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FROM "ETHNIC COMMUNITY" TO "BLACK COMMUNITY": THE CULTURAL BELONGING OF MIGRANTS BETWEEN RACE-RELATIONS RESEARCH AND THE POLITICS OF BLACKNESS IN 1970S AND 1980S BRITAIN

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From the moment immigration became a contested topic in British political debate in the late 1950s, cultural belonging represented a formidable problem for politicians, journalists, and police, but also for colonial and postcolonial immigrants alike. Due to the country's colonial past, many immigrants were eligible for or already possessed British citizenship but were considered culturally alien.[1] It was not even entirely straightforward determining who was considered a migrant: up until the 1990s, migration into the United Kingdom was often understood as immigration from the so-called New Commonwealth, that is to say, the predominantly black countries in the British Commonwealth that became independent after World War II, if one ignored the influx of (white) migrants from Ireland, Europe, or the former dominions of Australia, New Zealand, and Canada.[2] In the contemporary political and cultural discourse, whether people were regarded as immigrants often depended on the color of their skin, and this, in turn, frequently predetermined whether they were viewed as belonging to British society.[3]

The sociology of race relations was fundamental in setting the parameters for the public discussion of cultural belonging for colonial and postcolonial immigration into the United Kingdom from the 1950s onwards. This relatively new field sat awkwardly between its aim to provide policy advice for the government and the expectations of academic sociology. However, while the sociology of race relations was established as a branch of mainstream sociology in the 1970s, its main tenets were challenged by both first- and second-generation immigrants themselves. Academics-cum-activists reinterpreted some of the main and widely used categories of the traditional sociology of race relations from the margins of academic sociology. Their perspective was inherently political, honed by the many debates following confrontations between the second-generation of colonial immigrants and the police in the heightened political atmosphere of the 1970s and early 1980s.

1   See Dieter Gosewinkel, *Schutz und Freiheit? Staatsbürgerschaft in Europa im 20. und 21. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 2016), 416; Randall Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Post-war Britain: The Institutional Origins of a Multicultural Nation* (Oxford, 2000), 102–20; Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar era* (Ithaca, 1997), 131–35.

2   See Andrew S. Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back? The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-nineteenth Century* (London, 2005), 218.

3   See Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, xii.

4   See, for example, David
    Cesarani and Mary Fulbrook,
    eds., *Citizenship, Nationality and
    Migration in Europe* (London,
    1996); Paul, *Whitewashing
    Britain*; Hansen, *Citizenship
    and Iimmigration in Post-
    War Britain*; D. Feldman,
    "Nationality and Ethnicity," in
    Twentieth-century Britain, ed.
    Paul Johnson, 127–48
    (London, 2006); Ian R. G.
    Spencer, *British Immigration
    Policy since 1939: The Making
    of Multi-racial Britain*
    (London, 1997); Zig Layton-
    Henry, *The Politics of Immi-
    gration. Immigration, 'Race'
    and 'Race' Relations in Post-
    war Britain* (Oxford, 1992);
    Christian Joppke, *Citizenship
    and Immigration* (Cambridge,
    2010); Imke Sturm-Martin,
    *Zuwanderungspolitik in
    Großbritannien und
    Frankreich: Ein historischer
    Vergleich 1945–1962*, Campus
    Forschung 825 (Frankfurt a.
    M., 2001).

5   Simone Lässig and Swen
    Steinberg, "Knowledge on the
    Move," *Geschichte und
    Gesellschaft* 43 (2017): 313–
    46, 313. See also Maren
    Möhring, "Jenseits des Inte-
    grationsparadigmas? Aktuelle
    Konzepte und Ansätze in der
    Migrationsforschung," *Archiv
    für Sozialgeschichte* 58 (2018):
    305–30.

6   While Julian Go has recently
    charted the place of post-
    colonial thinking in North
    American sociology, British
    post-colonial thought occupies
    a marginal position in his work
    that belies the transatlantic,
    personal, and intellectual
    exchange that happened in the
    1970s and 1980s. See Julian
    Go, *Postcolonial Thought and
    Social Theory* (Oxford, 2016).

Taking the political predispositions of these two different proponents of migrant belonging as a starting point, this article uses the debate following the confrontations between predominately black youths and police of the spring and summer of 1981 as a case study for the shifting sociological debate about the cultural belonging of postcolonial migrants to British society: While race relations experts solicited policy advice, black intellectuals and activists defied attributions by police, media, and experts alike. These experts, academics, and activists expressed different conceptions of migrant belonging — conceptions that became apparent in the terms they used to describe the relationship of urban immigrant settlements to the wider British society: "ethnic community" and "black community." By focusing on the terms "ethnic community" and "black community," this article approaches the issue of colonial and postcolonial immigration into the United Kingdom from the perspective of knowledge. While historians have frequently examined the history of immigration into the United Kingdom from the angle of citizenship and migration control,[4] this intersection of the history of knowledge and migration history understands immigrants both as objects of practices of classification and framing and as well as "producers, conveyors, and translators of knowledge."[5] Colonial and postcolonial immigrants are thus not only understood as objects and victims but as protagonists on a par with more familiar players, such as the British government, journalists, and academics: While the conception of "ethnic communities" by race relations experts had proved decisive in setting the vocabulary for the wider political discourse on immigration into the United Kingdom and the place of colonial and postcolonial immigrants in British society, black activists challenged these interpretations both on academic and political grounds by using the adjective "black."

By analyzing the debate following the riots as a gateway into a larger academic argument, this paper contributes to a wider scholarly endeavor that both aims to chart the influence of postcolonial thinking on the wider political debate about cultural belonging of colonial and postcolonial immigrants in the late 1970s and early 1980s and to examine the early roots of postcolonial theory in the United Kingdom.[6] Earlier works have tended to analyze the research, institutes, and protagonists of race-relations sociology and black sociologists individually, without placing the interaction between the field and their wider political and cultural significance in the

center of the analysis.[7] In contrast, taking the debate following the riots as the starting point allows for an investigation into the inter-relationship between established ideas about migrant belonging and the reinterpretation of "black" activists and intellectuals, as well as the struggle to shape the discourse on cultural belonging.

With this in mind, the first section gives an overview of the riots, and the second analyzes both how the category of "ethnic community" was first developed in "traditional" race-relations research and how it gained currency in the wider political discourse. The analysis of the debate following the disturbances also shows how the "immigrant communities" affected had appropriated these categories and filled them with new meaning, which reflected their understanding of themselves less as immigrants but as politically aware activists approaching this subject from the perspective of political blackness. The third section examines how these terms referred back to discussions within a wider black radical sphere, in which the traditional sociology of race relations was criticized, the term "black community" was redefined, and notions of immigrant belonging were discussed.[8]

This analysis is based on the interpretation of articles published both in tabloid and broadsheet dailies, weekly newspapers, specialist journals, as well as archival resources on the riots. One note on terminology: in the context of this article, the terms "colonial" and "postcolonial" are strictly used in a temporal sense. Quotation marks are used to underline the contemporary use of the terms in question.

7   Les Back and John Solomos, "Introduction: Theorising Race and Racism," in *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*, edited by Les Back and John Solomos, 1–28 (London, New York, 2000); John Solomos, "Sociology of Race, Racism and Ethnicity: Trends, Debates and Research Agendas," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Sociology in Britain*, edited by John Holmwood, 396–412 (London, 2014); Reet Tamme, "'Promoting Racial Harmony':

Race Relations-Forschung und soziale Ungleichheit in Großbritannien in den 1950er bis 1960er Jahren," in *Das Soziale ordnen: Sozialwissenschaften und gesellschaftliche Ungleicheit im 20. Jahrhundert*, edited by Christiane Reinecke and Thomas Mergel, 183–218 (Frankfurt a. M., 2012); "Von den dark strangers zum 'Subproletariat': Wissenschaftliche Deutungen der multiethnischen Gesellschaft in Großbritannien von den 1950ern bis

Anfang der 1970er Jahre," in *Das Andere denken: Repräsentationen von Migration in Westeuropa und den USA im 20. Jahrhundert*, edited by Gabriele Metzler, 119–53 (Frankfurt a. M., 2013). However, in recent years there have been attempts to further historicize the CCCS; see, for example, Kieran Connell and Matthew Hilton, "The Working Practices of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies," *Social History* 40 (2015): 287–311.

8   On debates about blackness in the UK from the 1960s to 1980s, see Rob Waters, *Thinking Black: Britain, 1964–1985* (Oakland, 2019).

The Riots of 1981

By the 1970s, conflicts between the police and young people from "ethnic communities" had become the focal point for debates about the place of colonial and postcolonial immigrants from the "New Commonwealth" in British society. The second generation of immigrants had been at the center of this public dispute: Fear of "mugging" was prevalent at the time, a decade during which street robberies had increased.[9] From a highly gendered and racialized perspective, male adolescents, predominantly from the former "West Indies," were linked to this particular offense — a perception that media coverage and criminal statistics supported, but which sociologists contested.[10] Police tactics such as frequent stop-and-search practices greatly impaired relations between migrant communities and the police, eliciting accusations of malpractice and institutional racism.[11]

Public disorder, in particular, ignited debate, acutely in 1981, when serious tumults occurred across many major cities in England in the spring and summer. The unrest had started with confrontations between predominately black youths and the police in Brixton in South London in April 1981.[12] In July of the same year, rioting occurred again in Brixton and the London district of Southall but spread as far as Birmingham (Handsworth), Leeds (Chapeltown), Liverpool (Toxteth), Manchester (Moss Side), as well as a number of smaller riots in other towns and cities. Between July 11 and 12, street violence was reported in thirty places across England.[13] A contentious public debate followed, both about the short-term causes and long-term origins of these riots, as well as about measures that should be taken to prevent future disturbances. Journalists, politicians, representatives of the Metropolitan Police, and — to a lesser extent — representatives of the ethnic communities tried to make sense of the riots.[14] Race became one of the defining issues of the discussions: Even though violence was not confined to the black population in the unrest in Manchester, Liverpool, or Leeds in July, but also involved members of the South Asian community as well as white working-class youths, the involvement

9 On the contemporary sociological critique of "mugging," see Tony Jefferson and John Clarke, "'Down These Mean Streets': The Meaning of Mugging," in *CCCS Selected Working Papers*, Vol. 2, edited by Ann Gray, Jan Campbell, Mark Erikson, Stuart Hanson and Helen Wood, 571–84 (London, 2007); Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and Brian Roberts, *Policing the Crisis. Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (London, 1978), 323–28; Melanie Phillips, "Brixton and Crime," *New Society*, July 8, 1976.

10 Cf., for example, Edward Pearce, "Copping Out, in Malign Neglect: The Policeman's Lot," *Encounter* 57 (1981): 45–48. The West Indies comprised the islands and mainland colonies in and around the Caribbean that were part of the British Empire, namely, the Bahamas, Barbados, British Guiana, British Honduras, Jamaica with its dependencies, Trinidad and Tobago, the Windward Islands, and the Leeward Islands. On the eventful history of the term "West Indian," see Catherine Hall, "What Is a West Indian?," in *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain*, edited by Bill Schwarz, 31–50 (Manchester, 2003), 33–34.

11 See Ferdinand Mount, "From Swing to Scarman," *Spectator*, Nov. 28, 1981; Irene Brennan, "By the Waters of Babylon: Scarman in Retrospect," *Month* 15 (1982): 77–80; Nathan Glazer, "The Scarman Report: An American View," *Political Quarterly* 53 (1982): 111–19, 113; Leslie G. Scarman, *The Scarman Report: The Brixton Disorders 10–12 April 1981* (Harmondsworth, 1986), 110.

12 For the official version of events, see Scarman, *Scarman Report*, 14.

13 See David P. Waddington and Mike King, "Identifying Common Causes of UK and French Riots Occurring since the 1980s," *Howard Journal* 48 (2009): 245–56, 247.

14 See Robert Mark, "Police Are Easy Scapegoats," *Observer*, July 12, 1981; "Brixton. 'Our System of Policing and Justice Is Simply not Geared to this Kind of Thing,'" *Sunday Times*, Apr. 19, 1981; "Scarman's Britain: Pigs in the Middle," *Observer*, Nov. 29, 1981.

of black youths in most of them touched upon the sensitive issue of race relations and the question of institutional racism.[15]

In the course of the debate, conflicting opinions on the place of (post)colonial immigrants in British society became apparent. The relationship of immigrants and their descendants to British society was negotiated by means of two interrelated groups of actors that had been at the center of attention for a sizable part of the riot coverage: the police and black youths of predominantly Caribbean descent. The positions attributed to the two groups in the imagined societal order varied considerably according to the respective journalist's or politician's general assessment of the riots. Commentators who stressed the importance of law and order against juvenile, particularly immigrant, crime, invested police and migrants with symbolic power: the police became the proverbial "thin blue line"[16] separating the lawless chaos in the inner cities from "orderly" British society, where the rule of law was still upheld. In this interpretation, migrants were often presented as a disturbing factor, undermining the traditional cultural fabric of society. The submissions of the different police bodies to the official inquiry into the Brixton disturbances is a case in point. Even though representatives of the Association of Chief Police Officers of England, Wales and Northern Ireland took pains to stress that "communities" were generally policed irrespective of skin color, they admitted problems in policing areas where the community was multi-racial.[17] The confrontations in Brixton in April, in particular, were considered part of a longer-standing tradition of conflict between young men from predominantly Caribbean heritage and the police. Most recently, this conflict had flared a year earlier in the inner suburb of St. Pauls in Bristol, where a raid on an illegal drinking establishment had led to a night of rioting in a predominantly black area of the city.[18]

In contrast, Lord Leslie Scarman, who presided over the official inquiry into the Brixton disturbances of April 1981, considered colonial immigrants to be part of British society. In his influential report, he placed the unrest in Brixton in the spring of 1981 firmly within an

17 See, for example, Wales and Northern Ireland Association of Chief Police Officers of England, "Evidence to Lord Scarman's Inquiry," The National Archives, London, HO 266/29.

18 See, for example, *Hansard*, "Brixton (Disturbances)," HC Deb 13 April 1981 vol. 3 cc29; David P. Waddington and Mike King, "Theoretical Orientations: Lessons of the UK Riots of the 1980s and 1990s," in *Rioting in the UK and France*, edited by David P. Waddington, Fabien Jobard, and Mike King, 13–26 (Cullompton, 2009), 14; John Benyon and John Solomos, "British Urban Unrest in the 1980s," in *The Roots of Urban Unrest*, edited by John Benyon and John Solomos, 3–15 (Oxford, 1987), 4; Michael Rowe, *The Racialisation of Disorder in Twentieth Century Britain* (Aldershot, 1998), 7. Interestingly, altercations between black immigrants and the police in the 1970s did not feature in the debate. On the history of police confrontations, see "Brixton Burns," *Economist*, Apr. 18, 1981; Amrit Wilson, "Immigration Policy and the Police State," *New Statesman*, July 11, 1980; Francis Wheen, "Living in a State of Siege: Police Harrassment in London," *New Statesman*, Jan. 30, 1981; Bob Forde, "Routine Racism of the Met," *New Statesman*, Mar. 27, 1981; Rob Rohrer and David Massey, "The Toxteth Family Who Would Take No More," *New Statesman*, July 10, 1981; Mike Phillips and Crispin Aubrey, "Riots: Rage That Shattered Thatcher," *New Statesman*, July 17, 1981; Rob Rohrer, "'You Black Bastard, You Jungle Bunny': Growing Evidence of Brutal 'Reprisal Policing' on Merseyside," *New Statesman*, July 24, 1981.

15 On the issue of "race relations," see, for example, headlines such as "Black War on Police," *Daily Mail*, July 6, 1981. On the issue of institutional racism, see "What Next in Britain's Inner Cities?," *Economist*, May 22, 1982; "The Devil's Work," *Economist*, June 27, 1981; Amrit Wilson, "City on Fire: Coventry, Where Racist Violence Is Now a Fact of Life," *New Statesman*, June 12, 1981; "Editorial," *Race & Class* 23 (1981): i–ii.

16 See, for instance, "To Think This Is England," *The Sun*, July 6, 1981.

escalating cycle of insufficient living conditions, dire economic prospects, a sense of alienation, and the experience of everyday racism.[19] In his perspective, concealed discrimination shared the blame for the unrest, as "[s]ome young blacks [were] driven by their despair into feeling that they are rejected by the society of which they rightly believe they are members."[20] Ethnic minority groups were understood as an integral part of Brixton's "multi-racial society," in particular, and British society, in general. Nevertheless, he did not go so far as to say that *British* society was multi-racial.

The publication of his report, however, did not signal closure of the debate about the place of the first and second generation of colonial and postcolonial immigrants in British society. The divisiveness of the debate becomes obvious when one looks at the language used: While the terms "ethnic" or "black community" at first glance appeared to have been utilized by commentators, politicians, representatives of the Metropolitan Police, black residents, and activists alike, the meanings and political intentions behind these terms differed. A closer look at the submissions of representatives of immigrant neighborhoods to the official inquiry will show how these terms were appropriated and called into question by activists and intellectuals motivated by ideas of political blackness. While such language was decisively shaped by the sociology of race relations from the 1960s on, in the early 1980s, it masked different conceptions of belonging that were connected to a wider sociological critique of race-relations sociology by first- and second-generation immigrants. The use of the term "community" in the debate following the riots, particularly in the submissions to the Scarman inquiry, will serve as a point of departure for a deeper examination of the history of race-relations sociology and its black critique.

"Ethnic Community" and the Sociology of Race Relations

In the public debate following the riots, commentators and politicians on both the Left and the Right, but also police representatives, essentially reduced complexity by using the term "community." By framing the debate as one affecting "ethnic" or "black communities," the public discussion helped to both popularize the social and political problems associated with ethnic minorities while at the same time locating them in a geographically limited urban setting. Yet by using these terms, commentators, politicians, and police representatives circumnavigated questions of immigration and immigrant belonging:

19 Scarman's position was supported by a number of magazines; see, for example, "Scarman: For Action Now," *Economist*, Nov. 28, 1981.

20 Scarman, *Scarman Report*, 35.

the term "community" provided a way to frame immigrants who often held British citizenship in relation to, but not necessarily as part of, British society. The inhabitants of the "ethnic" or "black communities" were thus imagined as both culturally homogeneous and essentially culturally different.

One such example for this mechanism was the discussion about "community policing," which gained traction in the context of the debate following the unrest of 1981. Building ties with members of the "communities" and thus preventing crime represented the cornerstone of this policing strategy. These ideas had been developed in the United States in the late 1960s and were adopted by parts of the British police force in the 1970s. Longer-running debates about police accountability and the relationship between the police force and the population lay at the heart of these efforts to change the relationship between the police and society.[21] In the debate about the riots, this debate came to a head: now voices from *within* the force openly demanded a change in the *style* of policing, notably John Alderson, Chief Constable of Devon und Cornwall.[22] Alderson envisioned a system in which local "communities" essentially regulated themselves "through neighbourhood participation and inter-agency co-operation."[23] In practice, however, this concept of policing was shaped by the understanding of the special needs of different "communities," with areas of high immigration rates at the forefront. Officers trained in "community relations," patrolling local "communities" on foot, were considered a panacea for strained relations between immigrants and the local police force.[24] However, the concept of "community" that this eponymous policing style rested on was relatively vague: it presupposed both a relatively homogeneous group of people who were defined by their location within an urban district, and served as shorthand to describe membership in an ethnic group. The submission of the Avon and Somerset Constabulary, an early adopter of community policing, to the official inquiry into the Brixton disturbances provides a telling example. Even though the Constabulary stated that "a number of serious social problems ... affect both black and white members of the community alike," albeit in different proportions, the representatives classified "ethnic communities" as a problem. Afro-Caribbeans were understood as particularly conspicuous compared to the "normally passive Asians."[25] This form of cultural stereotyping not only shaped the debate about the police response but also cemented the use of the term "ethnic community" in the context of relations particularly between the police and Afro-Caribbeans.

21 On debates about the reform of the Metropolitan Police in the 1980s, see Timothy Brain, *A History of Policing in England and Wales from 1974: A Turbulent Journey* (Oxford, 2010), 82-83; Robert Reiner, *The Politics of the Police*, 4th ed. (Oxford, 2010), 83, 212–14.

22 Association of Chief Police Officers of England, "Evidence to Lord Scarman's Inquiry."

23 John C. Alderson, *Communal Policing* (Middlemoor, Exeter, 1980), iii.

24 See John Brown, "Shades of Grey: A Report on Police-West Indian Relations in Handsworth," The National Archives, HO 266/29.

25 Avon and Somerset Constabulary, "Report to the Local Inquiry Conducted by Lord Scarman Arising from the Brixton Disturbances," The National Archives, London, HO 266/29. See also Richard West, "The Seeds of Hatred," *Spectator*, Apr. 18, 1981.

The term "ethnic community" as it was used by commentators, politicians, and police representatives can be traced back to writings in the sociology of race relations. This branch of sociology had been fundamental in setting the parameters for the public discussion of postwar colonial and postcolonial immigration into the United Kingdom. This relatively new field — established in the 1940s and 1950s — produced knowledge about immigrants from the perspective of the "host" community.[26] The sociology of race relations sat uncomfortably between the demands of academic sociology and the aim of many of its experts to provide policy advice for the government. This quandary was symbolized by the Institute of Race Relations (IRR), which was formed as an independent body in 1958 in order to publish research on race relations worldwide: established with the help of funding from the American Ford Foundation and the British Nuffield Foundation, the IRR meant to produce academic studies that could be used in a policy context. This seemed particularly pertinent because political debates about migration and race relations had been reaching a wider political audience since race riots had shaken the London suburb of Notting Hill in 1958.[27] While providing background briefings, the social scientists researching race relations both responded to political needs and also shaped the political discourse about migration.

The early researchers of race relations were born and raised in the United Kingdom,[28] used American research as their academic reference points, and were influenced by anthropological perspectives — factors which shaped their outlook on migration.[29] Knowledge about immigration and immigrants was thus produced from a position from within the receiving country. This perspective both influenced and validated who was considered an immigrant: After early research into longer-standing "coloured communities" in port cities such as Cardiff,[30] race-relations researchers focused on migration from the "New Commonwealth" and disregarded the equally significant number of immigrants from Ireland and the countries of the "Old Commonwealth," such as Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. While immigrants from the "New Commonwealth" made up 2 percent, or 1,157,170 persons, of British society in 1971, Irish passport holders represented the biggest group of immigrants comprising roughly 1 percent of the British population (720,985 persons) (compared to 0.3 percent, or 145,250 persons, from the "Old Commonwealth" countries of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and parts of South Africa).[31]

26 See, for example, Michael Banton, *Promoting Racial Harmony* (Cambridge, 1985), 100.

27 See Tamme, "Von den dark strangers zum 'Subproletariat,'" 132–33. On the Notting Hill riots, see Sebastian Klöß, *Notting Hill Carnival: Die Aushandlung des Eigenen im multiethnischen Großbritannien seit 1958* (Frankfurt a. M., 2014).

28 John Rex was a notable — if slightly later — exception, having been born and politicized in South Africa.

29 See Tamme, "Von den dark strangers zum 'Subproletariat,'" 123–25.

30 See, for example, Kenneth Little, *Negroes in Britain*, revised edition with a new introduction by Leonard Bloom, 2nd ed. (London and Boston, 1972), 68.

31 See Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back?*, 218.

This early racialized perspective on immigration helps to explain the popularity of the assimilation theory in early race-relations research in the 1950s, which painted a rather ambiguous picture of immigrant belonging. This theory assumed that the minority group or culture would come to resemble the dominant group. The prime example was the first generation of Afro-Caribbean immigrants, who spoke English and followed norms considered quintessentially English in both sartorial terms and in the raising of their children.[32] Studies consequently presented colonial migration as having an impact that was the reverse of the impact of the periphery on the metropole, although they did this rather uncritically and by using empiricist and localized bottom-up methodology. The paradigm of the "dark stranger," which shaped race-relations research in the 1950s, ideally matched this perspective: the image acted as a heuristic tool which imagined immigrants and British society as essentially culturally different and thus separated people into groups before the analysis had even started, as Reet Tamme and Chris Waters have argued convincingly.[33] So even though researchers such as Sheila Patterson forecast the complete assimilation of second-generation Afro-Caribbeans into British Society while using the language of the "dark stranger," the underlying epistemological principle remained essentialist.[34]

To combat the analytical essentialism of this early research into race relations, researchers employed the term "ethnic community" from the late 1950s on.[35] Building on earlier works by researchers such as Kenneth Little, Michael Banton, and Anthony Richmond, who had analyzed the relationship between *minority* and *majority* communities, the qualifier "ethnic" denoted a broader cultural understanding of difference that encompassed race, but also religion, language, and different customs and traditions — an understanding that harked back to the writings of American sociologist Robert E. Park, among others.[36] At first glance, this signaled a departure from the more biological conceptions of race that had informed some of the earliest examples of race-relations research in the 1940s and early 1950s.[37] The basic premise of race-relations research now was the idea that "race" constituted a social problem that resulted from cultural differences understood as ethnic distinctions. These distinctions, however, were understood, in turn, as just as divisive from the "host" community; immigrants from "white" backgrounds were not considered potential objects of study. In the categories used by race-relations research, cultural belonging thus remained ambiguous.

32 See Tamme, "Von den dark strangers zum 'Subproletariat,'" 125–26.

33 See ibid., 127; Chris Waters, "'Dark Strangers' in our Midst: Discourses of Race and Nation in Britain, 1947–1963," *Journal of British Studies* 36 (1997): 207–38.

34 Sheila Patterson, *Dark Strangers: A Sociological Study of the Absorption of a Recent West Indian Migrant Group in Brixton, South London* (London, 1963).

35 Tamme, "Von den dark strangers zum 'Subproletariat,'" 133.

36 On the ethnic group focus in US-race-relations sociology, see Wolf-Dietrich Bukow, "Die Entdeckung der 'ethnischen Gruppe': Gesellschaftlicher Kontext und migrations-theoretische Kontextualisierung von Milton M. Gordon's 'Assimilation in American Life,'" in *Schlüsselwerke der Migrationsforschung: Pionierstudien und Referenztheorien*, edited by Julia Reuter and Paul Mecheril (Wiesbaden, 2015), 79.

37 For a prominent example, see Little, *Negroes in Britain*, ix–x.

While the term "ethnic community" gained traction in British sociological and political discourse,[38] politicians and commentators increasingly acknowledged the multiethnicity of British society: They now challenged the oft-held conception of a homogeneous British society, which had underpinned the "dark stranger" hypothesis. "Integration" rather than "assimilation" was the political demand of the day in the 1960s, and the idea of colonial immigrants as "ethnic communities" became their equivalent in social-science theory.[39] For instance, Home Secretary Roy Jenkins from the Labour Party opined in 1966 that he regarded integration not as "the loss, by immigrants, of their own national characteristics and culture," nor as a "melting pot." Instead, he defined integration "not a flattening process of assimilation but as equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance."[40]

However, immigration and race relations increasingly became hotly contested topics in British political discourse, with the question of immigrant belonging now standing in the center of the argument. This was clearly reflected in the contradictory immigration and race-relations legislation, which was overhauled during the 1960s: In response to a perceived heavy influx of migrants from countries such as Pakistan or the "West Indies," the Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1962 introduced a government-issued employment voucher system. The related regulations were effectively biased towards white migrants from Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, while limiting the number of migrants from the New Commonwealth countries.[41] Roy Jenkins's oft-quoted speech thus stood in contrast to the attempts to limit immigration from the New Commonwealth countries since the 1960s, even though these immigrants were supposed to have equal rights to migrate into the United Kingdom according to the 1948 nationality law. Subsequent acts in 1968 and 1971 further restricted the number of (post)colonial migrants into the UK. To prevent discrimination on the grounds of race in the fields of employment, the provision of goods and services, education, and public functions, a series of Race Relations Acts were introduced as accompanying measures in 1965, 1968, and 1976.[42] Nevertheless, these laws to secure good "race relations" became the focus of debate in a political discourse that soured dramatically.[43]

While questions of race relations and the cultural belonging of colonial and postcolonial immigrants were discussed ever more contentiously, research into race relations thrived, not least because the work was

38 Ironically, at a time when the concept of community lost traction in theory of mainstream sociological. See Graham Crow, "The Sociology of Community," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Sociology in Britain*, ed. John Holmwood and John Scott, 374–95 (Houndmills, 2014), 374.

39 See Tamme, "Von den dark strangers zum 'Subproletariat,'" 135–36.

40 Cited in Paul Wetherly, *Political Ideologies* (Oxford, 2017), 330.

41 Lord Chancellor, "Memorandum: Commonwealth Migrants," *The National Archives*, London, TNA/CAB/129/105/c67, 26. 5. 1961.

42 For a critical assessment see Erik Bleich, *Race politics in Britain and France. Ideas and policymaking since the 1960's* (Cambridge, 2003), 61.

43 See, for example, Enoch Powell's "rivers of blood" speech and its political aftermath. See Peter Brooke, "India, Post-imperialism and the Origins of Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' Speech," *Historical Journal* 50 (2007): 669–87; Amy Whipple, "Revisiting the 'Rivers of Blood' Controversy: Letters to Enoch Powell," *Journal of British Studies* 48 (2009): 717–35; Bill Schwarz, *Memories of Empire: The White Man's World* (Oxford, 2011), 33–52. On white working-class racism, see, for example, Jodi Burkett, *Constructing Post-imperial Britain: Britishness, 'Race' and the Radical Left in the 1960s* (Houndmills, 2013), 174–75.

once again considered politically important. In 1969, the British Sociological Association (BSA) even organized its annual conference on the topic of race relations.[44] The 1970s marked a turning point in the history of race-relations research: the sub-field firmly arrived in mainstream sociology, engaged more critically with sociological theory, and was further institutionalized. The Social Science Research Council (SSRC) established the SSRC Research Unit on Race Relations at the University of Bristol in 1970. Initially headed by Michael Banton, the unit changed its name shortly after its inauguration to SSRC Research Unit on Ethnic Relations (RUER) and was located at the University of Aston from 1978, under the stewardship of John Rex. Scholars who were to shape the field of British race-relations research from the 1980s onwards, such as Robert Miles, Annie Phizacklea, John Solomos, and Harry Goulbourne, worked at the unit during various phases in their careers. The 1970s were also shaped by sometimes bitter debate about the sociological orientation of race-relations sociology. Most notably, Michael Banton and John Rex disagreed on the theoretical foundation of race relation sociology, or, in the eyes of Rex, the lack thereof, and these debates mirrored broader questions about methodology and scholarly standards within British sociology.[45]

These methodological debates did not go so far as to abandon previously used analytical categories: even though the concept of "ethnic community" had increasingly prompted discussion within the field of race-relations sociology, it still represented an attempt to understand colonial and postcolonial immigrants as an essentially external group of people migrating into British society in the early 1980s. Given the racial bias of public and academic discourse, knowledge about colonial immigrants was still mainly restricted to an outside view on "ethnic communities" — despite the clear sympathy of many race-relations sociologists for the cause of the immigrants. The analytical tools used alone pointed to the underlying assumption, namely, that culturally, if not politically, these immigrants were still considered alien. The second generation, that is to say, children of immigrants born and raised in the United Kingdom, thus represented one of the issues race-relations researchers had to confront in their analyses. On the political level, the researchers also encountered the critique of intellectuals and activists within the black radical sphere.

Political Blackness and the Sociology of Race Relations

Representatives of the immigrant communities also used the terms "ethnic" and "black community" in the debate following the riots of

44 See Solomos, "Sociology of Race," 396–97.

45 Sally Tomlinson, "Michael Banton's Critique of John Rex's 'Mistakes'," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38 (2015): 1389–94; Peter Ratcliffe, "The Debate between Michael Banton and John Rex: A Re-evaluation," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38 (2015): 1395–400.

1981. By using the vocabulary shaped within traditional race-relations sociology, such representatives who participated in the official inquiry did not openly contradict the conventional framing of immigrant belonging as essentially culturally different. Indeed, in their submission to the official inquiry of Lord Scarman, they themselves often used the term "community" to emphasize their separate cultural customs and needs. While thus accepting the ethnic categorization placed upon them by mainstream media, the representatives of these various civic organizations made their political grievances known by referring to themselves as "black": ethnic difference now became the justification for political demands voiced in the language of political blackness. The submission of the Brixton Domino and Social Club to the official inquiry is a case in point. West Indian culture, understood as "black," was presented as distinct from British culture. The representatives blamed British society for the breakdown of parental authority, as its lax morals prevented parents from bringing up their children so that they would behave in a respectful manner. Ashton Gibson, who represented the Mission to Westindians in Britain, the Carmel Tabernacle Christian Church, Westindian Concern Limited, and Caribbean House Group in the Scarman inquiry, made a similar point in relation to parenting. He claimed that "the far stronger and larger indigenous section of the population is bludgeoning the smaller, weaker Westindian ethnic group into conforming with its own standards and norms."[46] The adjective "black" was used here as an expression of political agency rather than as a signifier of skin color, as understood in "traditional" research into race relations. The representatives of the immigrant communities thus situated themselves — to various degrees — in the discourse of political blackness that had been prominent in black intellectual circles since the late 1960s and 1970s.

This shifting ground in the discourse of migrant and "black" belonging was mirrored in the sociological field of race relations: black intellectuals and activists increasingly challenged traditional race-relations research and developed their own political understanding of cultural belonging from the perspective of debates about political blackness. Instead of being objects of research, the first and second generations now actively produced knowledge with a political reading of the term "black." The term "community" was similarly reinterpreted: Whereas in traditional race-relations research, the idea of the "ethnic community" essentially prefigured and illustrated the existing cultural fault lines between "black" and "white," black intellectuals

46 The Carmel Tabernacle Christian Church Mission to Westindians in Britain, Westindian Concern Limited, and Caribbean House Group, "Written Submission of Evidence to the Inquiry," The National Archives, London, HO 266/30.

understood community and the culturally and geographically limited space it entailed as a means of political mobilization: While the idea of an "ethnic community" had originally helped to reduce complexity in race-relations research, "black" intellectuals recast the concept as a source of strength.[47]

Ideas of political blackness had been discussed in the United Kingdom in the context of black intellectual discourse since the 1960s. When race relations had become a contentious topic of political debate, disaffection with the official politics of immigration and race relations and frustration with parliamentary parties gave rise to a wave of black activism.[48] One of the most notable campaigns was the "Campaign Against Racial Discrimination" (CARD), an offshoot of the American civil rights movement that was active between 1964 and 1967. The ideas and politics of Black Power also provided an inspiration and were expressed in criticism of "white" institutions and values.[49] These Black Power organizations were often short-lived but vocal: The political zenith of the Black Power movement in the UK had been a confrontation with police at the Mangrove Restaurant in All Saints Road, London, involving some two hundred demonstrators in 1970, and the trial of the "Mangrove Nine" that followed the next year.[50]

Feeling misrepresented, researchers identifying as black with a background as first- or second-generation migrants increasingly weighed into the debates about race relations and confidently asserted differing opinions. Arguments about basic political principles, particularly in relation to Marxism, the American civil rights movement, and the impact of colonial practices on the former imperial metropole were interwoven with questions of good practice within sociological research. Perhaps the most public dispute happened directly at the Institute of Race Relations (IRR), which had been the home of "traditional" research into race relations with a strong policy orientation until the late 1960s. Within the IRR, a conflict had unfolded between the "moderate" race-relations researchers and black activists. Young radical academics were questioning the line of research represented by the IRR, which they regarded as misleading at best and manipulative at worst. One of the researchers at the IRR, Robin Jenkins, pointedly criticized his institute in 1971 as a home to a "manipulative model of social research," as well as a "watchdog for the ruling elite," which "makes sure that they [the elites] receive ample information in the sub-proletariat and ample warning of impending revolts."[51]

47 See, for example, Paul Gilroy, "Steppin' Out of Babylon: Race, Class, and Autonomy," in *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain*, ed. Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 286–95 (London, 1986).

48 See Waters, *Thinking Black*, 92.

49 See Tamme, "Promoting Racial Harmony," 144.

50 See Howard L. Malchow, *Special Relations: The Americanization of Britain?* (Stanford, 2011), 188.

51 Cited in Tamme, "Von den dark strangers zum 'Subproletariat,'" 145.

He particularly disapproved of the methodology behind *Colour and Citizenship*, the IRR's most prominent publication co-written by Jim Rose and Nicholas Deacon, which he described as "spying on black people."[52] The institute's magazine *Race Today* stood in the center of this conflict; its more militant editorial collective had not only reported on the Black Power movement in the US and the UK but was influenced by it.[53] In 1972, the conflict came to a head: the IRR was reoriented to service community organizations and victims of racism, while the majority of board members was forced to resign. The institute's librarian, Ambalavaner Sivanandan, who had emigrated from the then-British dominion of Ceylon to the United Kingdom in 1958, assumed control of the institute, its magazine *Race Today*, and its journal *Race* (renamed *Race & Class* in 1974). As a consequence, the Ford Foundation withdrew its funding.

The main point of criticism was the conception of "ethnicity" prominent in race-relations research of the 1970s, which essentially signified a cultural difference between black and white. Ambalavaner Sivanandan and Jenny Bourne denounced this understanding of difference, noting that while it had changed the conception *of* British society into one that was not homogeneous but "multi-ethnic" and "multi-cultural," ethnicity alone was not sufficient for analyzing the main problem *within* British society: racism.[54] Sivanandan, inspired by Black Power to conduct a Marxist analysis of the black experience in the UK, sought to better understand racism through class.[55] He and Bourne stated their principle thesis as follows in 1980: "it was not black people who should be examined, but white society; it was not a question of educating blacks and whites for integration, but of fighting institutional racism; it was not race relations that was the field for study, but racism."[56] Sivanandan's focus on class was hardly new: The relationship between class and race had informed race-relations research since the beginning.[57] His focus on racism, however, was part of the new mainstream of Black Power-inspired thinking within the UK. In this respect, these intellectuals held a fundamentally different view from John Rex, who had also criticized the traditional policy-led, anti-theoretical and culturalist race-relations research embodied by the IRR and, to a certain extent, Michael Banton, from within the field of academic sociology.[58] The central point of contention had been the questions of theory and politics. While Rex disapproved of the "black power sociology" that he observed, for example, in the Race Relation's Group of the British Sociological Association's study group, Sivanandan and his colleagues were

52 Cited in ibid. See also Eliot Joseph Benn Rose et al., *Colour, Citizenship and British Society* (London, 1969).

53 On the influence of the Black Power movement in the UK, see Malchow, *Special Relations*, 181–88.

54 Jennifer Bourne and Ambalavaner Sivanandan, "Cheerleaders and Ombudsmen: The Sociology of Race Relations in Great Britain," *Race & Class* 21 (1980): 331–52, 343. See also Gilroy, "Steppin' Out of Babylon," 284.

55 See, for example, Ambalavaner Sivanandan, "Race, Class and the State: The Black Experience in Britain," *Race & Class* 17 (2016): 347–68.

56 Bourne and Sivanandan, "Cheerleaders and Ombudsmen," 339.

57 In the preface to the 1972 edition of *Negroes in Britain*, Kenneth Little explained how the idea of class consciousness had informed his work. However, the fundamental conceptual premise of his work remained race as a biological category. See Little, *Negroes in Britain*, ix–x.

58 For contemporary criticism, see, for example, Paul Gilroy, "Managing the 'Underclass': A Further Note on the Sociology of Race Relations in Britain," *Race & Class* 22 (1980): 49–50.

inspired by precisely the idea of black political consciousness.[59] In 1980, Jenny Bourne and Ambalavaner Sivanandan thus incorporated the reformed, politically aware race-relations sociology into their criticism: "There is a dangerous sociology abroad — a sociology of race relations, that is — and dangerous to the black cause that it seeks to espouse."[60]

The questions of race and class generated ample grounds for debate not only within traditional race-relations sociology but also among black neo-Marxist researchers themselves. The controversy about the direction the magazine *Race Today* took between 1973 and 1974 exemplifies this fundamental conflict: Darcus Howe, who had been part of the British Black Panther movement, most notably in the Mangrove Nine trial, was appointed to be editor of *Race Today* in 1973. He soon clashed with Sivanandan over the significance of white racism in relation to the analysis of class. Howe believed that black people had to take the lead not only against white racism, but also in engaging in the struggles of the British working class, whereas Sivanandan argued for the analysis of white racism as the defining principle of the IRR and *Race Today*.[61]

This debate about the significance of class in relation to race refers to a conceptual shift in the way "black" people's belonging within the United Kingdom was debated. While "traditional" race-relations sociology saw this group of people predominantly as immigrants, black intellectuals and activists both appropriated and reinterpreted the outside perspective they were accorded. Not migrant belonging, but "black" belonging was considered the topic that needed to be addressed. Researchers at the IRR, at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), a research center at the University of Birmingham known for radical thought, and for *Race Today* thus discussed how black people in the United Kingdom stood in relation to British society — and whether they wanted to belong to a society many of them considered racist.[62] This question which was bound to be contested. While many theorists and activists such as Ambalavaner Sivanandan often held a dismissive attitude, others took a more positive stance towards British society. Robin Bunce and Paul Field argue that Darcus Howe, who had immigrated to the UK from Trinidad in the early 1960s, and other "[m]embers of the Collective made an important transition from seeing themselves as immigrants or children of immigrants to identifying themselves as British"[63] and thus explicitly wanted to belong to British society.

59 See Bourne and Sivanandan, "Cheerleaders and Ombudsmen," 350. On Rex's critique of "black power sociology," see John Rex, *Race, Colonialism and the City* (New York, 1973), xvii–xviii.

60 Bourne and Sivanandan, "Cheerleaders and Ombudsmen," 321.

61 See Robin Bunce, "Race Today Cannot Fail: Darcus Howe and the Race Today Collective in the long 1980s," in *Labour and the Left in the 1980s*, ed. Jonathan Davis and Rohan McWilliam (Manchester, 2018), 193.

62 See, for example, Gilroy, "Steppin' Out of Babylon," 279.

63 Robin Bunce and Paul Field, *Darcus Howe: A Political Biography* (London, 2014), 153.

In the debates of black intellectuals and activists, questions of political blackness thus took precedence over the notion that many of the persons affected — or their parents — had entered the United Kingdom in the recent past as immigrants. This shift in attitude corresponded to a generational shift. While some of the black intellectuals identified as migrants, notions of political blackness, although prevalent in all generations, were assumed to be greater in the younger generation. This hope was borne out by a generational conflict within the CCCS about the centrality of race and the experience of migration: Stuart Hall, the center's director from 1968 to 1979, who had immigrated into the United Kingdom from Jamaica in 1951, maintained that while his experience as a colonial migrant had shaped his personal identity, this very experience distinguished him from his students.[64] Many of these, particularly in the CCCS's race and politics sub-group, were either first- or second-generation immigrants to the United Kingdom, such as Paul Gilroy, who had been born in London to Guyanese and English parents. However, they expressed their dissatisfaction with the intellectual debate at the Centre and current events less in terms of migratory identification and more in terms of the cultural category of "being black," demanding that the center's analyses place greater emphasis on race.[65]

This perspective of political blackness, despite having been developed at the interdisciplinary margins of academic British sociology, provided an increasingly influential counterpoint in the political sphere. A closer look at the Scarman inquiry is a case in point: both in terms of sheer numbers and media coverage, intellectuals of the black radical sphere and representatives of the immigrant neighborhoods were clearly in the minority in the debate following the unrest of 1981, yet the attention they got from Lord Leslie Scarman and the official inquiry into the causes of the riots offset this fact.[66] Members of the ethnic communities and grassroots campaigners effectively influenced the debate about the place of migrants in British society, generating a greater awareness of black politics wherein their background as migrants was less prominent than their self-identification as "black."[67] By contrast, prominent race-relations researchers like John Rex and Michael Banton were often cited in publications collected by Lord Scarman and his team, but their understanding of ethnic communities as groups of people with *immigrant* origin came to be more marginalized within the wider public debate. Instead, an understanding of postcolonial immigrants and their descendants as culturally "black" gained ground in this context.[68]

64 Cited in Claire Alexander, "Introduction: Stuart Hall and 'Race'," *Cultural Studies* 23 (2009): 463–64. See also Stuart Hall and Bill Schwarz, *Familiar Stranger: A Life between Two Islands* (London, 2017), 11.

65 See, for example, Hazel Carby, "Introduction to Section 5," in *CCCS Selected Working Papers*, ed. Ann Gray, Jan Campbell, Mark Erickson, Stuart Hanson, and Helen Wood, 563–70 (London, 2007), 563.

66 On the media coverage, see Graham Murdock, "Reporting the Riots: Images and Impacts," in *Scarman and After: Essays Reflecting on Lord Scarman's Report, the Riots, and Their Aftermath*, ed. John Benyon, 73–95 (Oxford, 1984), 78.

67 See, for example, J. A. Hunte, "West Indian Standing Conference. Re: Phase II — Lord Scarman Brixton Enquiry," The National Archives, London, HO 266/38.

68 On Rex's submission, see John Rex, "Racial Conflict in the Inner City," National Archives, London, HO 266/36. On the Scarman report and immigration, see, for instance, Scarman, *Scarman Report*, 24.

Conclusion

This article has traced the contentious debate about the cultural belonging of colonial and postcolonial immigrants in the United Kingdom surrounding the riots of 1981. Its focal point was the idea of the "ethnic community," which originated in debates within race-relations sociology about the correct way to address migrant groups. While the public discussion following the unrest of 1981 showed how colonial and postcolonial immigrants were excluded from British society by representatives of the police, politics and media, the categories utilized to describe these social groups were more ambivalent in their connotations of cultural belonging. The term "ethnic community," which was widely used to describe the location of migrant groups from the New Commonwealth within British society, represents a case in point: even though this concept was designed by researchers of race relations to overcome a racial bias in sociological research, the notion of "ethnic" still implied that these communities were fundamental different from British culture.

Nevertheless, immigrants themselves came to contest this knowledge about about themselves and their communities. The public debate following the riots illustrated how representatives of the immigrant population appropriated the concept of "ethnic community" and researchers, motivated by ideas of political blackness, questioned it. Representatives of immigrant and black neighborhoods confronted this understanding of cultural belonging of colonial and postcolonial immigrants with a transformed understanding of the adjective black, in which it was less a signifier of skin color than a sign for political activism — up to the point where all immigrants and their descendants from the "New Commonwealth" were subsumed under this marker.[69] In this way, they appropriated the idea of an "ethnic community" and filled it with new political meaning while drawing upon black liberationist thought and neo-Marxist debates. Among black radicals, this process signaled a wider debate about belonging to British society, wherein migrant identification, anti-racist critique, and their identification as Britons provided ample ground for debate — not least due to their cultural heritage as imperial Britons, which the majority of immigrants within this debate shared. This change in perspective was reflected in the way knowledge was constructed: while in traditional race-relations sociology, knowledge about immigration and immigrants was produced from a position from within the country people were migrating into, black intellectuals and activists, instead of being an object of research, now actively produced

69 See Tariq Modood, "Political Blackness and British Asians," *Sociology* 28 (1994): 859–76; "'Black', Racial Equality and Asian Identity," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 14 (1988): 397–404.

knowledge with a political reading of the term "black." The gaze of race-relations researchers thus no longer went from the "host society" to the "ethnic community" of immigrants without question: the "black community" gazed back.

The debate following the riots thus shows both how race-relations sociology developed from a remote, more policy-oriented branch of British sociology into the mainstream of the field, as well as how it provided the vocabulary and set the tone for the political discussion of the cultural belonging of colonial and postcolonial immigrants. The scholarly critique of black intellectuals and activists, though stinging, remained at the margins of British academic sociology, even though it grew more influential in the political sphere. It is one of the great ironies that, in the end, these black critics did not transform mainstream British sociology as much as they influenced the emerging transatlantic field of cultural studies.

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