

**This book will make you  
revisit the 'minority question'  
as it has been understood,  
conventionally.**

This book subjects to scrutiny some of the well-established social science concepts such as minority, ethnicity, inclusion, exclusion, and self-determination, among others. The purpose of the enquiry is neither to debunk these concepts nor to highlight their relevance/irrelevance, but merely to guard against their unselective usage by scholars. The work is an endeavor to address some of the questions that animate current scholarship on minority and minoritization. In doing so, the book draws upon European and Indian experiences of cultural diversities as these regions are two of the most culturally diverse regions in the world and engage with diversity from within a democratic framework.

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Tripathy | Padmanabhan

# BECOMING MINORITY

## BECOMING MINORITY How Discourses and Policies Produce Minorities in Europe and India

**Edited by  
Jyotirmaya Tripathy  
Sudarsan Padmanabhan**



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How Discourses and Policies Produce  
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Edited by  
Jyotirmaya Tripathy  
Sudarsan Padmanabhan

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# 10

## The Specter of Communalism and the Eugenic Solution to Britain's Immigration Problem

Gëzim Alpion

### Introduction

Focusing on the nature of the intranational relations among "indigenous" British peoples and their attitudes toward the "colored" workers who started arriving in Britain in the late 1940s, in this chapter I propose that Enoch Powell's speeches in the late 1960s reflected a "traditional" stance toward immigrants as well as a concern about the demographic changes which were taking place in parts of Britain, especially in England, from the mid-1950s.

Powell's rhetoric on immigration in general and especially his insistence that the numbers of Afro-Asian immigrants "are of the essence" (1969b, 37). I contend in this study, represent the last sustained effort in 20th century British politics to discuss this issue in the vein of the Enlightenment-inspired discourse that permeated 19th-century imperial attitudes toward non-Europeans, especially "colored people."

Powell stops short of approaching the "colored population" that had settled in Britain with the mindset of scientific racism. Nonetheless, the emphasis he puts on stopping completely and with immediate effect the net migration from the West Indies, India, and Pakistan, as well as stimulus initiating the repatriation of the "colored people" who were already in the country, I argue in this chapter, indicate clearly that his devotion to Britain, especially his insistence to keep England white, marked the most aggressive as well as the last sustained public expression of xenophobia and white supremacy in British politics in the second half of the 20th century. Powell's nationalist and racist views as well as his eugenic solution to the immigration of colored people are explained both in the context of the time when they were made and the lasting impact that his classical education and German culture had on him.

The chapter also approaches the British elites' treatment of Powell in the context of the prevailing institutionalized dislike for so-called populist politics and populist politicians. I contend that Powell was not a populist politician although at times he employed the populist rhetoric especially to warn against "communalism." While Powell apparently intervened in the immigration debate partly to stem the apparent "ethnization" of various constituencies of Great Britain, the reaction of the British establishment toward his views was also a "timely" intervention to curb the rise of "ethnic" nationalism in England at a time when Britain was moving from an Empire to a nation state.

The chapter finally assesses the impact of Powell's castigation by the officialdom on British politics and the immigration debate in Britain. I conclude that rather than continue shunning Powell as the bogeyman of British politics, policy makers and social scientists alike need to engage with and critique anew his controversial views on immigration especially at a time when, as a number of European leaders have recently claimed rather hastily, we are apparently witnessing the failure of "multiculturalism."<sup>2</sup>

### The British Empire and Multiculturalism

Following the end of the Crimean War in 1856 and the suppression of the Indian Mutiny in 1858, Neill notes, "[t]he whole world was open to Western commerce.... The day of Europe had come" (1990, 273).

The period in question was favorable especially for the consolidation of British rule over India.

Throughout their presence in India, the British had tried not to interfere too much with Indian religions, cultures, costumes, and traditions. This "non-interference" policy was often compromised by the officials of the East India Company, which led to the decision of the British Crown taking direct control of India in 1858. In the same year, Queen Victoria issued a Proclamation through which she was eager to appease angry Indians and signal a new stage in their relationship with Britain:

We disclaim alike the right and the desire to impose Our convictions on any of Our subjects. We declare it to be Our royal will and pleasure that none be in anywise favoured, none molested or disquieted by reason of their religious faith or observances, but that all shall alike enjoy the equal and impartial protection of the law. . . . And it is Our further will that, so far as may be, Our subjects, of whatever race or creed, be freely and impartially admitted to offices in Our service, the duties of which they may be qualified by their education, ability and integrity, duly to discharge. (Neill 1990, 274)

Queen Victoria's claim that institutionalized discrimination on any grounds would not be tolerated across the Empire was both incongruous and paradoxical because, like other colonial European powers, throughout the 19th century, Britain implemented a doctrine of racial superiority and preached the unfitness of the colonized Asian and African countries for self-governance.

On the other hand, Queen Victoria's 1858 message was a timely and well thought-out public relations gesture heralding, at least in theory, the dawn of a "new" legal era in India as well as in other British-controlled territories. The proclamation is perhaps the earliest official articulation of what, over a century later, would be known as "multiculturalism."

## Between Myth and Reality

Queen Victoria's proclamation initiated the myth about Britain as a fair "mother country" that was committed to treat all its overseas subjects on an equal footing. Britain benefited from this carefully crafted public image especially when the British Empire needed its overseas "equal" subjects' commitment for the "common good." Hundreds and thousands of colonial soldiers enlisted in the British army during both World Wars. Many

of them made enormous sacrifices in the name of "their" empire and the imagined "mother country" they heard so much about but never visited.

The first opportunity for many colonial soldiers to get to know their "mother country" came toward the end of the WW II. Throughout the war, a large number of them were stationed in Britain where they wanted to stay when the conflict came to an end in 1945. As many as 50 percent of West Indian servicemen, for instance, expressed the wish to settle in Britain.<sup>3</sup> Much to their surprise and disappointment, their requests were turned down.

To get back on her feet after the war, Britain needed manpower. The British political elite knew that the required workforce could be secured from the colonies but was apprehensive of the move to allow colored immigrants into the country, especially in large numbers. In the end, the more practical-minded participants in this "closed-door" debate had it their way and the first colored workers started arriving in Britain in the late 1940s.

An important moment in the history of postwar immigration in Britain is the docking of the freighter "Empire Windrush" in Southampton Harbour with 492 Jamaicans on board on June 22, 1948. For this contingent, as well as for the 125,000 West Indians immigrating to Britain throughout the 1950s, arriving in the "mother country" did not turn out to be the homecoming they had expected. The first generation of migrant hopefuls realized from the start that, no matter how much they were needed, Britain was neither prepared nor willing to treat them the same as the indigenous workforce, not only in employment but also in housing and education.

The unfair treatment that West Indian immigrants received in the "mother country" was to a large extent related to their physiognomy. The truth is that by then Britain had hardly treated white immigrants any better either. Behind the officially endorsed welcoming rhetoric about Britain's hospitality there is a less savory reality. Powell's claim in his Birmingham speech on April 20, 1968 that "[t]he Commonwealth immigrant came to Britain as a full citizen, to a country which knew no discrimination between one citizen and another" (1969b, 39) could hardly be further from the truth. Far from being the epitome of fairness, "Britain has an impeccable pedigree of racial and cultural intolerance of any new—and, therefore, fearsome—element in the population, dating back into the nineteenth century" (Smithies and Fiddick 1969, 55). In 1902, for

instance, Conservative MP Major William Evans Gordon urged the House of Commons to put immigration urgently under control because his countrymen were "ruthlessly turned out to make room for foreign invaders" (Smithies and Fiddick 1969, 55). In this case, the "invaders" were Italians, Romanians, Russians, and Poles. To Gordon, the invasion was so serious that "[i]t is only a matter of time before the population becomes entirely foreign" (ibid.). The immigrants had allegedly turned everything upside down: rents were raised by 50–100 percent, schools were overcrowded with thousands of foreign children (ibid.), and the country was on the verge of moral collapse. Gordon warned that "[a]mong the thousands who came here there is a considerable proportion of bad characters" (ibid.). Britain was obviously swamped by alien criminals, gamblers, bandits, and prostitutes. Gordon foresaw that a storm was brewing, which "if it be allowed to burst, will have deplorable results" (ibid., 56).

After WW II, colored workers replaced European "aliens" as a threat to Britain's "indigenous" population. Some newspapers in the Midlands such as the *Birmingham Post*, *Evening Mail*, and *Sunday Mercury* published outbursts of local people and civic leaders well before Powell made his inflammatory speeches in the late 1960s. On September 25, 1959, for instance, the *Birmingham Evening Mail* published a tirade by Councilor Collett against "the coloured immigrant who comes in peace and humility and ends by being the arrogant boss." In Collett's view, colored men should not refuse doing menial jobs as that is all they are capable of doing. "Only good coloured immigrants," Collett concludes, "should be allowed to come here, good in morals and health, and they should be licensed so that their good behaviour and limitation is guaranteed."

The apocalyptic tone, pathos, and diction apparent in Gordon's speech and Collett's outburst make for uncanny precursors to Powell's vision of Britain as a country on the verge of collapse because of the impact of immigration.

## The British and the "Inferior Other"

Throughout the empire, the British saw themselves as a nation with, to borrow a phrase from Max Weber, "a providential mission" (1970, 176). The print media in particular played a crucial role in constructing the

imperial British identity, starting and maintaining "an everyday plebscote" (Renan 1882), and forging Britishness in the shape of an "imagined political community" (Anderson 1983).

The British press constructed the "cohesion" and "superiority" of the British nation at the expense of the "fragmented nature" and "inferiority" of the subjugated nations and, to some extent, of any "backward" country, power and culture much along the lines of the antiquated "Greek-barbarian" racial imaginary polarity which was replaced in the 19th century with the "civilized-savage" dichotomy.<sup>4</sup>

Concentrating on magazines such as the *Gem* and *Magnet*, in his essay "Boys' Weeklies," George Orwell draws attention to media stereotyping and ridiculing of foreigners in the British press in the first half of the 20th century. In a tone echoing David Hume's condemnation in his 1748 essay "Of National Characters" of the tendency of "[t]he vulgar... to carry all 'national characters' to extremes" (Hume 1998, 113), Orwell observes that, notwithstanding occasional attempts to describe the natives as individual human beings, on the whole, the two magazines' basic assumptions are that "nothing ever changes, and foreigners are funny" (Orwell 1995, 178). For instance, in the *Gem* of 1939, Frenchmen are Froggies, Italians are Dagoes, and Americans are old-style stage Yankies.

While the tendency was to describe more or less any nation in derogatory terms, the worst stereotyping was reserved for nonwhite peoples. In addition to the press, throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the "racist" discourse was generated also by scientists and philosophers. Notwithstanding his aversion for stereotyping mentioned earlier, in a footnote to the same essay, Hume states that he is "apt to suspect the negroes and in general all other species of men... to be naturally inferior to the whites" (Eze 1997, 33). In an apparent attempt to exonerate Britain's enslavement of colored people, Hume claims that his conclusion on the "inferiority" of the "negroes" is based on their "underachievement" in "our colonies" as well as "all over Europe" (ibid.).

Hume's views on the "species of men" who are "naturally inferior to the whites" should be seen in the context of the obsession with taxonomies that characterized the Enlightenment, as well as of the sustained efforts to "legitimize" the exploitation of the "uncivilized" colonized peoples, especially the millions of Africans transported as slaves to the

New World. In this respect, Hume's infamous footnote on the "innate inferiority" of the slaves is a modern rephrasing of Aristotle's view that some people are more suited for manual labor and as such "destined" by nature to "serve others." Hume's and other Enlightenment philosophers' and men of science's obsession with skin color and their tendency to determine intelligence on the basis of physiognomy would inevitably turn "whiteness" and "blackness" into central categories to racial thinking in modern times. Hume's views on the "inferior" nonwhites illustrate, what Smith (2013) calls, "the curious paradox of Enlightenment thought, that the supposedly universal aspiration to liberty, equality and fraternity in fact only operated within a very circumscribed universe."

The British media played its part in stereotyping and misrepresenting nonwhite peoples also in the first half of the 20th century. In the *Gems* of 1939, Orwell notes, the Chinese are the 19th-century pantomime Chinamen, with saucer-shaped hats, pigtails and pidgin-English (Orwell 1995, 178), Indians are comic babus of the Punch tradition, and the "negro" is described as "comic" and "very faithful" (ibid., 179).

This kind of literature on foreigners, especially colored peoples, that the British had been exposed to for so long, would have a direct impact on their attitude toward the immigrants who started arriving in Britain from the late 1940s.

## Powell, the Media, and Party Politics

In the wake of WW II, the British government did not have a clear policy in terms of how many foreign workers would be allowed to enter the country and regarding their dispersal around Britain. As a result, while certain areas witnessed a large influx of immigrants, others received few or none. According to Powell, out of over 600 parliamentary constituencies, less than 60 were badly affected (1969a, 19).

The failure of the parliament and the government to listen to the concerns of local councilors and Members of Parliament about this issue was one of the reasons why Powell felt he needed to turn immigration into a national issue in the late 1960s. He saw himself as a politician with a mission and the media as an indispensable tool with which to accomplish it.

Powell understood very well the media's role and power as an effective propaganda tool. This explains why he distributed copies of the Birmingham speech before he actually delivered it on April 20, 1968, and why he used uncorroborated "examples" of immigrants allegedly mistreating the indigenous population. Shortly after the speech, he told the *Daily Mail* that "the best way of getting listened to is to humanise your theme by talking about an individual" (Smithies and Fiddick 1969, 14). As a result of the unprecedented attention the local and national media paid to the "blockbuster," as the editor of the *News of the World* called the Birmingham speech, Powell finally succeeded in bringing national attention to immigration.

His inflamed rhetoric backfired on him, however. The British political class condemned his views and the most severe criticism came from his own party.

It has been suggested that Powell's controversial speeches on immigration in 1968 were not in keeping with his interest in this issue but a calculated publicity stunt to secure the leadership of the Conservative Party. Powell was an ambitious politician and if indeed he chose to use the immigration card to further his political career, he was neither the first nor would he be the last British politician to do so. Lewis argues that Powell was a victim of an ongoing power struggle in the Conservative Party:

It was known, or at least said, in party circles that [Edward] Heath was hoping for an excuse to get rid of Powell, and that in this feeling he had most of the Shadow Cabinet with him. They had found his dissection of party policy proposals uncomfortable; and he was finding that Heath ignored his views or prevented him increasingly from putting them forward. (Lewis 1979, 107)

Heath apparently saw Powell as a contender for the leadership of the Conservative Party. By that time, Powell was already a scholar, a soldier, a philosopher, and a statesman with valuable experience in government and in opposition. If Heath wanted to rid himself of Powell, he was aware that he would need quite a strong reason to justify sacking him.

With his widely mediated Birmingham speech, Powell could not have offered Heath a better reason to remove him from the Shadow Cabinet. Heath wasted no time in condemning Powell's rant against immigrants as being "racialist in tone, and liable to exacerbate racial tensions," a verdict which even the unrepentant Powell could hardly disagree with.

Heath was also annoyed because Powell apparently failed to consult with him over the Birmingham speech. As far as Heath was concerned, Powell had been "calculatedly-disloyal" (Lewis 1979, 106), a charge which Powell strongly denied. In Powell's view, "[i]t was to the tone of my speech that objection was taken" (1969c, 64).

Powell's outspokenness as well as the support he received from working class people and some sections of the media obviously made the British political and media elites feel uncomfortable and embarrassed. As Heffer puts it, Powell's detractors assailed him, among other things, "for his temerity in thinking that, at times, he knew better than the Conservative Party, and had a right to condemn its moral and intellectual failings" (1998, 960). This point was articulated very clearly by the BBC's David Frost during an interview. In a moment of frustration, Frost interrupts Powell saying:

DF: You "underestimate" us. I feel a great sympathy for the people you talk about, make no mistake about that, but—and the people who've got a real problem now, but you—what you do is you "underestimate" us all so much. (Frost 1969, 113, emphasis added)

Frost accused Powell of "underestimating us" (*ibid.*, 114) once more shortly afterward. Powell's opponents in politics and the media obviously felt that he had made them look as if they were out of touch with what people thought about the important issue of immigration.

## Aversion to Populist Politics

Enoch Powell's falling out with Edward Heath and the criticism and condemnation he received from political allies and opponents as well as media and religious circles can be explained to some extent in the context of the British establishment's traditional "contempt" for so-called "populist politics" and "populist politicians" as well as in light of claims made by scholars on the power of the media to "manage" and "manipulate" rather than "express" the "public will."<sup>6</sup>

Political, economic, and intellectual elites in the West have a long tradition of disregard and dislike for democracy and the masses (Dewey 1987, Keane 2007, Bernstein 2010). This became more apparent when

the industrial and graphic revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries turned what was known as "rabble," "multitude," "mob," and "a Dark Continent beyond the understanding of the civilized elite" (Furedi 2005) into "mass."

Mass media, especially newspapers, have been traditionally seen by European politicians and intellectuals as a means through which populist leaders air the views of those "dirty people of no name," as the historian Clarendon called the masses (cited in Carr 1971, 50).

Powell himself had strong reservations about the role of the media in democracy (1969b, 39). He was mainly concerned, however, about the behavior of politicians toward the masses. "[A]lmost everywhere," he argued on July 13, 1971, "a common assumption is silently shared... that the citizen cannot, must not, fix his own goals or choose his own good" as a result of "the normal assumption" that his aims "are set by the state" (Powell 1971b). In his view, "[w]e do not usually notice this partly because the modern state uses the vocabulary of individual liberty ('human rights,' etc.), just as the totalitarian state uses the terminology of democracy" (*ibid.*).

Referring to its traditional sidelining and disconnection from the public and inability "to understand what makes people tick," Furedi maintains that:

the British political class assumes that the public suffers from irrational prejudice and is easily misled by xenophobic demagogues. This suspicion towards what may lurk beneath the soul of everyday society is deeply ingrained in the more leftist and liberal sections of the elite. It is paradoxical that this group, which continually denounces racism, does not recognize its own brand of contempt for those it deems morally inferior. It is worth recalling that the racial thinking first emerged in Europe among the elite that regarded the lower orders as both biologically and morally inferior to itself. (2005)

O'Neill detects "a barely concealed contempt for the voting masses" also in the "frenzy" against Robert Kilroy-Silk,<sup>7</sup> another controversial former British politician addressing the issue of immigration with hardly more sensitivity than Powell.

The word that pops up most often in critiques of Kilroy-Silk is "populist"—he's a "media populist," accuses Nick Cohen; he has an "abrasive populist manner" says one commentator; he's a "dangerous populist" says another.

What they're really saying is that Kilroy-Silk is trying to appeal to the masses and, dumbasses that the masses are, they might just fall for it and give in to his "populist patter." As one contributor to a web discussion board wrote: "There is a disenfranchised proletariat rump whose opinions are informed by this sort of xenophobic, populist crap." (2005)

Powell's speeches, especially those on immigration, at times reveal signs of populism. This is seen in his use of the first personal pronoun "we," the references to anonymous individuals, and the claims about the high level of support he received.

Notwithstanding the populist elements of his rhetoric, Powell was not necessarily a populist politician. His "populist rhetoric" should be seen, among other things, in the context of his concern about the irresponsible way, in his view, language was used by the government and the media. There is a "danger," he wrote on July 13, 1971:

that we may fall prey to one of the most dangerous of political epidemics—that of metaphor.... It is my thesis that much of the language of our current debate is unconscious metaphor of the most dangerous kind: the confusion of the economic and the political. (1971b)

At this stage, Powell is mainly concerned about the government's handling of Britain's membership in the European Economic Community, an issue to which we will return shortly. Powell also believed that the dangerous "political epidemics of metaphor" is noticeable in the government's and the national media's interpretation of the concept of "compassion," mainly regarding housing (1968a), and especially the immigration issue. Powell was adamant that the British establishment was inclined not to call things by their name, a tendency which, on September 27, 1969, he defined as "a humbugging abuse of language... intended to deceive."

In addition to Powell's aversion for the "humbugging" diction with which he believed "politics is cursed," the directness of the controversial "populist rhetoric" he employed is also a reflection of his views regarding the obligation of elected politicians toward the "demos." This is a recurrent theme in Powell's speeches. He justifies recounting in the Birmingham speech a controversial conversation with a constituent by saying: "I do not have the right not to do so... I simply do not have the right to shrug my shoulders and think about something else" (Powell 1969b, 36). Powell also believed that "it is the duty of a politician to make and to declare his judgement" (1969c, 73).

On February 12, 1971, Powell advised an audience in France not to be misled by the British politicians speaking in favor of Britain joining the ECC. In his words, their "unanimity and show of confidence" is nothing more than the public stance that those "who speak officially are in duty bound to maintain" (1971a).

The key phrase in the above quote is "duty bound." Powell was aware of his obligation to the Conservative Party and the Shadow Cabinet when he gave the Birmingham speech. However, he apparently did not understand loyalty to the party as an ultimate goal. Nor did he seem to have perceived politics as an end to retain or come to power. He was critical of anyone, irrespective of party affiliation, who, in his view, avoided addressing important issues to serve their own interests. He found hypocritical the compassionate rhetoric of the then Labour Cabinet: Prime Minister Harold Wilson's purpose, Powell argued on September 27, 1969, is the enforcement upon the citizens by the use of the powers of government redistribution of income which they hoped would stand the Labour Government in good stead at the next election "in terms of votes". Three years earlier, Powell took a swipe at the Labour Government and his own party saying that it was "absolutely absurd to say that immigration either is not, or ought not to be, an issue" at the 1966 election (1966). It was because he was "duty bound," he emphasized in Eastbourne (1969c, 64), that he took up the theme of immigration again since his vilification for the Birmingham speech earlier in the year.

### "The Numbers Are of the Essence"

Whenever Powell raised the issue of immigration, he would always mention that his main concern was the large number of immigrants. He stressed that "numbers are of the essence" especially in Birmingham (1969b, 37) and Eastbourne (1969c, 68). In 1968, he put the figure of the immigrants who were already in the country at "1.25 million" (*ibid.*, 69), predicting that between 1983 and 1988 it would stand at "3.5 million" (Powell 1969b, 36), and between 2000 and 2002 it would vary between "3.5 millions" (Powell 1967), "4.25 million" (Powell 1969c, 73), and "5-7 million" (Powell 1969b, 36). In percentage terms, in 1968, Powell held that by the end of the 20th century immigrants in Britain would



represent between "5 percent" (Powell 1967), "a little over 6 percent" (Powell 1969c, 73), nearly "one-eighth" (Frost 1969, 107), and even "approximately one-tenth of the whole population" (Powell 1969b, 36).

Following the Birmingham speech, Powell was often rebuked for his "unrealistic" figures. All the same, he maintained that the assumptions which produced the figures "are deliberately pitched low" (1969c, 73) and as such they were "neither random nor ill-considered" (*ibid.*). Regarding the claim that the number of immigrants in 1985 will be in the order of 3.5 millions, for instance, he was keen to stress that that was "the figure given to Parliament by the spokesman of the Registrar General's office" (Smithies and Fiddick 1969, 145).

The issue which still merits attention today about Powell's obsession with immigration statistics is not if they were accurate predictions—according to the 2001 Census, the ethnic minority population in the UK was 4.6 million, i.e., 7.9 percent of the country's total population—but that they refer almost exclusively to the "colored population" and the motives he had in referring to them ceaselessly.

## Criminalizing Colored Immigrants

Powell divided colored immigrants into two main groups when he provided statistics about the alien population in Britain from the late 1940s onward: West Indians and Afro-Asians; in the latter, he included Indians, Pakistanis, and South Asians who came to Britain from Kenya in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Powell was keen to highlight constantly that the number of so many colored people was allegedly causing a variety of problems ranging from putting pressure on local services to the complete transformation of certain areas. He wrote on February 16, 1967 that he lived in Wolverhampton within a stone's throw of streets which "went black" (Powell 1967).

Powell had a tendency to highlight primarily the unsocial and criminal behavior allegedly characterizing colored immigrants. He deliberately demonized and criminalized the colored population, especially the black immigrants, to blame them for the "exodus" of the indigenous population from formerly "white" areas. To illustrate the "plight" of the white people, Powell used information he claimed he had received from

talking to his constituents and anonymous letters. What one can draw from these maliciously selected case studies is that colored people were a "menace" to all age groups of white people, especially the elderly. The reasons why Powell chose the case of an old lady, apparently the last white person in her street, who was allegedly mistreated by the "negroes," can hardly be missed. She had apparently turned into a prisoner in her own home and was being persecuted in her own country for which her family had made enormous sacrifices: "[s]he lost her husband and both her sons in the war" (1969b, 41).

In a speech, echoing previously mentioned sentiments expressed by the Conservative Member of Parliament in 1902 about the "bad character" of "a considerable proportion" of European immigrants, and the Birmingham Councilor's call in 1959 to license colored immigrants "so that their good behavior and limitation is guaranteed," in 1968, Powell stated:

With the malefactors among our own people we have got to cope; they are our own responsibility and part of our own society. It is something totally different when the same or similar activities are perpetrated by strangers, and above all when they occur in the course of an increase in the numbers of those strangers and an extension of the areas which they occupy—an increase and an extension to which the victims perceive no end in sight. Surely only very clever people could fail to understand so simple a point. (1969c, 68)

Effective as the carefully selected examples of the "victimized" white individuals and their colored "tormentors" were, Powell was aware that a blanket victimization of all colored immigrants would do more harm than good to his smear campaign. He did manage, however, to find an "offence" with which, he hoped, he could charge all colored immigrants with: in his view, the overwhelming majority were communalists at heart.

## The Specter of Communalism

By the late 1960s, Powell warned that most colored immigrants in Britain were disconnected from the rest of the indigenous population which, he argued, stemmed from "[t]he irregular pattern of population and living [that] grew up higgledy-piggledy in the early years of immigration"

(1967). He paid attention to the lack of integration especially in the Walsall speech on February 9, 1968. Referring to the policy of the Wolverhampton Corporation to ask immigrant workers "to decide which if any of the rules of their sect they will keep," he concluded:

It will be the opposite to the equal treatment of all persons within the realm if employers are placed in the position of adjudicating upon the requirements of their employees' religion. The issue in this instance is not racial or religious discrimination: it is communalism. (1969a, 21-22)

Such "liberties," Powell argued in Birmingham, imply the elevation of the colored immigrants and their descendants into "a privileged or special class" (1969b, 39).

Powell argued that communalism was spreading in Britain mainly because of the strong inclination of the West Indian and Afro-Asian immigrants to live "in their own communities," speak "their own languages," and maintain "their native customs" (1969c, 71). He predicted on February 16, 1967 that the tendency was bound to worsen. In Birmingham the following year he warned about the consequences of this trend on the immigrants who are not keen on communalism *per se*, and the indigenous population:

Now we are seeing the growth of positive forces acting against integration, of vested interests in the preservation and sharpening of racial and religious differences, with a view to the exercise of actual domination, first over fellow-immigrants and then over the rest of the population. (1969b, 42)

To make his argument more effective, Powell quotes from a speech by John Stonehouse, a Labour MP and government minister:

The Sikh community's campaign to maintain customs inappropriate in Britain is much to be regretted.... To claim special communal rights (or should one say rites?) leads to a dangerous fragmentation within society. This communalism is a canker; whether practised by one colour or another it is to be strongly condemned. (ibid., 42-43)

Occasionally, Powell made some half-hearted remarks on the efforts everyone should make to ensure the integration of the colored population (1967). All the same, he is adamant that this can never be successfully achieved because, as he puts it on March 25, 1966, "there is really not one immigration problem, but two distinct and separate

immigration problems. One is concerned with the immigrants who are here already. The other is concerned with control over entry to this country" (Powell 1966).

By this time, Powell held that the inflow and the outflow of colored immigrants could be balanced over a period of years by greatly reducing the rate of admission and encouraging "voluntary" return to whence they came (ibid.). Not for long. A year later, he wrote the size of the problem could be eliminated "by virtually terminating net immigration" (Powell 1967) and employing "aid, inducements and encouragements to immigrants to rejoin families in their country of origin or to return thither" (ibid.). From this moment onward, Powell saw repatriation as important an issue as the complete halt on net immigration. So much so that, on November 16, 1968, he suggested that the resettlement of the colored immigrants "ought to be, and it could be, organized now on the scale which the urgency of the situation demands, preferably under a special Ministry for Repatriation or other authority charged with concentrating on this task" (1969c, 77).

Although Powell was aware of the drastic nature of his proposal, he maintained that this was the only way to eventually protect Britain from the dangers of "communalism," the "colour problem," and "racial discrimination" (1966) which, he was keen to emphasize, are endemic in other countries, especially in India and the USA. "Communalism has been the curse of India," he wrote on February 9, 1968, "and we need to be able to recognize it when it rears its head here" (1969a, 21). If his proposal was not implemented, he warned, by the end of the 20th century Britain would face a color problem "similar in magnitude to that in the United States now" (ibid.).

## Powell, the British Empire, and the UK

Powell took enormous pride in the British Empire and regretted its demise. With the empire gone, he saw the preservation of the United Kingdom as vital to Britain's survival as a state and raised his voice any time he believed the Union was in danger. Powell believed that from the 1950s onward Britain's dangers came from the US, the European Economic Community, and the presence of the colored population.



According to Heffer, Powell's "main, unresolved conflict with his opponents was the question of whether the British people wished to remain a nation" (1998, 959). I contend that, in Powell's view, his opponents also failed to grasp the detrimental impact the three aforementioned "threats" would have especially on the heart of the UK: England.

England's unique place among the nations of the British Isles was forged from the start of the second millennium. According to Bartlett (2001), in the Middle Ages, the British Isles exemplified the variety of a number of relationships: the degree of ethnic diversity, the degree of political centralization and unity, and the lack of direct connection between ethnic and political homogeneity. In early medieval Ireland and Wales, for instance, "a high degree of cultural unity coexisted with marked political fragmentation; in Scotland a unified kingdom emerged, formed of territories of great cultural and ethnic diversity" (ibid., 53). In England, however, the "relatively close match between the kingdom of England and the English" (ibid.) produced, what Davies calls, a "regnal and ethnic solidarity" (1994, 20). Having acknowledged that this situation generated different types of nationalism, Bartlett concludes that:

England is a simpler case. A longish history of political unity under one dynasty, a common language, and the territorial integrity aided by an island location all created a "match between people and polity" that gave English nationalism an earlier, more continuous, and more apparently self-evident history than the nationalism of most other parts of Europe. (2001, 53)

Powell was aware that "the duration and natural evolution" (1971a) of English national identity become apparent only if they are seen in the context of "a thousand years of English history" (1969b, 36). Equally important, in this respect, is his firm belief in the unique role of the English parliament in forging English national identity. Although he referred often to "the British" Parliament, in his view, this institution was fundamentally an English establishment, thus, echoing the sentiments of the 19th-century British politician John Bright who in 1865 stated that "England is the Mother of Parliaments," a phrase which is often wrongly quoted as a reference to the British Parliament. "Take Parliament out of the history of England," Powell said in France on February 12, 1971, "and that history itself becomes meaningless" (1971a).

England's special status within Great Britain does not lessen the role and importance of the other three nations included in the union. Indeed,

much of the success of the British Empire was down to the important role played by each of the four nations that together constructed the British identity.

On the whole, throughout the Imperial Era, this shared identity was not seen as a threat to the more immediate national identity. The English, Scots, Irish, and Welsh were not concerned with Britishness when they were in the UK. Their Britishness became more of a signifier, an indicator of who they collectively were, when they went overseas.

The collective British national identity had a strong appeal in the past, especially among the middle classes and the aristocracy, because, to quote Davenport (2005), "it was based on material interest. No doubt some identified with a mythical and backward-looking idea of 'Britishness', but essentially the British nation state was seen as the best guarantor of maintaining living standards."

During the time of the empire, as a result of the lack of Welsh institutions, different from the Scots and Irish, the Welsh would usually identify Britain with England, and see the English as epitomizing the "British." There were cases when even the Scots would equate Britain with England and the British with the English. This is particularly the case in the writings of two well-known 19th century Scottish authors, Thomas Carlyle (1841) and Samuel Smiles (1859), which abound in numerous references to England, the English, and the Englishman's character.

Different from the Scots, Welsh, and Irish, when Britain was an empire, the English would normally presume that, in their case, Britishness meant Englishness, something which was often reflected in the English newspapers and the political discourse. When the Conservative MP, mentioned earlier, demanded in 1902 that the government should no longer allow European immigrants to enter the country, what he was concerned about was not the detrimental effect immigration was allegedly having on Britain but on England. The victims he identified were not British but "English families" (Smithies and Fiddick 1969, 55). He was worried that, as a result of the foreigners, "an English working man" (ibid., 56) and not a British subject was apparently unable "to enjoy his day or rest" (ibid.).

The gradual loss of overseas influence and territories from the end of WWI and more rapidly in the wake of the WW II meant that Britain was changing from an imperial power to a nation state. The inevitable end of the empire was bound to bring to the surface, and with an increased

urgency, the issue of the relationship of the four nations comprising Great Britain and, more importantly, the question of England's position and role in this uneasy union. The British monarchy and the British political elite were obviously interested in maintaining the *status quo* at home, which in the postwar years meant that Britain should outlive its rapidly eroding empire.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned personal motives of Powell's political opponents to sideline him, I contend that his swift vilification immediately after the Birmingham speech indicates that the British ruling elite was not prepared to tolerate his "racalist" views for two reasons. Like Powell, they were aware of Britain's benefits from having a multiracial and multicultural society much earlier than when the heated immigration debate began in the late 1960s. On the other hand, unlike Powell, they apparently envisaged that his nationalistic rhetoric could lift the lid on long-standing nationalist antagonisms at home. The British establishment's determination to condemn Powell at a time when the Scots were debating their own future as a nation was probably one of its most important decisions after the WW II, a decision which, in hindsight, was perhaps paramount to the survival of the UK as a state.

## Powell, the English Nationalist

Powell put the blame squarely on the government for the large number of colored immigrants in Britain. In his view, the root of the problem was the British Nationality Act 1948 which saw the creation of the status of "Citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies" as the national citizenship of both the UK and its colonies. Powell "inveighed against" this Act "from the outset" (1969c, 70) and over the years tried hard "from inside and outside government" to urge legislation (*ibid.*), although without success. He was adamant that "[i]f Britain had provided herself in 1956... with what every nation under the sun possesses—a law defining its own people—what a world of anguish past and future would never have been!" (*ibid.*). On February 16, 1967, he castigated as "slow" and "timid" the decision of the government to act in the wake of "the rising flood of immigration which came on the post-election boom of 1960" (Powell 1967).

In Powell's view, the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962, which limited the right to migrate to the UK only to those issued with employment vouchers, finally made "our law like that of every other country on earth, in recognizing the difference between its own people and the rest" (Powell 1967). All the same, he maintained that the 1962 Act came very late.

In Eastbourne, Powell explained one of the main reasons why he was so critical of the way British governments had been handling the immigration of colored people from 1948:

[U]ntil 1962, this country, alone of all the nations in the world, had no definition of its own people, so that for all purposes an Englishman born in Birmingham and a tribesman from the North-West Frontier were indistinguishable in the law of the United Kingdom. (1969c, 63)

In his speeches and articles on immigration in the late 1960s, Powell was often keen to emphasize that England was affected by immigration more than any other part of the UK, and in Eastbourne he even claimed that "it is virtually only England which is affected" (*ibid.*, 69). As a result of this concentration of colored immigrants, he argued, some areas in England, like his Wolverhampton constituency, "are already undergoing the total transformation to which there is no parallel in a thousand years of English history" (1969b, 36). He feared the worst was yet to come.

The "victims" in Powell's articles and speeches, mentioned earlier, are all English. The victimization of the English people, he stressed in Birmingham, came from the colored population and the government. He claims a constituent told him he would prefer to leave England with his three children if he could afford it mainly because he believed that "[i]n this country in fifteen or twenty years time the black man will have the whip-hand over the white man" (*ibid.*). In the same speech, Powell expressed his strong opposition to calls by politicians, media people, and religious leaders for legislation "against discrimination" (*ibid.*, 39) because, in his view, the English people themselves have turned into "a persecuted minority" (*ibid.*, 40).

In spite of his Welsh heritage and aforementioned commitment to the survival of the UK, Powell was essentially an English nationalist.<sup>8</sup> The nature of his devotion to England becomes clearer if seen in the context of the stages of his commitment to the British Empire, Britain,

and England, and the order in which each of them in turn emerged as his main emotional attachment.

As mentioned earlier, Powell was proud of the British Empire and had an ambition to become Viceroy of India. He spoke emotionally about the might of the empire even in his old age (Shepherd 1996, 9). Britain replaced the empire in importance when he realized that the events in Europe in the mid-1930s would eventually lead to war. If until then Powell had seen "the nation in the framework of the British Empire," now Britain and the British nation became his main concern: "what mattered to me, more than anything that could happen to me personally was the outcome of that war that was to come for the existence of the nation" (Roth 1979, 24).

Even at that early stage, Powell saw the war as being a major threat especially to England; he had no doubt that "at stake was the freedom of England" (*ibid.*).

Notwithstanding Powell's early attachment to England, this part of Britain became his main concern when he articulated his fears about the long-term impact of the colored population in the late 1960s. Powell's stance as an English nationalist is better understood in the context of the impact that Germany, his "spiritual homeland" (Shepherd 1996, 25), and German culture, of which he "was to remain in uncritical awe" as a young man, had on him.

Powell believed that the only way for the British nation to survive was to follow the German model. As Walker Connor notes, prior to the outbreak of WW II, Germany was among the handful of states that clearly qualified as a nation state, which means that the "state" and the "nation" were indistinguishably linked in the popular perception. To the Germans, Germany "was something far more personal and profound than a territorial-political structure termed a state; it was an embodiment of the nation-idea and therefore an extension of self" (Connor 1994, 42).

Powell was opposed to Hitler and Nazism. Hitler's purge of his political rivals in the summer of 1934, Powell would recall later, left him "in a state of shock... shock which you experience when, around you, you see the debris of a beautiful building in which you have lived for a long time" (Roth 1970, 24). The event, Shepherd (1996, 28) contends, marked the disillusionment of Powell with German culture. The shock was strong enough to make Powell keen to enlist in the British army "from the first day that Britain goes to war" (Heffer 1998, 22).

Notwithstanding his aversion for Hitler, the German leader's propaganda about the "superiority" of the Aryan race as well as the disturbing views of some German philosophers like Kant (1950) and Hegel (1902) on the "inferiority" of colored people apparently made a lasting impact on the young Powell. After all, Powell "remained addicted to German culture" (Heffer 1998, 22) throughout his life. As he put it in 1966, the happiest and most glorious hours of his life as a scholar "have been with German books" (*ibid.*, 28).

For someone who does not know much about German history, the fact that Powell gave the Birmingham speech on January 20 would hardly seem significant. Given that Powell was so immersed in German culture, however, his decision to deliver the most important speech of his career on the anniversary of Hitler's birthday seems more like a sinister choice than an unfortunate memory lapse. The final solution Powell devised in the late 1960s to virtually cleanse Britain, especially England, from the colored population shows clearly that he was a white supremacist. Powell was keen to use intimidating language and tactics and thinly veiled threats intended for colored immigrants who would not pack up and leave England. His prediction in Eastbourne that "the People of England will not endure it" (Powell 1969c, 73-74) amounts to an ominous call to arms to the English to resist "an invasion which the Government apparently approved and their fellow-citizens—elsewhere—viewed with complacency" (Powell 1967).

Finally, Powell's obsession to preserve the homogeneity of indigenous white population, his tendency to see the presence of colored people as a clear and present "menace" (*ibid.*) and a hidden "evil" (Powell 1969b, 35) that had to be tackled even in the knowledge that it could not be stopped completely (Powell 1969a, 19), and the apocalyptic vision that failure to act immediately is "like watching a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre" (1969b, 37) are unmistakable signs of the lasting impact of his classical education, especially of the views that a number of classicists at the start of the 20th century held on the fall of civilizations. One such classicist, Frank, wrote in his essay "Race Mixture in the Roman Empire": "what lay behind and constantly reacted upon all such causes of Rome's disintegration was, after all to considerable extent, the fact that the people who built Rome had given way to a different race" (1916, 705). Echoing Frank's views about the same issue, Duff (1928) saw "race-mixing" as a "threat" of contemporary immigration.

For someone like Powell who had studied and excelled in classics at King Edward's School, Birmingham, and at Trinity College, Cambridge, who had published scholarly articles on ancient civilizations from an early age, and who at 25 was appointed Professor of Greek at the University of Sydney, the presence in his articles and speeches on immigration of numerous references to the classical world, especially to ancient Greece and Rome, was unavoidable. The influence of this attachment to classics is apparent especially in the tone and diction of the Birmingham address, otherwise known as the "Rivers of Blood" speech. Toward the end of this speech, Powell uses an allusion to Virgil's *Aeneid* with the purpose of warning ominously of an apocalyptic future: "As I look forward, I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I seem to see 'the River Tiber foaming with much blood'" (1969b, 43).

As mentioned earlier, Powell was fairly accurate in predicting in the late 1960s the numbers of immigrants in Britain by the end of the 20th century. Likewise, he was a little off the mark in his estimate of the size of immigrant population in England. The 2001 Census revealed that at the start of the 21st century in England the immigrant or immigrant-descended population made up 9 percent of the total population, whereas in Scotland and Wales only 2 percent, and in Northern Ireland less than 1 percent. Today, there are areas in England where the population is predominantly non-English.

Notwithstanding the figures, Powell's prophecies of social and racial conflicts between the indigenous population and the colored immigrants, indeed the large number of foreigners who have settled in the UK since the late 1960s, have not materialized. Even more significant is the fact that, in spite of ongoing concerns about the government's lack of a clear policy on immigration, the people of England and across the UK have not endorsed nor have they appropriated Powell's xenophobic and racist views.

## Conclusion

Powell saw the presence of colored population as a "threat" to the "cohesion" of the English nation which, he believed, would eventually undermine the very existence of the UK as a state. He failed to see that in

the wake of WW II immigration was an unstoppable phenomenon. The dismantling of the colonial system and the trend of globalization made inevitable demographic changes in the UK and other former colonial powers in Western Europe.

Powell was eager to emphasize in Eastbourne that from the 1950s "the people of Britain are faced with a *fait accompli*, that all sorts of excuses are invented and we are told in terms of arrogant moral superiority that we have got a 'multi-racial society' and had better like it" (1969c, 69). The problem in Britain's case, as well as in other former colonial powers, was that by the time their grip on the colonies slipped away, they were ill-prepared to treat fairly the immigrant force they needed to keep their economies going. It is hardly a coincidence that, apart from some halfhearted remarks, Powell did not mention the benefits of immigration to UK economy.

Powell's tendency to indiscriminately criminalize colored immigrants, to highlight their alleged innate communalism, and the reluctance to respect and appropriate new cultures were, and remain, deeply offensive and repulsive. Equally disturbing is his eugenic solution, a drastic measure which Britain's establishment had the farsightedness to condemn outright when he articulated it in the late 1960s. It is primarily for these reasons why, to this day, he remains the bogeyman of British politics. Among politicians, one must enjoy a near untouchable status, as was the case with Margaret Thatcher, to dare make a positive remark on Powell. A number of people in the public eye have been rebuked over the last few years for praising Powell's views on immigration.<sup>9</sup>

In the modern world, almost every society and country is multiracial, multicultural, multiethnic, multilingual, and multireligious. In this multilayered world, it is important that citizens preserve their identities and respect the identities of others as well as try to discover what, in spite of their differences, they share. This sharing is paramount for building and maintaining a cohesive society.

Only in a cohesive society can a spirit of togetherness be forged. This togetherness is possible if we do not see our native cultures as set in stone and incapable of dialogue and fusion. Powell did not even consider that such fusion is possible; he held that a colored immigrant does not "by being born in England become an Englishman" (1969c, 77).

All the same, all indications are that this togetherness, although "dis-mantled" (Bauman 2003, 119), is already in Britain and across the world. What are required are more coordinated efforts among politicians, community leaders, and social scientists to detect and promote it.

## Notes and Bibliography

### Notes

1. The terminology referring to the skin color of the immigrant population in Britain in this chapter reflects the lexicon employed by the media, Enoch Powell, and the authors of the publications consulted.
2. Some of the European leaders who have recently spoken about the failure of multiculturalism in their countries include former French president Nicolas Sarkozy, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and British Prime Minister David Cameron.
3. For information on the West Indian servicemen's wish to remain in Britain at the end of WW II and the British government's plans to ship them home, see Pilkington (1990).
4. I have addressed the representation of foreigners in the British press in the article "Western Media and the European 'Other'—Images of Albania in the British Press," which is included in the collection of essays *Encounters with Civilizations: From Alexander the Great to Mother Teresa* (see Alpion 2011).
5. David Hume edited slightly the 1748 essay "Of National Characters" and its accompanying infamous footnote several times. The quotes from the 1748 footnote in this chapter are taken from the 1754 version which is believed to include the most important modifications. For the full 1754 version of the footnote, see Eze (1997, 33). For Hume's complete essay, see Hume (1998).
6. For the role of the media in managing rather than expressing the public will, see Hall (1986), Curran (2003), and Bernstein (2005).
7. Robert Kilroy-Silk is a former British politician and television presenter. His show *Kilroy* was canceled by the BBC in 2004 following the publication in the *Sunday Express* of his controversial article entitled "We Owe Arabs Nothing" on January 4 of that year. I have written about Kilroy-Silk's racist views in my article "Why Human Rights Must Never Just Be Selective," *The Birmingham Post*, January 31, 2004, 8.
8. By the time Enoch Powell was born in 1912, his family had been living in England for four generations.
9. For information on the criticism that some people in the public eye in Britain have received in recent years for praising Enoch Powell, see Furch (2009), and Prince (2009).

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