

1 From Empire to Multicultural Democracy?

The period from the Second World War to the present can be seen as one during which we have observed several unprecedented transformations in British society, particularly in relation to the core issues that we are analysing in this book, namely migration, multiculturalism, and the dynamics of black and ethnic minority political participation. As several accounts of the period that we cover in this book have highlighted, the conjuncture from 1945 to the present has seen important transformations both in the role of Britain in the broader global environment and in the social and cultural formation of British society itself (Favell 2001c; Hampshire 2005; Perry 2016; Waters 2019). Paul Gilroy, for example, has characterised this period as involving an ongoing, and as yet largely unfinished, move from the colonial to the postcolonial, involving the evolution of an ‘ordinary multiculturalism’ that has become part of what he calls a spontaneous ‘convivial multicultural’ that is often combined with a nostalgia for the days of empire (Gilroy 2004). He argues that an important challenge faced by scholars and researchers who are looking to make sense of the scale of the transformations in British society after 1945 is the need to explore the ways in which processes of decolonisation, migration, and racial formation coalesced together to help to develop a new conception of a multicultural British identity. More generally, as Stuart Hall, amongst other scholars, has argued, it is during this period that we saw the development of new understandings of race and ethnicity, both at the national and at the local level, within the context of British society as it moved beyond the period of empire and colonialism (Hall 2017a, b; hooks and Hall 2018).

Bearing these broader transformations in mind, the main concern of this chapter will be to set the scene for the analysis of the politicisation of race, migration, and related issues in the second half of the twentieth century, which will form the focus of the substantive chapters in Parts II and III. As a number of scholars have argued, we need to situate the post-1945 history of race and immigration within a broader frame that includes both the role of race in the wider context of the British Empire

as well as the national and local experiences of race within the *mother country* (Ashcroft & Bevir 2017; Favell 2001c; Hampshire 2005). Yet, as we argue in this chapter, it is somewhat simplistic to see the postcolonial period as one that saw the move from empire to multicultural democracy in a linear fashion. Rather, we argue that it is important to provide a conceptual and empirical frame that highlights the ways in which processes of racialisation and exclusion helped to fashion a particular politics around race in British society whose consequences remain with us today. This politicisation of race, migration, and multiculturalism has been a complex process involving interventions by successive governments, political parties, pressure groups, activists, campaigners, politicians, and other political actors.

In other words, the sequence of events that we have witnessed since 1945 have been the product of political mobilisation of one sort or another, rather than the inevitable consequence of processes beyond political action. What has become even more clear, however, particularly in the period since the 1980s and 1990s, is that ethnic minority communities have become intimately engaged in a variety of ways with political institutions and have attempted to forge their own forms of political mobilisation at both local and national political levels. We have seen a rapid, if uneven, growth in forms of political involvement from within minority communities, whether it be in terms of mainstream politics at the national or local levels; community-oriented mobilisations over specific issues, such as the Stephen Lawrence campaign or the campaigns about deaths in custody; or the emergence of alternative forms of political organisation such as Black Lives Matter (Bhattacharyya et al., 2021; Nwonka 2021). In addition, we have also seen a resurgence of forms of identity politics that are premised on religious faith communities, ethnicity, or forms of regional and local identification.

Empire, Migration, and Racial Formation

Although it is often ignored or underplayed in accounts of post-1945 politics and history, black and ethnic minority communities played an active role in the political debates about questions of race and immigration. From the very earliest stages of the migration processes that evolved through the 1950s and 1960s as groups of migrants from the colonies or ex-colonies came and settled, the emerging minority communities were involved in various forms of political action, both locally and nationally (Allen 1971, Patterson 1969, Rex & Moore 1967, Richmond 1961). This sometimes took the form of community or ethnic associations, local campaigns around specific issues of concern, or, more generally,

alliances between minority and white organisations. Some of these mobilisations were linked to networks of political activism in countries of origin (Goulbourne 1988, 1990, 1991; Hiro 1973). In the early stages of migration and settlement, many of these mobilisations were often focused on initiatives to counteract the activities of racist groups (Sivanandan 1982b). They were also often concerned to promote measures aimed at enhancing racial justice and equality. At other times, it took the form of pressure on mainstream political parties to respond to the needs of ethnic minority communities.

During the 1940s and 1950s, the position of the newly arrived migrant communities can be seen as one in which they were by and large marginalised from the political system. Rooted in associational forms of migrant solidarity and campaigns against forms of racism and exclusion of solidarity, cultural and faith-based organisations set up to provide support and mutual aid. In the face of overt exclusion from mainstream politics, minority organisations and networks became the main focus for political involvement and engagement (Foot 1969, Glass 1960, Katznelson 1973, Waters 1997).

In the 1960s, however, several black and ethnic minority groups and individuals challenging this exclusion invoked fundamental rights of citizenship and equality. African Caribbean and Asian migrants launched a series of local and national organisations that sought in various ways to challenge the exclusion of black and ethnic minority communities from equal participation in British society. Such organisations included the already established Indian Workers' Association, the West Indian Standing Conference, and other groups framed around racial and ethnic as well as class signifiers (Goulbourne 1990, 1991; Rex, Joly, & Wilpert 1987). Although the impact of such organisations within the formal political sphere remained relatively limited through this period, both locally and nationally, they played an important role in shaping forms of political identity and community formation.

There were also attempts to create transitional organisations of the kind that we discuss in Chapter 5, whose principal concern was to act as pressure groups for bringing questions about race and immigration onto both national and local political agendas. The organisation that received widespread public attention during the 1960s, however, was the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination (CARD). This organisation was formed in 1964–1965 by a coalition of black political groups, white liberals, and campaigners against racism (Heineman Jr. 1972; Rose et al., 1969). It had as its main objectives the struggle to eliminate racial discrimination in British society, opposition to racially discriminatory legislation, and the co-ordination of the work of local and national

organisations fighting racial discrimination. Although it collapsed after a brief and highly controversial power struggle within the organisation during 1967, it did play a role in public debates about the development of policies to tackle racial discrimination, and it also served as a catalyst for a wide-ranging debate about the need for autonomous black political organisation to tackle the roots of racial inequality at all levels of British society.

Such debates were symbolic of the growing pressure that was emerging through this period to recognise the reality that black and ethnic minority communities were becoming an important part of the social and political fabric of British society. Although much of the research and scholarship on this period have focused on the role of anti-immigrant politics and mobilisation, particularly in the form of Powellism (Foot 1969, Schoen 1977, Schofield 2013), it is important to note that this was also a conjuncture that saw efforts to create a political voice and presence for black and ethnic minority communities both within the mainstream political sphere and through more radical mobilisations, often influenced by the political language of the civil rights and Black Power movements in the United States. Through the period from the 1970s to the 1990s, there were continual attempts, though somewhat uneven in character, to create organisations that spoke to the political interests of black and ethnic minority communities. These efforts were accompanied by the search for alliances between the various minority communities as well as cross-racial alliances, to enhance the political pressure for change.

Race, Governance, and Mobilisation

As a result of developments such as these, we saw the beginnings of political debates about possible routes for black and ethnic minority communities to gain access to political influence and representation. Although these debates can be traced back several decades by now, they are still in many ways ongoing and have taken on different forms through the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. Quite apart from attempts to access the formal political sphere, there have been various efforts to develop autonomous organisations to give voice to the interests of black and ethnic minority communities in British society. Such organisations have at various stages been influenced by political ideologies framed around ideas of Black Power, civil rights, faith, and community (Angelo 2009, 2018; Bourne 2016; Narayan 2019). Although such mobilisations have been limited in terms of both scope and reach, they have highlighted a growing awareness that

it was partly through inclusion in the political sphere that questions about racial inequality and social justice could be addressed more fully.

What became evident, however, is that once black and ethnic minority communities began to gain access to channels of political participation and representation, they did not necessarily gain equal access to agenda-setting and decision-making. Although we began to see some evidence that the voice of minorities was beginning to be heard by politicians, the pace of change at the level of growing representation of minority politicians within the political sphere remained painfully slow, with the early embryonic signs of change coming to the fore in the 1980s. This was a period heavily shaped by the outbreaks of revolts and urban unrest during the early and mid-1980s, and this led to more concerted pressure to increase minority representation in both local and national representative institutions (Benyon & Solomos 1987, Hall 1987). A high-level investigation into the riots was commissioned by the government, which saw – for the first time – a Lord officially consulting black communities. Changes to policing and policy, and new urban aid funds directed at inner city areas produced stronger control and containment measures alongside community engagement opportunities. Although the riots and unrest of the 1980s did not fundamentally impact on the political agenda of the Thatcher government, the shock caused by the large scale of rioting fed into debates about the possible dangers that could result from the political alienation of sections of black and ethnic minority communities (Peplow 2019b; Schofield & Jones 2019).

What became clear, however, is that such pressures for political inclusion did not necessarily have a direct impact on the national political culture. A good example of this is the way in which, with the shift in political values to the right during the period of Conservative Party rule from 1979 to 1997, calls for political intervention to promote greater racial equality and positive action were in practice politically marginalised. Because such calls did not fit in with the dominant ethos and culture of the Conservative Party, successive administrations from 1979 to 1997 systematically refused to take any major initiatives to increase the political representation of minority communities (Bale 2016, Francis 2017, Sagar 1998). They also paid little attention to calls to strengthen race relations legislation or to allocate more resources to those bodies charged with promoting greater racial equality. At the same time, however, it is important to note that the Conservative Party did begin to make overtures to attract the support of sections of black and ethnic minority communities, particularly those that were seen as upwardly mobile and relatively successful in economic terms.

In this context, the question of the political incorporation of black and ethnic minority communities remained a relatively neglected issue during the 1980s and 1990s, although we did begin to see some more research develop in this area during both the 1990s and the early 2000s.

Spheres of Political Incorporation

The pressure for political inclusion grew as evidence emerged in the 1970s and 1980s that black and ethnic minority communities did not enjoy the same opportunity to participate politically through channels defined as legitimate (Layton-Henry 1984, Layton-Henry & Studlar 1985). Such research highlighted the reality that at best black and ethnic minority communities could hope for some form of partial political incorporation rather than full incorporation into the core political institutions. Although not exhaustive, such research suggested that the following options seemed to lie ahead for minority communities in British society seeking to play a role in the mainstream political sphere:

- i. be incorporated fully and equally and may possess the capacity to affect the contours of policy change
- ii. be incorporated fully and equally but with relatively little influence on the political system
- iii. be incorporated in a partial and structurally subordinate way but possess the capacity to influence policy outcomes at some moments
- iv. be structurally subordinate and without resources to affect what the state does.

In practice, the situation in the 1960s and 1970s can be seen as characterised by a mixture of all these types of political incorporation and exclusion. It was perhaps only by the 1980s and 1990s that the attempts to engage black and ethnic minority communities in the political sphere had reached the stage where they could be seen as moving towards a fuller pattern of inclusion, both at the local and at the national political levels. This situation had moved on by the early 2000s as we witnessed new types of mobilisation come to the fore both within the political sphere and in civil society.

It was in this context that we began the research on race and political mobilisation that frames this book, and we were therefore faced with the need to develop an analytical framework that could encompass the transformations that were taking place in relation to the political sphere and to civil society. To make sense of what is going on in contemporary Britain in relation to the political engagement of black and ethnic minority communities, we felt that it is essential to develop an analytical frame

that went beyond the sphere of formal politics as such and included emergent and alternative forms of politics.

To help with this, we took on board the notion that political participation is best conceived as taking place in several interlinked public spheres. In doing this, we took the (not unproblematic) notion of the *public sphere* as utilised by Jürgen Habermas amongst others and adapted it to frame our own analysis of the evolving forms of democratic governance and ethnic minority political mobilisation (Black Public Sphere Collective 1995, Dahlberg 2005, Habermas 1989, Negt & Kluge 1993). In broad terms, we developed a typology that interrogated the links between conventional participation in the *formal public sphere* of political parties, council elections, and democratic elections and participation in other emerging political spheres. Specifically, we considered the emergence of a *transitional public sphere* that contained several national campaigns that promoted the salience of race and ethnic issues in the national political agenda such as Operation Black Vote, the Civil Rights Movement, and the National Assembly against Racism. The research highlighted the considerable problems and – commonly – a growing, if uneven, disillusionment with both *formal* and *transitional spheres* of political participation. However, this should not be read straightforwardly as a declining sense of participation as such. Sites of political participation reflected generational changes, situational logics, and more conscious deliberations of tactics and strategies reflecting the perceived efficacy of interventions at different times and places. The typology also included the development of places, institutions, and cultures that were characterised by committed participation around contentious ethical issues, arenas in which the changing nature of racism organised mobilisation in ways that were not always congruent either with the institutions of race politics or with the rhetoric of identity politics of more recent times. We chose to describe these as representing the development of *alternative public spheres*, in part precisely because these sites often defined themselves negatively – involving participation that was explicitly recognising the conventionally defined *formal public sphere* but choosing to *engage with* rather than *participate in* it. For example, faith-based mobilisation around Islam prompted impressive and effective levels of participation in debates around key welfare support services such as schooling, youth provision, and urban regeneration, but such engagement was mediated by an associational politics that linked third-sector organisations to networks of mosques rather than participating directly in Labour, Liberal, or Conservative Party politics (Dancygier 2013, 2017). Similarly, a cultural politics of political sentiment and mobilising power linked popular musicians to refugee networks in

campaigns around issues of asylum, whilst black and ethnic minority creatives opened new spaces and genres.

The threefold typology used throughout the book is consciously heuristic, empirical, and taxonomic rather than theoretically sophisticated. The work on the public sphere and of Habermas, in particular, has produced volumes of powerful critique, reconstruction, and engagement with the performativity and congregation of the political and the affective registers and geographies of its constitution (Butler 1990, 1997; Butler, Laclau, & Žižek 2000; Fleig & Scheve 2020; Löw 2013, 2016; Mouffe 2000b). But the aim of the heuristic here is more straightforward; to taxonomise historically and geographically the dramaturgical stages through which racial meanings are contested and racial identities legitimated, transformed, and reframed through processes of engagement and participation.

To understand these everyday worlds of social movements and political mobilisation around issues of race and ethnicity, it is essential to engage closely and qualitatively with precisely the individuals and groups that are structuring new political debates rather than just quantitatively counting the number of times they choose to vote or the amount of press coverage they receive. New alliances are emerging which make it important to consider the British context more transnationally, both in terms of the commonalities of multicultural politics across national examples and in terms of the diasporic links that cross national political boundaries. Intersectional geometries of gender, sexuality, and class increasingly complicate the alliances and campaigns of race politics. In this context, the very vocabulary of race politics and race relations needs to be continually re-examined to make sense of what is happening in the present rather than assuming that we can reduce current developments to earlier forms of political participation.

In the evolving spheres of today's multicultural Britain, the nature of association – and the languages of social capital that have come to feature prominently in the social policy rhetoric of social exclusion and neighbourhood renewal – continue to promote committed engagement in debate and mobilisation in forms of activity that are clearly forms of political participation. Analytically, we must think slightly more laterally about how these forms of ethically rooted conduct are just not seen as politics in definitions of the term from both the media and academia. Ethically, the mainstream institutions and political parties of the, sometimes, United Kingdom need to consider carefully how they join up to these alternative public spheres where there is evidence of an enduring vibrant and contested politics at a time when the future of multiculturalism in Britain remains of major concern.

It is precisely these issues that are at the heart of our call in this book to rethink the nature of the political in multicultural Britain, and it is to this issue that we move onto in the next part of this chapter.

Rethinking the Political in Multicultural Britain

Having outlined the broad analytical framework that underpins the research agenda of this book, we now want to focus on the changing nature of ethnic minority political participation in contemporary Britain. This is an issue that has been the focus of much debate in recent times, particularly as we have seen the emergence of ever more complex forms of political involvement by the various ethnic minority communities that make up an increasingly significant component of urban communities. It is also a question that has begun to attract interest in other European societies, as governments recognise that the position of ethnic minority and migrant communities raises important questions about the nature of democratic participation, and that failure to make them into full citizens undermines the inclusive principle of democracy. Against this background, we developed research on the changing dynamics of local politics and ethnic minority political participation. We are particularly concerned to engage with this issue from both a theoretical as well as a policy perspective, since it seems clear that over the next decade and more, the question of ethnic minorities and their role in democratic institutions will continue to be an important area of public debate.

The account in the preceding sections of this chapter does not exhaust the different types of political participation and engagement that have characterised minority politics in British society. But they do highlight the changing nature of this involvement and pinpoint an argument that we want to explore both empirically and theoretically in this book, namely the fact that minority mobilisation can take several divergent forms. The experience of the past decade has shown that these forms can include mobilisations and activities based on identities defined in terms of religious, national, ethnic, community, and gender categories. Some of these mobilisations have been within the context of mainstream politics, yet others have been articulated in terms of models of identity politics that fit into a social movement model rather than a narrow institutional model. Typically, such movements work for social rights, the recognition of different cultural values and needs, and campaigns on issues such as racist violence and policing. It is important to explore the dynamics of these processes of change if we are to understand their impact on the position of minorities within the wider polity.

Discussion of race and ethnicity is in part structured by the methodological and theoretical paradigms imported from parent disciplines within the social sciences and humanities and perspectives that cross disciplinary boundaries. There are – broadly speaking – two approaches that we are attempting to synthesise and develop further in our own work. One approach traditionally privileges culture; the other conventionally privileges demography.

It is possible to consider models of ethnic participation that focus on the penetration of conventionally defined institutional forms by clearly categorised ethnic groups. The number of Punjabis or African Caribbeans or Somalis or any other ethnicity that join political parties, take part in elections, sit on councils, or take seats in Parliament all form categories and measures of participation that clearly have a validity within contemporary thinking around politics, race, and ethnic representation. Equally, in recent years, cultural studies and ethnography have increasingly highlighted how the very subjects of analysis in such work are themselves liable to change, both generationally and geographically. In Stuart Hall's notion of new ethnicities (Hall 1988a, 1991b), there was a clear sense that the implicit assimilationism in many forms of race and ethnic relations is simply inadequate to address the manner in which specific multicultural contexts have changed both the communities that settled in Britain several generations ago and also the social contexts in which settlement has occurred. Such a focus directs attention to the way new and frequently hybridised forms of expressive culture in music, arts, and cultural industries challenge conventional value systems in a manner that is clearly political.

Over the past three decades, it has become evident that the campaigns around the murder of Stephen Lawrence, the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, the role of faith communities in local structures of governance, and the debates about asylum seekers are simply not possible to understand within a restricted notion of the political that corresponds with a restricted understanding of political participation. Therefore, we have sought to bring together research from sociology, political science, cultural studies, and anthropology to develop a more rounded account of the evolving position of black and ethnic minority communities within the institutions of democratic governance.

In broad-brush terms, it is possible to give a slightly caricatured representation of the sort of work that informed our thinking when putting our overarching theoretical frame together. Theoretically, this points us towards literatures that take the formation of collective identities as problematic, with multicultural settings presenting variations on more general themes. It also points us to debates that consider a broad

understanding of the political in terms of contestation of values and meanings as well as of resources and structures of power and an understanding of notions of governance that consider the regimes of power that structure forms of governmentality, the institutional contexts within which deliberative democracy develops, and the policy settings in which democratic governance develops.

In this context, we are concerned both methodologically and analytically with the staging of political mobilisation. We attempt to draw together both the cultural studies focus on the politics of cultural change and the salience of major forms of institutional governance in political science. We are attempting to do this through a qualitative and ethnographic analysis of the place of race and ethnicity within the public sphere.

In the context of multiracial Britain, a long-standing public debate relates to the relative possibility of mainstream institutions reflecting the needs and demographic realities of multicultural life in the cities of today's Britain. A reformist ethical diagnosis prompts analysis of ethnic minority presence in Britain in terms of both personnel and power within specific institutional contexts, most notably through representation in party structures, local and national government or in other structures of governance. An alternative diagnosis has prompted the promotion of autonomous spheres of participation that are based on racial, ethnic, or faith divisions and may have varying degrees of interaction with the mainstream.

This volume rejects this dichotomy both empirically and conceptually. Some strands of writing caricature a world beyond state power and translates into a social policy stance that either promotes the notion of an autonomous civil society or an analytical or social territory of community that exists innocent of the institutional forms of structures of governance. We took instead as our starting point the notion that a hard boundary between state and civil society does not exist. There is no pure realm of community action, social movements, or political mobilisation that takes place outside sets of rules, laws, networks, and institutional framings that define regimes of governmentality through which – after Foucault – the conduct of conduct is regulated. Put crudely, there is no straightforward inside or outside to the institutions of the state, and so consequently forms of participation in political action need to be considered relationally in terms of the institutional circumstances through which they emerge. Consequently, we felt it important to examine the stages, networks, institutions, and social movements of ethnic minority participation by setting them within wider structures of governmental power.

We believe in this way it is possible to develop a more complex model of power, ethnicity, and cultural change than is common in most of the research literature. In this way we feel that it is important to speak to the debates around social capital and draw selectively and with caution on the conceptual terms in the social capital debate. In so doing, we hope also to develop a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between power, representation, and structures of governance and governmentality.

The concerns of this book link up well with broader theoretical and empirical questions. As we argue in Chapters 4 to 8, it is important to develop a detailed and nuanced understanding of the complex forms of political engagement that have emerged through the efforts of black and ethnic minority communities to gain at least a foothold in both the national and local political cultures of British society. It is through such an analysis that we can develop a fuller understanding of the nature of multicultural democracy and the changing forms of citizenship in societies shaped by growing racial and ethnic diversities.

Changing Boundaries of the Political

In this chapter, we have focused thus far on two key issues. First, we have sought to trace the evolution of forms of black and ethnic minority political mobilisation in the second half of the twentieth century. Second, we have provided an outline of the analytical frame that we used in developing the research on which this book is based. Although centred specifically on the position of ethnic minorities, the conceptual issues it touches on have a much broader relevance. This is evidenced by the intense debates in recent times about the changing boundaries of citizenship in multicultural societies, and ongoing debates about the shifting forms of national and cultural identity. New socio-economic conditions and political concerns which have arisen by way of new forms of ethnic diversity have recently stimulated much rethinking with regard to the idea of what a democratic society actually means in practice (Gooding-Williams et al., 2020; Hanchard 2018).

Given this growing body of research, it is surprising that until recently the mainstream work of race and politics in political science in Britain was by and large unhelpful in making sense of the way the conventional institutions of political power either did or did not reflect the agendas, concerns, and participation of black and ethnic minority communities. Although there is a large and growing body of scholarship in the United States that addresses these issues in some depth from the perspective of political science (Brown & Gershon 2017;

Buyuker, et al., 2021; McClain & Tauber 2018), we have not seen the same trend in the context of British society. It is partly to remedy this gap in our knowledge of black and ethnic minority political mobilisation that we embarked on the research that feeds into the substantive chapters in this book.

At the heart of this research is an interest in the degree to which contemporary forms of cosmopolitanism challenge the universalist conventions of much of the debate about political participation. In the context of Britain, the United States, and several European states, one significant element of this debate reflects on the degree to which multicultural realities – defined in terms of gender, interest, identity, and ethnicity – complement or contradict the realisation of a healthy and active civil society. In a similar manner, several writers have pointed to the ways in which citizenship as effective participation depends on appropriate structures and processes, and on access to information. Effective participation in a civil society also means full and equal engagement in the public sphere, and an acceptance of the realities of diverse ethnic communities living together (Alexander 2006, 2013, Taylor 1994).

Rather than assume that there are some teleological models whereby migrant minorities mobilised initially outside the system and then progressively became integrated into it, we shall aim, particularly in *Parts II and III*, to show that in practice there is much greater flux over time and space as to how black and ethnic minority communities have sought to engage with the political. At some moments in time, the town hall or the House of Commons was the focus of political action; at other times, civil society organisations addressed concerns that were frequently not even considered legitimate.

It is with this concern in mind that we developed our working model that seeks to explore the evolution of black and ethnic minority politics through the lens of involvement and engagement in three interlinked spheres, namely the alternative public sphere, transitional public sphere, and the formal public sphere. This model is not a hypothesis to be tested but more a Weberian ideal type that we used in part heuristically and in part in dialogue with the groups, institutions, and individuals we worked with in our research to see if it helps to describe their engagement in the political. As we hope to show in the substantive chapters of this book, this is a model that helps us make sense of the changing and evolving contours of black and ethnic minority politics, and it is to this issue that we now turn in Chapter 2.