

# The role of ethnicity in migration decisions and community cohesion

Nissa Finney

Hallsworth Fellow, Cathie Marsh Centre for Census and Survey Research (CCSR), University of Manchester  
Nissa.Finney@manchester.ac.uk www.ccsr.ac.uk/staff/nf

## Introduction

Concern with the ethnic character of neighbourhoods has risen to the political fore in Britain (and elsewhere in Europe, north America and Australasia) in the first decade of the twenty first century. The policy response has been an agenda of community cohesion, a key element of which is ethnic mixing.

Though residential mixing is only part of ethnic integration, the powerful iconography of undesirable ghettos continues to permeate social and political discourses. This is compounded by a dearth of contemporary research about what residential patterns mean for ethnic relations.

This project, which runs from 2011 to 2013, will examine the causal relationships between ethnicity, migration, segregation and integration using a mixed-methods approach. The understanding provided by this research, about migration processes and the role of ethnicity in them, will allow re-theorisation of the interactions between spatial and social integration and de-stabilisation of ideas about areas labelled as 'white', 'mixed', 'ghettos'.

## Aims

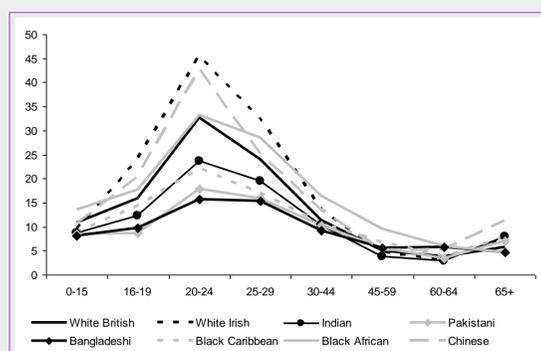
This project aims to investigate the causal relationships between ethnicity, migration, segregation and integration by addressing two primary research questions:

- 1) Are there ethnic differences in norms, expectations, barriers and constraints that shape migration patterns differently for different ethnic groups?
- 2) How does the ethnic character of local population change affect residents' neighbourhood belonging and community cohesion?

## Ethnicity and migration decision making

Migration is the primary component of local ethnic group population change; it is what causes neighbourhoods to be ethnically mixed or not (Finney and Simpson 2009). Studies of ethnic differences in internal migration in Britain have predominantly focused on migration as a process of residential de/segregation to explore 'White flight' and 'minority self-segregation' (e.g. Stillwell and Hussain 2008). These studies offer valuable understandings of ethnic commonalities in migration experiences but are limited in their explanations of ethnic differences in levels and geographies of migration.

Figure 1: Probability of migrating within Britain (%; 2000-2001) by age and ethnic group

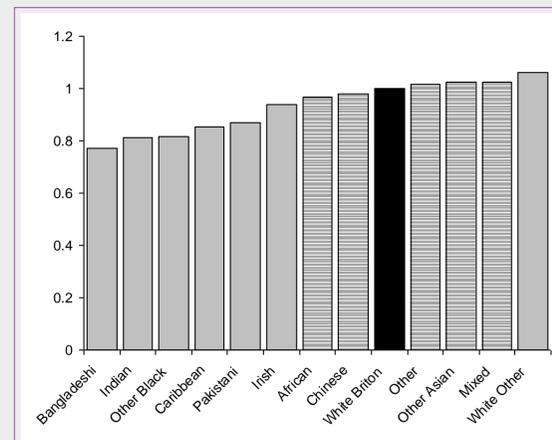


Source: 2001 Census SAR, GB.

## References

- Finney, N. (2011) 'Understanding ethnic differences in the internal migration of young adults in Britain from a lifecycle perspective' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*
- Finney, N. and Simpson, L. (2008) 'Internal migration and ethnic groups: evidence for Britain from the 2001 Census' *Population, Space and Place* 14: 63-83
- Finney, N. and Simpson, L. (2009) *Sleepwalking to Segregation? Challenging myths of race and migration* Bristol: The Policy Press
- Hooghe, M., Reeskens, T., Stolle, D. and Trappers, A. (2009) 'Ethnic Diversity and Generalized Trust in Europe' *Comparative Political Studies* 2: 198-223
- Laurence, J. and Heath, A. (2008) Predictors of community cohesion: multi-level modelling of the 2005 Citizenship Survey. London: CLG
- Letki, N. (2008) Does Diversity Erode Social Cohesion. Social Capital and Race in British Neighbourhoods' *Political Studies* 56: 99-126
- Putnam, R. (2007) 'E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century - The 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture' *Scandinavian Political Studies* 30 (2): 137-174
- Raudenbush, S.W. and Sampson, R.J. (2004) 'Seeing Disorder: neighbourhood Stigma and the Social Construction of "Broken Windows"' *Social Psychology Quarterly* 67(4): 319-342
- Stillwell, J. and Hussain, S. (2008) 'Ethnic group migration within Britain during 2000-01: a district level analysis' *University of Leeds School of Geography Working Paper, Leeds*

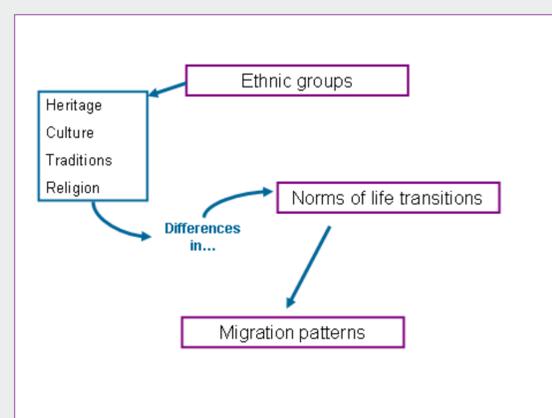
Figure 2: Odds of migrating within Britain (2000-2001) relative to White Britons after controlling for demographic and socioeconomic characteristics



Source: 2001 Census SAR, GB. Controls for age, economic activity, qualifications, tenure, health, household composition. Black bar, for White Britons, is the reference group. Grey bars show odds of migrating that are statistically significantly different from White Britons, after controls.

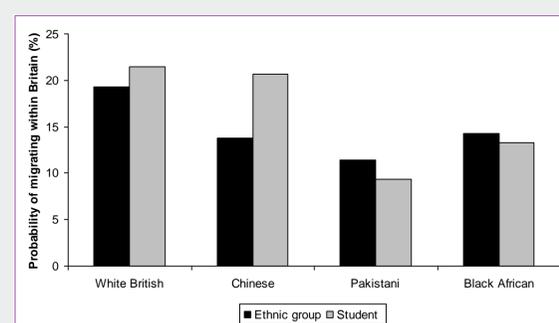
This research looks to life event explanations, drawing on evidence of the importance of age in understanding ethnic differences in migration. Even taking into account the younger age structure of minority ethnic groups (which results in high migration rates), ethnic differences remain and are greatest at the young adult ages. For example, migration rates for Chinese are double those of Bangladeshis (Figure 1). After controlling for many demographic and socio-economic characteristics, there are still ethnic differences in levels of migration (Figure 2).

Figure 3: Diagrammatic representation of the role of ethnicity in migration



This raises the question of whether there are ethnic differences in norms, expectations, barriers and constraints that shape migration patterns differently for different ethnic groups. The mechanism for the role of ethnicity is represented diagrammatically in Figure 3. Initial analyses have indicated that ethnic differences can be expected in how migration is associated with young adult life events, particularly marriage and being a student (Finney 2011). For example, Figure 4 shows that being student is associated with increased residential mobility for White British and Chinese young adults but decreased residential mobility for Pakistani and Black African young adults.

Figure 4: The additional effect of being a student on probability of migrating, selected ethnic groups



Source: 2001 Census SAR, GB age 16-29. Notes: Reference category is White British, Manager/Professional, single, male, home owner, with qualifications up to GCSE level, not a student, born in UK, without children.

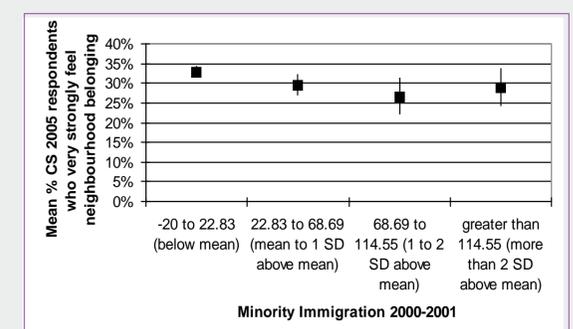
## Ethnic group population change and community cohesion

Government policies of community cohesion and academic research have been influenced by agenda-setting US studies which found greater ethnic diversity to be associated with less neighbourhood trust (Putnam 2007). However, counterarguments to this thesis have been made and questions raised about the causal pathways of these associations, such as the role of inter-group contact (e.g. Letki 2008, Hooghe et al 2009). Some have argued that not only neighbourhood composition but neighbourhood population change are important for understanding community cohesion (Laurence and Heath 2008).

This research will speak to these debates from a new angle: how migration history and population change – for individuals and neighbourhoods - affect community cohesion, and how this is ethnically differentiated. Of relevance here are theories of social disorganisation which, similar to social capital ideas, posit that disorganised communities are less socially cohesive (Raudenbush and Sampson 2004). One aspect of disorganisation is neighbourhood population stability, the primary determinant of which is migration. The hypothesis would therefore be that where there is greater residential instability there is less feeling of neighbourhood belonging or cohesion.

Early results are inconclusive. Figure 5, for example, shows that neighbourhood belonging is highest where there is lowest immigration (the graph shows results for minority immigration but the pattern is no different if White immigration is considered). However, the difference between levels of neighbourhood belonging in areas of differing levels of immigration is not statistically significant.

Figure 5: Levels of neighbourhood belonging in areas of differing levels of immigration



Source: commissioned 2005 Citizenship Survey data with migration data from 2001 Census.

## A mixed methods approach

This project will adopt a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data and techniques to illuminate different facets of the research problem.

The quantitative elements will examine levels and geographies of migration by age and ethnic group with regression modelling of how migration is associated with key life events. Aggregate and individual level UK 2001 and 2011 Census data and administrative data including a dataset commissioned from the Higher Education Statistics Authority will be used. The *Citizenship Survey* and the first wave of *Understanding Society*, the UK Household Longitudinal Study, will be the source for investigation of population change and community cohesion. The qualitative elements of the project will investigate how migration is thought about in relation to key life events; the factors affecting migration decisions; and how migration experiences shape sense of belonging and feelings about place-based identity.

## In short....

Evidence shows that ethnicity affects migration patterns and that population change (through migration) affects community cohesion. This project will reveal **how** ethnicity affects migration and cohesion. This will improve ethnic integration theories and inform integration strategies.