforts remains to be seen.

Meanwhile, new political coalitions are taking shape amongst and across minority groups. While ‘political blackness’ may no longer provide a compelling political identity for many, issues of race remain high on the agenda for many grassroots and national groups – from those targeting practices of police ‘stop-and-search’, based on evidence of racial bias, to those aiming for more inclusive conversations and practices in the diagnosis and treatment of mental health10. National and international crises, such as the recent Windrush scandal, and the ongoing Syrian war, have also become occasions for the emergence of new coalitions campaigning on immigration reform and issues of refuge and asylum.

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10 E.g. https://y-stop.org/ and https://www.time-to-change.org.uk/
5.4 enduring gaps

Today, Britain’s minority groups voice a strong sense of belonging, both to their local areas and to the UK. However, everyday life for these same groups is often marked by experiences of exclusion as well. A similar experience exists for the white-British majority, which has embraced diversity in particular ways, and yet continues to struggle with it in others. Neither majority nor minority groups are homogenous. Dynamics of identity, belonging and inclusion continue to vary widely within them. Local experiences offer opportunities for rethinking identities and belonging in more open and inclusive ways, but there are also limits to these processes, particularly in segregated areas, where local identities may become more insular or resentful and the impact of inclusive local identities in transforming national discourses may be limited.

Nationally, further tensions exist between a range of competing discourses, which imagine different configurations of inclusion and exclusion. Today, a broad range of equalities legislation exists to safeguard equal outcomes and the right to equal participation in public life for minorities. However, despite this, there are still meaningful, if uneven, gaps in a range of social outcomes for many minority groups, including income, and access to education, health, housing and justice. The creativity and dynamism of both minority groups, and that of the broader communities in which they live, offer a powerful resource for overcoming inequality and exclusion, but it is also clear that much more remains to be done.

‘The creativity and dynamism of both minority groups, and that of the broader communities in which they live, offer a powerful resource for overcoming inequality and exclusion, but it is also clear that much more remains to be done’


———. There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack. Routledge, 2013.


Hall, Stuart, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts. Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order. Holmes & Meier, 1978.


