

Interdisciplinary Research Series
in Ethnic, Gender and Class Relations

From Immigrants to Ethnic Minority

Making black community
in Britain

Lorna Chessum



FROM IMMIGRANTS TO ETHNIC MINORITY

*For Wendell Trenton Wilberforce Johnson
and the late Doris Cope*

From Immigrants to Ethnic Minority

Making black community in Britain

LORNA CHESSUM

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List of Abbreviations

AIMS	Anti Immigration Society
ANL	Anti Nazi League
ARC	Anti Racist Committee
AUEW	Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers
CARD	Campaign Against Racial Discrimination
CLS	Community Languages
CP	Communist Party
CRE	Commission for Racial Equality
DES	Department of Education and Science
EEC	European Economic Community
GIA _s	General Improvement Areas
HAAs	Housing Action Areas
IRSC	Inter Racial Solidarity Campaign
JSG	Jamaica Service Group
LCCR	Leicester Council for Community Relations
LRO	Leicestershire Record Office
LUCA	Leicester United Caribbean Association
MSD	Migrant Services Division
NF	National Front
PRO	Public Record Office
RAF	Royal Air Force
SEN	State Enrolled Nurse
SRN	State Registered Nurse
TGWU	Transport and General Workers Union
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
VMA	Valerie Marett Archive

Series Editor's Preface

From Immigrants to Ethnic Minority is a peculiar story of people who descended from Africa but who live in societies structured in dominance. Other immigrants have since become citizens but people of African descent are condemned to the inferior status of ethnic minority on the basis of their gendered, class-specific racialisation. Although Dr Lorna Chessum focused on the African Caribbean Diaspora in Leicester and excluded African immigrants for the sake of her doctoral requirement to narrow the focus of her analysis, what she says about her subjects is applicable to the worldwide African Diaspora even in South and North America where hundreds of millions of people of African descent remain ethnic minorities while recent immigrants are already perceived as full citizens due to their Euro-Asian origins and relative affluence.

The author combines limited primary archival sources with abundant oral history and secondary sources to analyse public policy and national or local debates concerning the presence of large groups of black people in the East Midlands city of Leicester since the end of the Second World War – the largest such population outside London. The book demonstrates that just like all people of African descent in racist and sexist capitalist societies, the black people who were lured to Leicester with promises of abundant jobs arrived with immense skills and enthusiasm only to be marginalised into racialised and gendered menial jobs instead of being allowed equal opportunities. Although this could be said to be the experience of most immigrant groups, the persistence of racism, class-snubbery and sexism has meant that black men and black women have largely remained in their marginalised positions more than fifty years after the first generation was begged to come and serve the war-weakened ‘mother country’ while other richer or whiter groups of immigrants have fared better.

The book charts the amazing survival of black people in an incredibly hostile environment that has not stopped discriminating against them. In that sense, being regarded as ethnic minorities is a grudging acceptance that, as Linton Kwesi Johnson put it, ‘No matter what they say, come what may, we are here to stay in England’. Compared to another group of racialised immigrants also regarded as part of the ethnic minority population of Leicester,

the author found that the Asians (mostly middle class refugees from East Africa) were racialised on a higher hierarchy due to their relative access to economic and political power and their consequent access to the different classes of the British population whereas the African Caribbeans remain impoverished as working class and unemployed elements of the ethnic minority.

The major conclusion readers can draw from this book is that the marginalisation of the African Caribbean in Britain should be understood within the context of institutionalised racism-sexism-classism instead of being blamed on the attitudes of individuals alone. The book reveals that the national and the local governments were active in constructing the third-class status of the African Caribbean as an ethnic minority when policy attempts to restrict the growth of multicultural Britain was successfully resisted by the initial black immigrants and their descendants. Since the government played active roles in restricting the growth of the opportunities and numbers of African Caribbeans in Britain, the government should also be responsible for rehabilitating the descendants of the initial immigrants who were exploited and maltreated for so long in spite of their eagerness to help the 'mother country' back on its feet after the war.

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1 Researching Black History: Problems and Issues

Introduction

This book is about the place of black people in British society in the post war world. It focuses on the development of one community of African Caribbeans; that of Leicester, a medium size British city in the East Midlands.

The study links national and local government policy with respect to race and immigration, aspects of national identity as expressed in public debate by local people in Leicester, and the experiences of African Caribbean migrants in Leicester between 1945 and 1981. It outlines aspects of the development of the relationship between the position of African Caribbeans in the class structure and an evolving racialised identity constructed in public discourse. This study in historical sociology charts the way in which African Caribbeans made a life for themselves in a largely hostile environment. Policy decisions made at national and local level have influenced the composition and structure of the local population in the city of Leicester and have had far reaching implications for the lives of people. However, this is not to argue that the experiences of, and decisions made by, African Caribbeans are simply a reflection of state policies. Black people have actively constructed their lives but within the context of a pervasive racialised identity and practice.

African Caribbeans arrived in Leicester from the Second World War onwards bringing with them a wide range of skills, knowledge and experience. They were systematically prevented from exercising many aspects of this human capital in employment. Instead of slotting into the occupational structure in Leicester in a wide variety of industries, services and professions which needed workers, African Caribbeans were confined to a narrower range of jobs than white people. These jobs were those deemed suitable for them through racialised and gendered constructions of identity. Employment provides people with an important, defining feature of their identity. Over time African Caribbean people in Leicester became associated with particular industries and occupations, such as manual work in engineering for men and hosiery and nursing for women. The working

class profile of black people in Leicester has contributed to the development of an evolving racialised construction of what came, by the end of the period studied here, to be described as an African Caribbean ethnic group.

Sociological theorists have debated the relative importance of race, class and more latterly gender, in determining the nature of peoples' lives. It is argued that the historical approach adopted here reveals aspects of the way in which race and class interact in a complex dynamic relationship, a relationship that can only be exposed over time. Racialised groups exist in relation to each other. But whereas whiteness is usually covert; often unconscious and unacknowledged, for other groups, overt racialisation permeates every aspect of life. It is further argued here that it is only when different aspects of life are considered together and over time that the extent, nature and implications of racialisation become apparent.

Post war Caribbean migration to Britain has received attention from academics since it began and this interest has paralleled the migration itself. Early work included Kenneth Little's (1947) study of Cardiff, Richmond's (1954) work on Liverpool and Banton (1955) on Stepney. Less well known is Learie Constantine's work, *Colour Bar* (1954). In 1960 Ruth Glass (1960) looked at black immigrants and Sheila Patterson (1963) published *Dark Strangers* which was particularly influential. These were sociological studies. They provided a great deal of information about African Caribbeans and included interview material from black people in Britain. They tended to focus on race relations and usually adopted an 'immigrant-host' perspective. This sees the status of migrants as immigrants rather than as a racialised group as being the salient determinant of problems in relation to the native population. Patterson's study provided the best example of this approach and was important in influencing understandings of the position of black people in Britain. Concern focused on the everyday interaction of black and white people and her work was naive in its methodology, accepting at face value the claims made by white people that they were not 'colour prejudiced'. Accordingly it was thought that 'colour prejudice' would diminish as immigrants became assimilated into white society.

During the 1960s more attention was given to establishing evidence of racial discrimination and the studies of Rex and Moore (1967) and that led by Rose (Rose et al., 1969) were important. During the 1960s immigration became an increasingly important political issue and saw the development of studies of the causes of immigration, such as that of Davison (1962) and Peach (1968). During the 1970s the 'immigrant-host' model was

challenged as more studies showed the extent of racial discrimination in British society and immigration legislation became more overtly racist (Smith, 1974). The 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act introduced by the Conservative government created a voucher system for potential immigrants from the 'New Commonwealth' and, while not overtly racist, was clearly intended to severely curtail the entry of black and Asian people to Britain. Racial discrimination was extended in the 1968 Act and subsequent legislation of 1971 and 1981 as black and Asian immigration continued to be an important issue in British politics throughout the period. But academic study continued to be located largely within the social sciences. However, more recently, historians have turned their attention to the study of black history.

James Walvin (1992) in an essay entitled 'The Emergence of British Black Historical Studies' wrote of the genesis of British Black Historiography over the past twenty years. He pointed to four important converging factors. These were first, the 'explosion' of African history. Second the flowering of African/American and Caribbean studies and third, the development of British Black social history. Walvin stated the importance of E P Thompson's (1963) *The Making of the English Working Class* as being both influential and path-breaking, creating respectability for diverse subjects of research. Walvin also mentioned as a fourth factor Eric William's (1964) revisionist thesis concerning the importance of slavery to the process of industrialisation in Britain which has continued to be of importance to historians of the Caribbean. Walter Rodney's (1964) book on *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* also presents an economic analysis of slavery. While through the 1980s sociological studies continued to debate the relative importance of class and race (Castles and Kosack, 1973) in the by now established unequal position of black people in British society, historians have tended to concentrate on unearthing the hitherto forgotten black presence in Britain.

Important studies of blacks in Britain include Walvin's (1971) own work on slavery, Folarin Shyllon's (1974, 1977) study of black people in Britain, Sivanandan's (1982) essays on black resistance to oppression and Peter Fryer's (1984) *Staying Power*. Fryer's study has uncovered lost continuities of black communities. This project was founded on the need to challenge the construction of British history as the development of a racialised and culturally homogenous group. It is clear that in the battle over Britain's past, minority groups have been expunged from the record and in doing so a racialised national identity has been created (Cesarani, 1996). However, continuities can be artificially produced. The African

Caribbean communities which developed in Britain after the Second World War were not descendants of those earlier groups of slaves and former slaves from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries although the cause of their presence can be seen, at least in part, as historically linked to slavery.

Historians are now turning their attention to uncovering the excluded and forgotten presence of minority groups in British history. Ron Ramdin's (1987) *The Making of the Black Working Class* also develops the continuities of black workers in their struggles against racism and exploitation at work. But black history is still in 'its infancy' (Casely-Hayford, 1990). Until recently it has been largely left to non-professional historians such as local community groups to publish small scale studies, often using oral history methods, recording the experiences of black people in Britain (*Forty Winters On*, 1988; Sewcharan, 1986; Sweeney, 1978; Murray, 1996; *Highfields Rangers*, 1993; *Highfields Remembered*, 1996).

The late Raphael Samuel (1995) pointed to some of the problems associated with the 'new wave' social history of the 1960s and 1970s and its 'history from below'. These included, he argued:

the ambiguities attaching to the notion of 'ordinary people', a coinage of the 1930s, replacing older terms such as 'everyman' and 'the common people'.

He suggested that this focus may be 'less democratic than it sounds'. Certainly the tendency to turn their gaze downwards towards the poor and the powerless has often facilitated the approach of some social scientists who have seen the causes of poverty and powerlessness to lie within the cultures of those groups rather than in the relationships with the rich and the powerful. The problem with the 'great man' theory of history (Samuel, 1995) lies less with the object of study than with the perspective on the role of great men in society. The study of black people in Britain provides an example of a group of people whose disadvantaged position has often been attributed to the lifestyle or inborn characteristics of the people themselves. This study is an attempt to shed some light on the relationship between the nature of the lives of black people and the attitudes and behaviour of those with more power in the local community.

This is a study of black people of Caribbean origin who came to live in Leicester from 1945 onwards. It does not include black people of African origin nor does it include Asian people from the Caribbean or from the Indian sub continent. There are now many black people living in Leicester who were born in Leicester. Current estimates suggest that approximately 40% of blacks in Britain were born in this country; however, none were

interviewed for this study. The work is intended as a contribution to historical knowledge and understanding of the progress of a racialised group of people and their relationship to the local state and the wider society in a provincial city. It charts how people made a life for themselves in the context of a hostile environment. There have been few studies of modern black communities outside London and fewer that have taken an historical perspective. Leicester is the city with the highest proportion of what have come to be called ethnic minorities of any city outside London, yet there have been few studies of its population to date. Pearson (1981) studied West Indian organisations, Valerie Maret (1989) studied the arrival and settlement of Ugandan Asians who came as refugees to Leicester in 1972 and Margaret Byron (1994) has researched the small Nevisian community in Leicester. Nash and Reeder (1993) have at least considered the place of black and Asian people in what is a general history of Leicester in the twentieth century. This is the only study with an historical perspective. It is a central theme here that only by considering various areas of life such as housing, employment and education alongside each other, over time and in relation to the wider community can the nature of the experience of black people and the logic of response be understood.

Primary Sources

The lack of documentary evidence on the existence of black people in Leicester in the 1950s is remarkable. There is no written record of the arrival of people in the city by any body, official or unofficial, at local or national level. The lack of documentation reflects the lack of planning of central government during the 1950s which itself is a reflection of the desire by both Labour and Conservative governments to prevent the development of a multi-racial society and to exclude black immigrants. No planning was required because no provision was to be made for black immigrants. Any provision might encourage people to come. This lack of documentary evidence has been noted elsewhere.¹ Therefore, there are no reliable statistics on the characteristics of the people, for example, their age, sex, islands of origin or years of arrival.

The census, normally regarded as a reliable source of information, is inadequate in this case. The ten year cycle leaves too long a period in which a great deal of movement of people can take place, unrecorded. Certainly, in this case, oral evidence suggests that there was a great deal of movement of people both between the Caribbean and Leicester and

between other cities within the United Kingdom (UK). Second, the figures are not comparable over time. The 1951 census records the birthplace of people living within the boundaries of the City of Leicester. There were 56 people born in British Guyana, Jamaica or Trinidad and Tobago.² The 1961 census shows 1,347 people born in Jamaica or 'other Caribbean'.³ The sample census of 1966 gave 10,087 people born in countries of the Commonwealth, except Canada, Australia and New Zealand.⁴ In 1971, there were, according to the census, 1,405 people born in Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica or Trinidad and Tobago⁵ and in 1981, 2,551 born in the Caribbean.⁶ The census did ask about individual island of origin of migrants and that information will be available to researchers in the future, but it is not recorded in the published tables and is not available for public scrutiny at present. However, perhaps more important than the comparability and paucity of what is known, is the now widely acknowledged view that the census under-records the numbers of black people in Britain and, following, those in Leicester throughout the period (Lee). Peach compared information about immigration with the census and has estimated that the census underestimates the numbers of Caribbean born people by 20% in Britain as a whole (Peach, 1974). Oral evidence in this and other studies supports this view.⁷

There are several points to be made in relation to the lack of reliable information about the basic characteristics of the black people who moved to Leicester in the 1950s and 1960s. First the lack of documentation reflects government policy of the day and has negative significance. There was no planning by central or local government for the arrival of black immigrants to Britain and therefore no need to chart the migration. This lack of preparation was deliberate. Any provision, it was thought, may have encouraged migrants who were unwanted by the government. Second, history tends to privilege official documents as a source of information about the past and it could be argued that a lack of official records concerning black people in Britain contributes to the way in which minorities are 'written out' of historical accounts in the longer term: they become forgotten and ignored and the construction of a continuity of racialised white English history referred to above is thus facilitated. There are two sorts of evidence which establish that black people lived in Leicester in the 1950s. There are the oral testimonies of the people themselves which are very important. As Casely-Hayford (1995, p.59) has written:

The first generation of British Blacks are a vital source of information for present and future ages of local and general historians.

There are also the local newspapers which carried articles throughout the 1950s and 1960s about black people in Leicester, mostly showing Caribbean migrants in a very negative light, often as criminals in reports of court proceedings, or as highlighting the social problems of housing or health.

Third and perhaps most important, the question needs to be asked: how much does accurate charting of numbers contribute to our understanding? It has been argued that the obsession with numbers evident in public discussions of government immigration policy during the 1950s and 1960s was led by an assumption that there were too many black people coming into the country and this has led some to be wary of any discussion of numbers of immigrants. This is supported by the fact that public discussion has been only rarely informed by knowledge of numbers of immigrants *per se*, but rather assumed immigrants to mean black and Asian people. Indeed this continues to be the case: immigrant in popular discourse means black or Asian people with the term ethnic minority also being defined in a racialised way.

However, there are reasons for gathering basic statistical information about the characteristics of the people who came from the Caribbean to Leicester to live. In order to ensure that the testimonies gathered as oral evidence are not untypical it is important to try and make them reflect the composition of the African Caribbean population as much as possible. Without a 'sampling frame'; that is a profile of the characteristics of the people in terms of age, sex, island of origin and so on, it is not possible to reproduce the different kinds of people in the group selected from which to gather evidence. In the case of this study it was necessary to rely on a number of small scale surveys to provide such information. The first comprehensive attempt to survey the black and Asian populations of Leicester was not carried out by the City Council until 1983.⁸ The people interviewed for this study are not representative, in a statistical sense, of the African Caribbean population of Leicester. However, they do come from a range of groups which reflect different kinds of people who make up the population: men and women, Antiguan, Jamaicans, Barbudans, Nevisians and other islanders, people who came from a spread of years from the 1940s to the late 1960s.

Numbers are also important in relationships between groups. The changing relationship between African Caribbeans, Asians and whites, as

they are perceived as communities, in Leicester has been influenced by their relative size. Whereas African Caribbean migrants outnumbered Asians in the 1950s, by the end of the period, Asians were six times as numerous. This has had an effect on the relationships between the three groups and their relationships with the local state.

Numbers have also been important in personal relationships. A higher proportion of black people have personal relationships with whites, in a situation where it is still possible for only a few whites to have personal relationships with blacks. Indeed that has certainly been the case in Leicester, although the implications of this has not been addressed here.

Other primary documentary sources examined for this research included city corporation records such as minutes of Housing Committees, Education Committees and Medical Officer of Health reports. But it is only in the Medical Officer's reports that there was evidence of the existence of black people in Leicester during the 1950s. Other official documents examined included Chief Constables' Annual reports.⁹ Despite the lack of concern of official bodies, the growing black community had a very high profile in the local Leicester press and this has been a very important source of information. The local newspapers were used as a source in two ways. First they provided information about events and people of the time. Newspapers can be extremely inaccurate and caution is needed. Wherever possible events and other facts recorded in the newspapers were checked against other sources. Second the newspapers provided a discourse on issues of race and immigration which can be seen as a powerful expression of views of the time.¹⁰ In this way they are a primary source. The press was the only really comprehensive written source confirming the presence of black people in Leicester at all during the 1950s, where West Indians had a very high, and negative, profile.

By the 1960s references to black people, who were usually described as 'immigrants' or West Indians were appearing in the minutes of the records of the local authority, particularly in Education Committee minutes, Medical Officer of Health Reports and Chief Constables Annual Reports. During the 1970s representatives of the local authority gave evidence to the Parliamentary Select Committees on Race Relations and Immigration concerning the black and Asian communities in Leicester.¹¹ Other primary documentary sources examined included Minutes of the Leicester Council for Community Relations (LCCR) Trades Council minutes, annual reports and other documents of a variety private bodies.

Oral History

Of major importance was the oral testimony of Caribbean migrants interviewed for this study. Like the newspapers the oral testimonies provided evidence not only of what was happening (for which there was often no other source), but they also provided an understanding of the migrants own views of their experiences. Giving voice to the views of Caribbean migrants is an important aim of this work. There has been a tendency, not always articulated, to regard oral history methods as inferior to that of written records, particularly official documents. But something spoken is not necessarily inferior to written words in terms of quality of information. It could be that suspicion of oral evidence is based on a suspicion of ordinary peoples' ability to give accurate accounts of events, compared with the abilities of those in 'high places'. It is clearly important to distinguish between the subjective and partial perceptions of one individual compared with a considered account based on more objectively collected information. However, it should not be assumed that subjectivity is always a feature of the testimony of ordinary people and objectivity of members of the government or civil servants.

But oral history does create special problems. People's memories distort, select and rearrange events of the past. Particularly frustrating in this study was the common, if understandable, inability of people to remember the actual years when particular events occurred. Chronology was remembered, but not dates. Views were sometimes influenced by present circumstances. For example, disappointment at their achievements after living many years in Britain was felt by some. Particularly influential were the 'hard times' brought on by the recession that continued at the time of the interviews: the first half of the 1990s. Some had grown up children who were unemployed.

Documents are more likely to have been written contemporaneously. However, all information is subject to a framework of perception and of practical constraints, such as, for example, what to include in minutes, which has to be taken into account when considering the validity of that information. In this study the tone of the minutes of the Education Committee, for example, gave no hint of the emotional and acrimonious debate taking place in the local press at the time concerning the education of 'immigrant' children. But that debate clearly influenced the Committee. Indeed, as is the case with data gathered from newspapers and from individuals, it is sometimes the very perceptions which are of interest.

The information created in answer to questions asked for research

purposes is necessarily different in kind from that created when information is provided for another purpose as is usually the case in written documents. Informants, usually, know the purposes of the research and can attempt to influence the researcher's perceptions. However, in both cases, the reason why the information is produced has to be considered and in this sense oral evidence is not different in kind from documents: documents are often intended to influence opinion too.

Paul Thompson (1988) wrote in the opening line of his book, *The Voice of the Past*: 'All history depends ultimately upon its social purpose' (Thompson, 1988, p.1). Thompson (1988, p.6) has written:

Oral history ...makes a much fairer trial possible: witnesses can now also be called from the under-classes, the unprivileged and the defeated... It provides a more realistic and fair reconstruction of the past, a challenge to the established account.

By this means according to Thompson, history becomes more democratic (Thompson, 1988, p.21) and he continues:

...oral history offers a challenge to the accepted myths of history, to the authoritarian judgment inherent in its tradition. It provides a means for a radical transformation of the social meaning of history.

The lack of documentary evidence of black people in Leicester makes oral evidence in this case particularly important. However, to compliment this information searches were made in as wide a variety of primary sources as possible. Casely-Hayford (1990, p.59) has accurately described this process.

The historian researching Black history has, therefore, to become a sort of rag-and-bone man, utilising materials from a wide range of sources to construct as clear a picture as possible.

Evidence collected for this study was scattered and fragmented and required considerable synthesising to create a coherent picture.

The Interviews

Interviews were carried out with twenty nine African Caribbean people who had lived in Leicester during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. People were

chosen to reflect what is known about the composition of the population but were not a representative sample in a sociological sense. Of the twenty nine, eight were 'community leaders'. The interviews lasted between one and two and a half hours each. Most were recorded on tape and transcribed later. Some people were interviewed twice and one three times.¹² A number of other people were also interviewed or consulted. This group was mostly white but also included some African Caribbean people. There were in this group nine councillors or officials of Leicester City Council. Other people interviewed included the Director of the Race Equality Council, the Complaints Officer of the Commission for Racial Equality, East Midlands Region, a former member of Leicester Council for Community Relations (LCCR) a white employer and a former member of the Anti Nazi League. A number of academics working in this field were also helpful. Some African Caribbean community leaders were interviewed not for their testimonies of life in Leicester, but rather as 'gatekeepers' providing access to others and for information about organisations and who were important in providing credibility for the research. The interviews were carried out between 1993 and 1997.

Secondary Sources

The secondary literature in this field is extremely large. It cuts across the disciplines of history and social science. In addition, a social history of one group of people in one community in a specific time necessarily needs to relate to literature in more than one context. First, what happened in Leicester during the period needed to be put in the context of government policy of the day. Second, information gathered from sources was compared to existing knowledge gathered in sociological studies of other black communities in Britain. Third, the place of African Caribbeans in Leicester must to be located within the context of the wider local community of Leicester and the city's politics and social structure. A problem in studying a relatively small group of people in one city is that generalisations made to the wider group of African Caribbeans in Britain from the study are hard to sustain. This book is in effect a case study, not in the sense of a case study that is representative of all African Caribbeans in Britain, rather as a case study that stands in relation to current knowledge and theoretical positions and is intended to confirm or revise our current understandings. Wilson (1993, p.45), in a description which applies to this work precisely, argued that case studies have:

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certain basic generic properties. First, they are particularistic, describing events in a specific situation. Second, they are holistic, exploring the multifaceted features of the situation through interrogation of a range of salient variables. Third, they are longitudinal and therefore dynamic; they trace developments over a length of time and chart their continuities and discontinuities. Finally they are based on qualitative rather than quantitative research.

Apart from the large body of literature referred to above and in the historiography, other secondary sources used for this study included thirty five unpublished MA dissertations, on African Caribbeans in Leicester produced in the Sociology department at Leicester University between 1959 and 1980. Also used were some small scale studies by non-professional local black people in Leicester. These were invaluable.

Objectivity

It was long held that objectivity and integrity demanded that researchers should not be influenced by being part of the group under study: researchers should be neutral. While the epitome of this position was reached in the functionalism school of American sociology, it was a view accepted by historians also. This position was associated with, mainly but not exclusively, quantitative research methodology. These methods were held to produce neutral and objective truth. Indeed objectivity and neutrality became almost synonymous. This positivism was attacked by ethnomethodologists and phenomenologists in the 1970s. Both anti-positivists and Marxists argued that it was possible to be truthful while also 'taking sides'. Neutrality was also challenged by feminists who established the legitimacy of qualitative research which studied social groups from the inside. In the case of the feminist critique, this was based on an exposé of the biased and distorted knowledge that was created as a result of the apparent objectivity of men who imposed their gendered understandings upon research findings. 'Neutrality' meant that the experiences and understandings of whole groups of people were excluded, ignored or marginalised. Not only were women and minorities excluded in this process but such research, far from producing work which was more accurate and truthful, distorted findings. The exclusion of women from studies of migration is an example which is discussed elsewhere in this thesis.¹³

This powerful critique has led to a new legitimisation of qualitative research which speaks from the experience of minority groups from the

inside. The importance of qualitative research has also been argued in the context of the study of race. Barry Troyna (1993), for example, has questioned the validity of quantitative methodology in the study of racial harassment and the use of other traditional sociological methods in race research. He also argued (Troyna, 1995, p.31) that:

qualitative researchers are interested in documenting and interpreting experiences as they are shaped by and within day-to-day experiences.

From this a new research orthodoxy has developed, in which such a stance is taken as the only legitimate way to study the disadvantaged. An important study carried out at the Birmingham Centre for Cultural studies began a debate in the academy with an argument that only black people can understand the black experience and only black people can legitimately research the black experience (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1982). For example Natasha Sivanandan 'questioned the right of whites to talk about black experience' (Bornat, Burdell, Goom, Thompson, 1980, p.21). A parallel debate took place within feminism. Some took the view that only women were entitled to speak about their experiences.

This argument has developed in academic and in some areas of popular discourse with a number of different strands. The first concerns the way in which academic research by whites has lent support to racism (Moynihan, 1965). Black people have argued that academic research has often been used to justify inequalities in society and to pathologise the culture of blacks.

The second strand is an ethical one: that white researchers have exploited black people for their own ends, to make money or to build a career. Black people are frequently researched by white academics who turn their gaze downwards and continually put blacks in 'the looking glass'. This argument was forcefully put to the author in the course of this research. The author was requested to 'give something back' to the community in terms of work and help for various community projects. This proved to be a commitment which enhanced understanding. Much research, it was argued, has produced no advantages to black people and has led to no improvements in the position of black people in society. Indeed the data collected has sometimes been used by the state against the interests of black people (Bourne, 1980, pp.331-352; Lawrence, 1982, pp.92-142). Natasha Sivanandan has argued that 'oral history could become yet another example of whites prying into the black community' (Bornat, Burdell, Goom, Thompson, 1980, p.22). Amrit Wilson has

challenged the claim of oral history to give a central place to the experiences of black people. She has suggested that this 'smacked of the imperialism of anthropology and sociology in their concern with subject peoples' (Bornat, Burdell, Goom, Thompson, 1980, p.22). Black people should be able to control what was included in their history. It is hardly surprising that this position should be argued and has reached academic discussions much later in this country than in the USA. Ordinary people have often understood the falsity of academic claims to neutral commitments to unbiased truths.¹⁴ This position has provided a very powerful criticism of much of the academic work in the area of race and few have attempted to debate the points raised, at least in print. Barry Troyna (1993), as an exception, has argued that researchers should be committed not to any one group or another but to the values of 'social justice, equality and participatory democracy' (p.115). Those critical of whites who research issues of race have contended that white researchers can best make a contribution to anti racist struggle by focusing their attentions on white racism. A further ethical question which arose in this work involved the fact that long interviews recalling past experiences were sometimes painful for the interviewees. While some people enjoyed the opportunity to 'tell their story' others found the experience quite gruelling, despite their willingness to participate.

Throughout the late 1980s and 1990s the critique of positivism has continued and has been developed by some into a new orthodoxy. Highly theorised and often obscure and esoteric, postmodernism is in part, the descendent of the phenomenologism of the 1970s. Some feminist scholars have embraced this theory and become submerged within it. Postmodernism's child, postcolonial theory, purports to centralise the perspective of the subaltern; those who have been subjected to Imperialist domination in the past, has proved attractive to some scholars of race and ethnicity. The explosion of studies of ethnic and gendered identity can also be seen as having their origin in the critique of positivism. The perspective here is one which attempts to show a developing relationship between discourse and the material determinates of peoples' lives between 1945 and 1981. It is a gendered study which focuses on race and class. These salient dimensions of identity are socially constructed in complex formation which change and reform over time. Above all they are constructed through relationships between groups of people positioned through all three, along with other, dimensions of identity simultaneously.

Black women's critique of the essentialist and reductionist nature of some white feminist discussion of gender developed along with the second

wave of feminism (hooks, 1982; Carby, 1982). The construction of 'blacks' as men and 'women' as white, which was so effectively critiqued by hooks (1982) and others produced a debate which resulted in a more sophisticated understanding of the ways in which the various permutations of class, race and gender can be constructed.

This study examines some of the most important aspects of African Caribbean Peoples' lives over the period such as home, work, education and politics. While gender, race and class are all relevant, the focus is predominantly of the evolving interrelationship between race and class.

The study is gendered where sources permit, but it is not primarily about gender. Social constructions of gender are always relevant but limitations imposed by sources, has at times made a proper consideration of gender impossible. The paucity of documentary evidence has been noted above. For example statistics of the local authority were often not gendered, or referred only to men.

African Caribbeans in Leicester

The pattern of post war immigration into Leicester of 'people of colour' has had a profound impact on the perceptions of the different communities formed. West Indians were the earliest arrivals. At end of the 1950s the African Caribbean population of Leicester was estimated to be twice as big as that of Asians. By 1970 it was one quarter the size of the Asian Community and by the end of the 1970s it was only one sixth. The arrival of Kenyan Asians in 1968 and Ugandan Asians in 1972 and the political furore which accompanied these events, locally and nationally (Marett, 1989) has tended to associate Leicester exclusively with these minority groups. A particular perspective developed in relation to this situation. African Caribbeans felt marginalised by the attention given to the needs and numerical superiority of, Asians. This marginalisation is reflected in academic work and there are a number of possible reasons for this apart from the numerical superiority mentioned above. One is that when researching 'immigrants' in Leicester Asians are easily identifiable in documents through names. African Caribbeans are rendered invisible because their names are indistinguishable from those of the majority white community. An example is provided in Pritchard's (1976) study of housing, in which the author acknowledged the fact that Asians were taken to represent 'immigrants' for precisely this reason. Once established, the tendency of academic study to draw on other studies exacerbates the

problem. For example, David Nash and David Reeder's (1993) *History of Leicester in the Twentieth Century* described post war immigration patterns which match that of Asian groups but are inaccurate to describe African Caribbeans.

The binary division between racialised groups of majority whites and minority 'immigrants', defined in a racialised way, also leads to distinct groups of peoples with diverse origins and cultures being reduced to a simple unitary description of Asians. In addition, a political culture developed within the local authority which has made comparisons between two communities: African Caribbeans on the one hand and Asians on the other.

A final factor is the different social class profiles of African Caribbeans compared to Asian groups: Asians tend to have greater political and economic power and to be more evenly distributed through the class structure of British society. These various factors lend support to each other, so that, for example, the success of Asians in business means that they receive attention and this appears to suggest that African Caribbeans are less important. The cumulative effect of these factors is that African Caribbeans' place in the life of the city is overlooked and they have been compared unfavourably with Asians in the political culture of the city.

A major problem facing social historians and social scientists lies in choosing meaningful concepts with which to analyse ideas and actions. The choice of concepts is itself part of a battle over competing political ideologies. There is a long standing and continuing debate in social science about the idea of race. While there is widespread acceptance that race is a socially constructed concept, this idea still has to be defended against a common sense and minority academic view of race as biologically determined (Miles, 1994, p.191). The liberal position of the 1960s in popular discourse that race should not be relevant has been rightly challenged by social scientists in its failure to address social realities. But the dilemma remains. How is it possible to expose and understand the role of race in society without utilising as an analytical tool the issue which we wish to problematise? The use of race in parenthesis was a widely adopted approach. However, universal acceptance was not forthcoming and perhaps more important, this idea failed to dent the continuing 'everyday' understanding of race as a natural division of peoples. It is not possible or appropriate here to outline the evolution of the terminology about race and its relationship to social theory. The concept of 'racialisation' was first developed by Robert Miles (1994, p.75). He used the term racialisation:

to refer to those instances when social relations between people have been structured by the signification of human biological characteristics in such a way as to define and construct differential social collectivities.

In this definition racialisation does not necessarily imply negative evaluation. The concept of racialisation is widely used in the study of black and Asian minorities and does most commonly carry with it an assumption that the idea does include negative evaluation. Miles distinguishes between racialisation and racism. He reserves the latter to describe racialisation coupled with negative evaluation.

It has been recognised that the disadvantaged position of black people in society has not arisen solely as a result of the behaviour of racists as defined above. The concept of 'institutionalised racism' has been adopted to explain not only the persuasiveness of exclusionary practices, but the cluster of disadvantages experienced by racialised groups even though there may have been no overt intention to discriminate by decision makers:

racism is embodied in exclusionary practices or in a formally non-racialised discourse - exclusionary practices that result in a disadvantage for racialised groups cannot be assumed to be determined wholly or in part by racism (Miles 1984, p.87).

A parallel, although different mixture of overt, covert discrimination and disadvantage produces inequalities between men and women.

However, the ideas of racialisation, racism and institutional racism remain contentious, and there is no consensus on the use of these terms. Small (1994, p.34) uses the term in a way which focuses attention on the racialisation of one group by another.

When we examine the process of 'racialisation' we find that our beliefs about 'racism' and 'race relations' have more to do with the attitudes, actions, motivations and interests of powerful groups in society and less to do with the characteristics, attitudes and actions of those who are defined as belonging to inferior 'races'.

In public and academic discourse since the Second World War, immigrant has been defined in a racialised way. As Miles (1989, p.86) has argued:

the language of 'immigration' and 'immigrant' therefore carried a set of implicit meanings or a subtext. As a result they were understood to refer specifically to 'coloured' immigrants (Miles, 1989, p.86).

This situation was quite clear in the documents of the Local Authority here. For example, in local Education Committee Minutes immigrants are defined in a racialised way. Immigrant children who came to Leicester in the post war period included groups with different skin colours, geographic origins, and ethnicities. There were white Europeans, black and Asian people of Caribbean origin, black and Asian people from Africa as well as Asians from the Indian subcontinent, but it is clear that ‘immigrants’ were defined as people with dark skins. The negative evaluation contained in this definition of immigration was also seen in the way in which immigrants were seen as a problem. White immigrant children were not seen like this. Additionally, the cause of these problems was seen to lie in the culture of black and Asian children, in the way Small described and quoted above. The situation was further complicated by the fact that black and Asian children in the 1950s and 1960s were lumped together as a group. It is clear that in education until the early 1970s attention was focused particularly on the culture of black children of Caribbean origin described at the time as ‘West Indian’. The dominant discourse makes it hard for historians to establish the true nature of the composition of immigrant children in schools and, second, the true nature of the changes in schools produced as a result of this immigration.

Here the concept of racialisation is used in the same way as that of Miles. Racialisation is used as a way to describe aspects of the identity of both black and whites. However, while the racialisation of blacks has been negative, the racialisation of whites has been positive. The concept of racism is used here to describe racialisation in practice. But it also embodies a commitment to a critical, moral evaluation. It refers to the ability of dominant groups to impose negative definitions of racialisation on to less powerful groups and implies consequences which disadvantage these groups.

Definitions

Terminology here is problematic and contentious. There is no precise term to describe the group of people whose experiences and relationship with the wider community is charted. Neither ‘Caribbean’ nor ‘West Indian’ accurately describes the geographical origins of the group.¹⁵ ‘Black’ can include migrants from Africa or the Caribbean and is also used as a political expression to describe those subjected to racism (UK: Fighting Our Fundamentalisms, 1995). The problem of terminology arises from the

social construction of groups of people into racialised categories, and the plastic nature of these constructions which change and reform as part of an ideological battle over the position of groups of people in society.¹⁶ African Caribbean, while problematic, has been adopted as a descriptor here, in line with the self classification of community members in the most recent research of opinion of the group in Leicester and which is also consistent with choice of the largest number of people in the 1991 census (African Caribbean People in Leicestershire, 1993). However, in this study, it includes people who regard themselves as black people originating from the Caribbean. It does not include people of Asian-Caribbean origin nor black people of African origin. Despite inaccuracies the terms 'black' and Caribbean migrant are used here interchangeably with African Caribbean. The term West Indian is used to describe British Colonial territories and migrants who came from these areas when it was used in sources or literature at a time when this was a common descriptor. While it is clearly inappropriate for black people born here, many African Caribbean people born in the Caribbean, are happy to call themselves West Indian. Terms like 'coloured' are adopted when they are used in sources or otherwise in parenthesis.

'Asian' is also used as a descriptor. This too is inaccurate to describe migrants in Leicester who arrived from India, East Africa and later Pakistan. However, this term has been retained as it is widely understood in Britain to mean immigrants whose antecedents originated from the Indian sub continent and it is also the description adopted by most of the people who themselves came from this area and who now live in Leicester.

This study is organised to show the evolving relationships between national and local government, policy towards immigration, the public discourse on race and the experiences of African Caribbeans in Leicester between 1945 and 1981. It is structured in a thematic way. The study examines a number of the most important areas of life: housing, employment, education, political organisations, leisure, cultural and religious life, but does so in a way that is consistent as far as possible with the chronological development of the policy, and decisions in relations to African Caribbeans.

Chapter Two discusses the causes of post war Caribbean immigration to Britain and shows the settlement of the African Caribbean population in Leicester in the context of the geographical distribution of African Caribbeans in Britain. It also outlines government policy on immigration through the period and thus the influence of this on the composition of the population of Leicester.

Chapter Three demonstrates that local government, in line with national policy, made no provision for the arrival of black people in Leicester in the period up to 1962 but shows that a racialised discourse concerning the arrival of black people was expressed in the local press. The first need of people after food is shelter and chapter four describes the experiences of African Caribbeans arriving in Leicester in relation to housing. Here again the local authority made no provision in this respect but policies had the effect of excluding African Caribbeans from public housing until the 1970s and allowed widespread discrimination in the private sector. Chapter Five discusses employment, an essential aspect of life for many people and at the heart of debates about black and Asian immigration. This chapter describes the 'colour bar' in Leicester which operated until 1981 and shows that this was not inevitable. The class composition of the African Caribbean community was forged as a result of exclusionary practices.

Chapter Six demonstrates the consistency between the remembered experiences of black people of their education in Leicester schools beginning in the early 1960s, and the policy of the Leicester Education Authority regarding the arrival of black and Asian children. Chapter Seven is concerned with the way in which African Caribbeans organised themselves politically and in relation to the local state. It also examines the growth of the far right in Leicester and the opposition to it. Chapter Eight shows how African Caribbeans were excluded from public places of entertainment and leisure facilities and how they developed a range of cultural organisations including religious institutions, as well as other organisations to protect their interests. These organisations developed a relationship with the local state through which an ethnic minority was formed.

In 1981, along with other cities in the UK, Leicester experienced what were considered street disorders by some and an uprising by others, involving black, Asian and white youths. These events can be seen as marking a turning point in the evolution of the construction of black and Asian people from immigrants to ethnic minorities. After 1981 the state, through local authorities, began to formalise this construction by fostering an ethnic identity through the funding of community projects. However, the continuity of a racialised element to the way in which black and Asian people were seen, remained. Both immigrant and ethnic minority are racialised concepts and in both popular and official discourse are defined in a racialised way.

Notes

- 1 House of Commons Sessional Papers 1975-76, Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration, 'Memorandum Submitted by Leicester United Caribbean Association', 4 December 1975, HMSO, London, paragraph, 17; House of Commons Session 1980-81, Fifth Report from the Home Affairs Committee, Racial Disadvantage, 13 March 1981, HMSO, (Marett, 1989, p.1).
- 2 The 1951 Census, Leicester and Leicestershire, Table 20.
- 3 The 1961 Census, Leicester and Leicestershire, Table 10.
- 4 The 1966 Sample Census, Leicester and Leicestershire, Table 20.
- 5 1971 Census, County Report for Leicester Part 1, Table 14.
- 6 1981 Census, County Report for Leicester Part 1, Table 10.
- 7 See Chapter 2 for a fuller discussion of this issue.
- 8 *Survey of Leicester*, Leicester City Council, 1983.
- 9 See Bibliography for a complete list of sources.
- 10 See Chapter Three.
- 11 House of Commons, Sessional Papers 1972-73, Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration, 'Memorandum Submitted by Leicester LEA', 24 May 1973, HMSO, London 1973; House of Commons Sessional Papers, 1975-76, Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration, Memoranda Submitted by LUCA, 4 December 1975, HMSO, London 1976; House of Commons, Session 1980-81, Fifth Report from the Home Affairs Committee, Racial Disadvantage, Evidence was submitted from a number of representatives of Leicester City Council and Leicestershire County Council, 13 March 1981, HMSO, London 1981.
- 12 Where people were unwilling to be identified a pseudonym was used and this has been noted.
- 13 See Chapter Two.
- 14 In Philadelphia, for example, a group of black parents attempted to ban all intelligence testing in schools as a 'result of the way these have been used to keep black people down' (Comer, 1970, p.8).
- 15 For a discussion of the evolving history and problems associated with these terms see E.M. Thomas-Hope, *Perspectives on Caribbean Regional Identity*, Centre for Latin American Studies, University of Liverpool, Monograph Series 11.
- 16 In Leicester in the 1950s, African-American servicemen were also treated as part of a group which were then described as 'coloured'. This racialised category overrode their nationality. For example, the headline 'Coloured Man is Attacked' referred to an American. *Leicester Mercury*, 1 October 1958.

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