

# Beyond the 'Race' Concept: The Reproduction of Racism in England

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Large numbers of people continue for long periods of time to cling to myth, to justify it in formulas that are repeated in their cultures, and to reject falsifying information when prevailing myths justify their interests, roles, and past actions, or assuage their fears. (Edelman, 1977:3)

The deepest instinct of the Englishman - how the word 'instinct' keeps forcing itself in again and again! - is for continuity: he never acts more freely nor innovates more boldly than when he is conscious of conserving or even of reacting (Enoch Powell, cited in Wood, 1965:145)

This is the doctrine of the new tribalism, and as such would make sure, if it prevailed, that there would be Washingtons and riots in Britain. (*Times*, 18.11.67)

## *Introduction*

This paper has two objectives. First, it will summarise and develop my critique of the sociology of 'race relations' and the way in which it utilises the idea of 'race' as an analytical concept. It will be concluded from this that it is necessary to show why and how the idea of 'race' is employed in social relations rather than take for granted its commonsense status. The concepts of racialisation and racism will be shown to be central to this task. Second, as a way of illustrating the significance of this argument, I shall consider a key phase in the racialisation of domestic English politics. I show, first, how the 1964/ 70 Labour government initially employed the idea of 'race' to problematise the migrant presence in favour of the exposure of racism and, second, how Enoch Powell subverted a later attempt to do the latter by an ideological intervention which employed the category of 'nation' as an allusion to the idea of 'race'.

## *The Ideological Character of 'Race Relations' Sociology*

A confrontation with the idea of 'race' is a confrontation with the history and legacy of a central strand of Western thought. During the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, the idea of 'race' occupied a key place in the attempt by intellectuals and politicians to understand the rapidly changing and expanding world in which they lived, and the successful attempt to attribute scientific status to the idea of 'race' is now well

understood (Banton, 1977). That some eight million people had to die in the course of a political project influenced by that bogus science is also well understood, despite ongoing attempts by fascist groups to define this historical episode as a myth. The work of many biologists and geneticists both before and after the Holocaust has demonstrated, clearly and repeatedly, that the idea of there being discrete biological groups ranged in a hierarchy of superiority/ inferiority has no scientific foundation. Ambiguities remain in the way in which some of them continue to employ the idea of 'race' within scientific discourse but where its use is maintained and defended, it is in terms which are clearly divorced from the nineteenth century emphasis upon the classification of phenotypical variation (Montagu, 1972). 'Race', in the sense of discrete sub-species, is no longer seriously considered to be biological fact. Thus 'any use of racial categories must take its justifications from some other source than biology' (Rose et al., 1984:127).

Most social scientists accept and adopt this as their starting point when analysing the continuing reproduction of racism. But, in the course of rejecting scientific racism, many of them have incorporated the key 'concept' of scientific racism into their analytical framework. They have redefined 'race' as a social category and utilise it as both explanans and explanandum, in an attempt to constitute 'race relations' as a discrete object of analysis, about which theories can be formulated, tested and reformulated (e.g. Rex, 1970; cf. Miles, 1982, 1984b).

Historically, and in the contemporary world, people attribute meaning to particular patterns of phenotypical variation and act in accordance with that process of signification. The occurrence of this complex process of cognition and action is not contested. What is contested is the analytical method and concepts employed to understand and explain it. The conventional sociological method is to claim that, as a result of this process, 'races' are constituted and thereby come to relate to one another, and that the means and consequences of this fall into regular patterns which can be theorised. Thereafter, and crucially, 'race' is transformed into a real phenomenon which has identifiable effects in the social world. 'Race' becomes a variable with measurable consequences. Sociologists employ this variable to report that, for example, 'race' has important effects on educational achievement, that 'race' interrelates with class to produce multiple patterns of disadvantage, that 'race' intervenes in the political process affecting the way in which people vote, that 'race' determines an individual's chances of being unemployed, arrested by the police or becoming a magistrate, and so on. That is, sociologists employ the idea of 'race' as an explanans, as an analytical concept identifying a phenomenon with determinant effects.

This is a classic example of reification. There is no identifiable phenomenon of 'race' which can have such effects on social relations and processes. There is only a process of signification in the course of which the idea of 'race' is employed to interpret the presence and behaviour of others, a conceptual process which can guide subsequent action and reaction. This complex of signification and action, where it occurs systematically over periods of time, has structural consequences. This complex can be referred to as a process of racialisation, a concept which refers to the social construction but also refers to patterns of action and reaction consequent upon the signification. Within this process, the ideology of racism plays a central role by offering criteria upon which signification can occur, attributing negative correlates to all those possessing the real or alleged criteria, and legitimating consequent discriminatory behaviour or consequences.

This 'race relations' sociology takes for granted and legitimates commonsense definitions. This point was made in a review over fifteen years ago of a text by one of Britain's foremost exponents of 'race relations' sociology where it was argued that:

One cannot avoid the suspicion that Banton's concept of race is simply the popular British concept shorn of its innuendos of prejudice and raised from the daily life of the British Isles to the status of a universal scientific category (Pitt-Rivers, 1970:340).

In other words, it assumes something that needs to be explained. Put yet another way, the reality of phenotypical variation is usually regarded as an adequate explanation of signification. But not all phenotypical differences are interpreted as evidence for the supposed existence of 'race'. The human species can be classified into categories by a very wide range of phenotypical features (e.g. size of feet, eye colour, hair colour, height etc.) but only a limited range tends to be referred to as signifying 'race' (e.g. skin colour). Therefore, there is an ongoing process of ideological construction and re-construction which requires explanation.

This claim is reinforced by the historical fact that not all instances of social relations between individuals categorised as being of distinct 'race' are followed by the mutual reproduction of the signification in practice. The scientific racism of the nineteenth century had such a pervasive influence that almost all instances of group differentiation were liable to be interpreted in terms of 'race'. For example, Elizabeth Gaskell's biography of Charlotte Bronte refers to the population of Yorkshire as a 'race' and outlines their supposedly distinctive cultural characteristics (1975:60). More significantly, Irish migrants to Scotland in the nineteenth century

were identified as a 'race' and were subjected to violent physical attack and systematic discrimination (Miles, 1982:121-50). Yet, in neither case have the process and consequences been signified either by the participants or sociologists as a 'race relations' situation.

The attribution of the categories of 'race' and 'race relations' is, therefore, an ideological process which occurs in particular circumstances. Its occurrence requires explanation because

... language is an integral facet of the political scene; not simply an instrument for describing events but itself a part of events, shaping their meaning and helping to shape the political roles officials and the general public play. In this sense, language, events, and self-conceptions are a part of the same transaction, mutually determining one another's meanings (Edelman, 1977:4).

The signification of an individual as belonging to a 'race' or of a situation as being one of 'race relations' is an event which has particular consequences because

... Perception involves categorisation. To place an object in one class of things rather than another establishes its central characteristics and creates assumptions about matters that are not seen (Edelman, 1977:23).

It is also an event which has certain preconditions which need to be identified and explained.

A further reason for rejecting 'race relations' sociology follows from the key place that the idea of 'race' occupies in Western commonsense (understood in the Gramscian sense). The reification of the process of signification and the attribution of analytical status to the idea of 'race' transforms the phenotypical feature into a determining agent, reproducing at another level the causal sequence which scientific racism purported to identify. Thus, 'race' is transformed from being an idea employed in a process of signification into an active subject in the same manner that scientific racism asserted that a complex of phenotypical characteristics determined social processes and outcomes. 'Race relations' sociology denies this determining process but articulates an analytical sequence in which it is echoed and reincarnated. This consequence of reification is particularly problematic when 'race relations' sociology reports its findings and conclusions to politicians, the media and the public in a historical context in which the nineteenth century idea of 'race' continues to be reproduced. In such circumstances, the process of reification confirms and legitimates the historically constituted commonsense notion that 'race' is a biological fact with determinant effects. Thus, 'race relations' sociology plays a role in

the legitimation of commonsense ideas about 'race' and, consequently, remains on the same ideological terrain as the racist. Viewed in this context, the incorporation of such an ideological notion into sociological analysis is a political act and needs to be consistently exposed as such.

One crucial consequence is that the ideas of 'race' and 'race relations' are used in a way which obscures historical and social processes. In asserting that a 'race relations' problem exists, it is implied that the development of social interaction between the different 'races' constitutes the origin of the problem. Thus, when West Indians migrated to England in the 1950s, it was claimed that their arrival and presence created a 'race relations' problem. This formulation is ideological because it locates the origin of what is defined as problematic in the very presence of the migrant group. Such an interpretation reverses the sequence of events and obscures the active agent in the process. The determining signification and action is the initial definition of the migrants as a distinct 'race' whose presence is denoted as creating a 'race relations' problem. 'Race relations' are not naturally occurring relations between 'races' but is a label applied to situations in which the participants are defined and define themselves as 'races'. The determining factor is, therefore, the act of definition and the action taken to reinforce and sustain that definition. By obscuring this process, the influence of racism itself can be downgraded or ignored when it is often this ideology which sustains that initial act of categorisation.

### *The Historical Character of 'Race Relations' Sociology*

Although the idea of 'race' has had a lengthy genesis in European thought, it was during the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries that scientists, intellectuals and politicians posed the problem of explaining 'race relations' and found an answer in biology (cf. Miles, 1982:43). It was not until the early twentieth century that sociological forms of analysis began to appropriate the same object but shift certain of the analytical categories while retaining the idea of 'race' as an analytical concept. This first occurred in the United States with the publication of *Introduction to the Science of Society* by R. Park and E.W. Burgess in 1921. Subsequently, during the 1920s and 1930s, a sociological tradition defined and analysed 'race relations' as socially-defined relations and produced a series of classic investigations which focused in particular on the southern states of the USA (Richmond, 1969:238; Banton, 1977:101-35).

This first sociology of 'race relations' identified such relations as an internal problem within the United States at a time when the migration of a section of the American population of African origin from the southern to the northern states was under way (Piore, 1979:143, 157-63). This migration of labour had its origin in a particular phase of capital accumulation in the United States, during which an addition to the ranks of the unskilled and

semi-skilled industrial proletariat was required in the northern centres of capitalist production. The migration was possible because of the uneven character of capitalist development which had left large sections of the population in the southern states in considerable poverty. A part of that section of the population of African origin which had earlier been racialised in the course of establishing, legitimating and reproducing the slave mode of production was then summoned by capital to reconstitute its relation to the capitalist mode of production by selling labour power for a wage. A period of marginalisation and externalisation was ended as these Afro-Americans were encouraged to occupy a pivotal position at the heart of the process of extraction of surplus value. It was in response to this historical process that sociologists in the USA laid the foundations for 'race relations' sociology.

A similar process occurred in Britain. Although there were small communities of colonial origin in Britain in the nineteenth century, as well as a large migrant population from Ireland, all of which had been racialised and subject to physical attack, their presence was neither politically identified as constituting a 'race relations' problem nor considered by the infant social sciences as worthy of attention. It was only following the economically induced migration of labour from the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent during the 1950s that such a definition was applied and such attention was given. This work tended to borrow heavily from the American tradition.

'Race relations' sociology can therefore be viewed as an attempt to confront the problem of racism when historically racialised populations are transferred from the colonial periphery to the centre of the world system of commodity production to be proletarianised. It constitutes an attempt to analyse a real problem which highlights certain central contradictions in the reproduction of capitalist relations of production. Increasingly, it has become necessary for the state to intervene to manage the conflicts that arise from the reproduction of racism in the metropolitan centre, and 'race relations' sociology, because of its ideological character, can be appropriated and utilised as part of the project of containment (Gilroy, 1980). By understanding the essential relations that underlie the origin of 'race relations' sociology, it is possible to employ a more adequate analytical framework within which to locate the process of racialisation (cf. Miles, 1982:94-133). In what follows, I focus in some detail on a particular phase in the racialisation of domestic English politics and in the conclusion I briefly relate this to economic relations.

### *The Racialisation of Politics in England in the 1950s*

The most cursory examination of political history in England since 1945 reveals that only a minority of participants in formal political processes

have articulated openly a racist theory which approximates to the claims of the biological sciences in the nineteenth century. There is, therefore, a sense in which Banton was correct to assert that racism is dead (1970:28), at least in the English context. But the validity of this assertion is contradicted by two considerations. First, small fascist parties have continued since 1945 to articulate the central claims of scientific racism, and these parties have had, in certain periods, a significant influence on the political process (cf. Miles & Phizacklea, 1984:113-35). Second, there is a debate about the definition and nature of racism, and different definitions admit different criteria as a measure of the presence or persistence of the ideology (Miles, 1982:72-92). Such conceptual debates are important, but do not in themselves solve the problem if they are abstracted from the historical and contemporary evidence. In what follows, my primary concern is with some of that evidence.

I now approach that evidence in the light of the analytical and conceptual implications of the preceding argument. My claim is that the articulation of racism in English politics is more clearly revealed if we first appreciate that the idea of 'race' is a central component of national commonsense. This assertion presumes a historical relationship between racism and nationalism in the English case which cannot be pursued in detail here. It is sufficient to note that the idea of 'race' occupied a central role in the writing of English history (Banton, 1977:15-26; MacDougall, 1982) and was employed by all classes of the English population during the nineteenth century in order to comprehend the populations of those parts of the world which had been or were to be incorporated into the British Empire. As an element of commonsense, the idea of 'race' need not necessarily be explicitly articulated for it to have real effects on the political process. By definition, commonsense is all those 'taken for granted' ideas and 'facts' which shape the manner in which problems are defined and solutions sought. This can be done without the idea of 'race' ever being articulated. And even when the idea of 'race' is explicitly articulated, its commonsense status ensures that such usage does not require legitimisation or explanation.

During the 1950s, 'race' was constructed as an object of political debate in England and as a problem requiring political intervention. The concept of racialisation refers to this historical process of reifying the idea of 'race', of conceiving it as a real object. Brittan and Maynard express the consequences in the following way:

... political discourse proceeds as if the reality 'race' was self-evident. Parliament legislates on 'race'. The media discuss 'race'. Politicians discover 'race' as an important dimension of their appeal to the electorate (1984:13).

The sociology of 'race relations' takes this for granted and subsequently legitimates this ideological process by proceeding to offer an explanation which accepts that there is a 'race' problem in England. I wish to problematise what is 'taken-for-granted' and ask why it is that the arrival of people in England from the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent was interpreted using the idea of 'race'.

This requires historical reconstruction in order to explain the context for and the means by which 'race' entered English political discourse. Let us narrow that task immediately by assuming that it did so in the context of British colonialism and, therefore, that the 'race' problem was construed as being largely external to England in the period before 1945. This is an assumption which is not fully justified if we take account of, for example, the ideological reaction to the Jewish migration in the late nineteenth century or the physical attacks on people of colonial origin in English seaports in the early twentieth century (Joshua et al., 1983:7-55), but it is an assumption which does not contradict the general thesis that political intervention creates 'race' as an object of attention and action. In the post-1945 period, a migration from the Caribbean (and later from the Indian subcontinent) was stimulated by a shortage of semi- and unskilled labour in certain sectors of the English economy and proceeded by means of a politically unregulated chain migration. The ideological signification of this migration employed the idea of 'race', and this was the crucial first step in the racialisation of domestic English politics.

These Commonwealth and British subjects became the object of two contradictory political processes. The first was a process of exclusion. Discrimination was practised to limit their access to housing and places of entertainment, and this required an ideological legitimisation. The second was a process of inclusion. Various forms of organisation attempted to ease and assist their entry into English social relations, and this too required ideological legitimisation. Initially, neither the migration nor these reactive processes received sustained, formal and public attention by the state or individual politicians, although both had been privately engaged in various sorts of activity from the 1940s which indicated that they defined the migration as problematic (Joshi & Carter, 1984). In other words, there were a number of crosscutting political and ideological reactions to the migration within civil society, but none received public state attention in the early and mid-1950s.

The situation changed following a fight outside a pub in Nottingham and a subsequent series of attacks on West Indian migrants and their property in the summer of 1958. Similar incidents occurred in London. The events themselves matter less than the political and ideological reaction to them (cf. Miles, 1984b). The political debate following the attacks, as refracted

by newspaper reporting, provides a classic example of Edelman's claim that

Political and ideological debate consists very largely of efforts to win acceptance of a particular categorisation of an issue in the face of competing efforts of a different one ... (1977:25).

The categorisation that predominated over the several ones articulated asserted that the 'riots' demonstrated that England faced a 'race' problem as a result of 'immigration'. This categorisation had a certain phenomenal adequacy insofar as it was commonly assumed by both politicians and audience that the world's population was divided into distinct 'races' and that it was by means of 'immigration' that they came into contact with each other. I refer to this categorisation as the 'race/ immigration' dualism. As a result of its predominance, 'race' and 'immigration' were established as legitimate objects of political attention and action.

There are a number of things to note about this categorisation. First, it displaced any reference to the facts which demonstrated that the so-called 'riots' began as a result of attacks on West Indian migrants and that those who perpetrated these attacks identified their victims using categories such as 'nigger'. By defining 'race' as the problem, the implicit reification obscured the social process of categorisation, with the result that the object of categorisation (and attack) was transformed into the origin of the ideologically constructed problem. Second, each pole of the dualism defined and contained the other. Hence, and third, the dualism contained both explanation and solution to the problem. By suggesting that the 'race' problem had been created by 'immigration', the solution was 'obviously' to be found in stopping 'immigration'. Finally, it served to dislocate the legal status of the settlers as United Kingdom subjects who had the right to enter and live in Britain.

The predominance of this dualism was achieved without any attempt by either leading parliamentary politicians or journalists to identify explicitly the 'immigrants' as a 'race' which exhibited undesirable and negatively evaluated biological characteristics. But some Labour and Conservative politicians did link the category 'coloured immigrants' in a deterministic manner with a number of negatively evaluated characteristics, from which they concluded that the migration of such people should be controlled. This interpretation was sanctioned by the decision of the Conservative government in 1961 to establish controls over the entry into Britain of Commonwealth citizens, controls which were not applied to citizens of the Irish Republic. The Labour Party criticised for being inspired by racism and opposed the legislation as a matter of principle. However, over the following eighteen months, there was a clear retreat from this position,

principally by the Labour leadership, which became obvious following the election of a Labour government in 1964 (cf. Layton-Henry, 1984:57).

The Labour government published a White Paper in 1965 titled *Immigration from the Commonwealth* which endorsed and developed the 'race/immigration' categorisation. It endorsed the categorisation by proposing even stricter controls over 'immigration' and developed it by proposing that the state should intervene to improve 'race relations'. The analysis offered in this official document is worthy of careful attention because of what it reveals about the Labour government's ideological construction. The document claimed to set out both a Commonwealth 'immigration policy' and a policy to deal with 'the problems to which it has given rise'. The latter was dealt with in Part III under the title 'Integration', in which the United Kingdom was described as a 'multi-racial society' in which

... the presence ... of nearly one million immigrants from the Commonwealth with different social and cultural backgrounds raises a number of problems and creates various social tensions in those areas where they have concentrated (HMSO, 1965:10).

It went on to claim that these problems and tensions would have to be resolved if

... we are to avoid the evil of racial strife and if harmonious relations between the different races who now form our community are to develop ... (HMSO, 1965:10).

Thus 'harmonious race relations' was defined as the policy goal and was to be achieved by solving the problems created by the 'immigrants'. These problems were said to have arisen in housing, education, employment and health.

Within three of these areas, the document claimed that the 'immigrant' presence was the origin of the problem. Concerning housing, it was claimed that:

The main cause of unsatisfactory living conditions among immigrants is the multiple occupation of houses originally designed for one family (HMSO, 1965:11).

Concerning education, it was argued that

... most of the difficulties arise from the fact that numbers of immigrant children newly arrived from overseas are brought to school without previous warning, often knowing little or no English, and ignorant of the normal social habits and ways of life in this country (HMSO, 1965:11).

Part of the solution to this problem was seen to lie with dispersing these children in order to prevent their 'undue concentration'. As far as health was concerned, the document asserted that:

The main problem presented to the local authorities is the detection and prevention of tuberculosis ... One of the main pressures that Commonwealth immigrants exert on local hospital facilities arises from the fact that their poor housing conditions are unsuitable for home confinements and that this leads to a heavy demand for hospital maternity beds (HMSO, 1965:14).

Clearly, as far as the Labour government was concerned, the main obstacle to 'harmonious race relations' was the presence and behaviour of 'immigrants'.

But there was a subsidiary and secondary theme which emerged in the discussion of employment. Here, it was noted that the majority of 'immigrants' were employed and that the only problem was the persistence of discrimination against them which was being dealt with by withholding help from employers who set discriminatory criteria in the hiring of labour and by using 'persuasion and reasoning' to overcome 'difficulties'. This was a problem in which 'considerable progress has already been made' (HMSO, 1965:13) and which therefore required no major initiative. This was echoed by a later claim that 'mutual tolerance and understanding' would be achieved because of the 'good sense of the British people' (HMSO, 1965:18). Here was the merest hint that the problem lay not with the migrants but with the reaction to them, but this suggestion immediately dismissed the assertion that action had already been taken to resolve this difficulty and that an alleged characteristic of the indigenous population necessarily limited its scope.

Although the 1965 White Paper offered no sustained argument, supported with evidence, to suggest that the problem lay with the conception and action of the indigenous population, yet, when the government intervened to legislate for 'race relations' in 1965 and 1968, it was legislation that defined racial discrimination as illegal and that sought to penalise such behaviour. Here was a clear contradiction between the way in which the government construed the nature of the problem and the action it took, although an attempt was made prior to the introduction of the 1968 legislation to legitimate it with evidence on the extent of discrimination in England (Daniel, 1968). In the light of the predominance of the 'race/immigration' categorisation and the predominant opinion that there were 'too many immigrants in Britain' this was a difficult venture. Meanwhile, events in East Africa were encouraging the migration to Britain of Kenyan Asians holding UK passports, and a number of right-wing Conservative politicians reacted in such a way as to re-focus the political debate on the

commonsense logic of the 'race/ immigration' dualism, and thereafter to offer a new categorisation.

### *Powell and the Racialisation of Politics*

The most important member of this group of politicians was Enoch Powell MP who was Shadow Minister for Defence. In 1968 he made three speeches which dealt explicitly with 'immigration' and with the problems that he considered to have arisen from 'immigration'. In each of them, he argued that the solution to the problems that he identified lay no longer with immigration control alone but with a state organised policy of 'repatriation'. Each of the three speeches was carefully constructed and there is therefore special significance in the fact that the idea of 'race' was rarely employed. Indeed, on one of the few occasions when the 'race' idea was articulated, Powell did so in order to deny that the extent of the diversity of 'race' or culture of the 'immigrants' was problematic in itself (Smithies and Fiddick, 1969:68). This is usually ignored by academic commentators who themselves uncritically interpret Powell's speeches by using the 'race/ immigration' dualism (e.g. Layton-Henry, 1984:70-2; 75-7) and who therefore fail to grasp the ideological shift that Powell attempted in 1968 and after. Barker, too, uses a reified concept of 'race', although I agree with his analysis of Powell as a key figure in the construction of the 'new racism' (1981:37-42). Unfortunately, Barker contextualises Powell primarily in terms of Conservative party politics rather than in relation to the broader process of racialisation which is what I attempt to do here.

In the 1968 speeches, Powell's primary concern was with the alleged effects of the numbers and characteristics of the migrants upon the English people or 'nation'. This became clear, for example, in his attack in the Birmingham speech on the Race Relations Bill (which aimed to extend the provisions of the Race Relations Act, 1965, to housing and employment) which was then being discussed in Parliament. Powell argued that the English people

... now learn that a one way privilege is to be established by act of parliament; a law, which cannot, and is not intended, to operate to protect them or redress their grievances, is to be enacted to give the stranger, the disgruntled and the *agent provocateur* the power to pillory for them for their private actions (quoted in Smithies and Fiddick, 1969:40; cf. pp.38-9, 43).

Powell's concern was that the English, described as having 'incredible tolerance' (Smithies and Fiddick, 1969:69), would lose their right to discriminate in pursuing their rightful interests (Smithies and Fiddick, 1969:39) in a context where

They found their wives unable to obtain hospital beds in childbirth,

their children unable to obtain schoolplaces, their homes and neighbourhoods changed beyond recognition, their plans and prospects for the future defeated ... (Smithies and Fiddick, 1969:40).

This imagery of the systematic disadvantage created for the English as a result of migration was contrasted with the limited problems faced by the migrants which, in Powell's view, arose from 'personal circumstances and accidents' (Smithies and Fiddick, 1969:40). Here Powell was denying that the migrant population was the object of systematic discrimination and disadvantage.

This alleged material disadvantage (for the English) arising from migration echoed the claims of the Labour Party's 1965 White Paper and illustrates the extent of the common ideological terrain on which the contest was occurring. But Powell took the argument a stage further. These alleged disadvantages which arose, first from the sheer size of the immigrant population were, he continued, accentuated by the wish of the immigrants to maintain their distinct cultural identity and practices. In the Eastbourne speech, he cited a sociological study of migration from the Caribbean to support this argument and went on to argue that

Sometimes people point to the increasing proportion of immigrant offspring born in this country as if the fact contained within itself the ultimate solution. The truth is the opposite. The West Indian or Asian does not, by being born in England, become an Englishman. In law he becomes a United Kingdom citizen by birth: in fact, he is a West Indian or an Asian still. Unless he be one of a small minority - for number, I repeat again and again, is of the essence - he will by the very nature of things have lost one country without gaining another, lost one nationality without acquiring a new one (Smithies and Fiddick, 1969:77).

The real problem, he claimed in the Walsall speech, was not discrimination but the migrants' communalism (Smithies and Fiddick, 1969: 22). Powell believed that this was a disintegrative force because it meant the creation of a distinct culture and set of interests which, so he claimed, could be defended by the legal 'privileges' created by the Race Relations legislation. The explicit, primary object of Powell's concern was, therefore, not the 'race' of the migrants, but with maintaining the cultural homogeneity of the English 'nation'.

Nevertheless, a number of devices were employed in the speeches to sustain the categorisation that the problems arising from 'immigration' were closely connected with the phenotypical difference of the migrant population. First, there were a limited number of strategic references to skin colour. Powell referred to 'white children' or 'white inhabitants', the former being used dramatically in the very first paragraph of the speech given on 9

February, whose lives were alleged to have been made more difficult by 'immigration' (Smithies and Fiddick, 1969:19, 65, 66). Although he was careful to refer to 'immigrants' without specifying any further distinction other than that they were from the Commonwealth, he did make a reference to 'coloured immigrants and their offspring' in the Eastbourne speech (Smithies and Fiddick, 1969:70). Second, in two of the speeches there were references to a supposed danger of reproducing in England a problem that was well-known in the USA. Immediately after claiming that a child born in England of West Indian or Asian parents could not be English, Powell predicted that

With the lapse of a generation or so we shall at least have succeeded - to the benefit of nobody - in reproducing in 'England's green and pleasant land' the haunting tragedy of the United States (Smithies and Fiddick, 1969:77; cf. pp.21, 73.)

Third, Powell specified precisely the object of his attack by quoting passages from letters he announced he had been sent or by citing conversations with constituents. The most explicit reference came in the speech given on 20 April, 1968, when he claimed that a constituent had told him that

In this country in fifteen or twenty years time the black man will have the whip-hand over the white man (Smithies and Fiddick, 1969:36).

Powell also cited letters which referred to 'Negroes', to 'coloured' and to West Indian people and which also attributed negative characteristics to the people so categorised (cf. Smithies and Fiddick, 1969:66-8).

The first device utilised an explicit reference to phenotypical difference while the other two worked in somewhat different ways. References to the USA depend on commonsense understandings of the political conflicts that took place in US cities in the 1960s which were widely interpreted, especially in the media, as evidence for the existence of a 'race' problem (Hartman & Husband, 1974:135). Thus, two days after Powell's speech of 9 February 1968, the *Times* had a front page headline 'City Blamed for Race Riot' leading a story about the publication of a report on a riot in the United States in July 1967 (*Times*, 11.2.68). Given that Powell continually emphasised the care with which his speeches were worded, there is considerable significance in the fact that his emphasis upon the category of 'nation' to signify a problem in England was here underpinned by a reference to a situation widely interpreted as having a 'race' problem. The third device operated by legitimating commonsense interpretations of the 'ordinary citizen'. The few references to constituents' statements of despair and alleged victimisation echoed the commonsense imagery of 'race' employed in workplaces, pubs and bus queues about the conse-

quences of the presence of Asian and Caribbean migrants and their children (cf. Phizacklea & Miles, 1980:167-76). All three of these devices therefore substituted for the use of the idea of 'race'.

But it is not so much that Powell's 1968 speeches operated with a sanitised code (Reeves, 1984:189-97) whereby what he 'really meant' was partially obscured by more 'polite' language. Rather, Powell was articulating a theory of nationalism and only by understanding this can we appreciate both the continuity in Powell's ideology (cf. Wood, 1965:135-46) and the nature of the racism that he was articulating (cf. Barker, 1981:42; also Nairn, 1981:256-90). Powell was positing the existence of an enduring politico-cultural unit, the English nation, which is alleged to have a number of equally enduring social and cultural characteristics as well as certain psychological features, for example, a 'strange passivity in the face of danger or absurdity or provocation' (Smithies and Fiddick, 1969:77). The ability of the English 'nation' to survive was said to depend upon protection from, *inter alia*, sources of internal dissolution and Powell identified the scale of the migrant presence as the source of such dissolution. The migrant population was attributed with the characteristics of not only intensifying the struggle for scarce resources (e.g. taking the hospital beds that should rightfully be occupied by English mothers) but also with threatening the foundation of continued existence of the English nation. The 'alien wedge' was the 'enemy within'.

Not only was this 'internal enemy' surreptitiously identified by phenotypical features. In a crucial passage Powell claimed that the process of disintegration was taking place not only by means of cultural differentiation but also through 'race':

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

Powell here warned that a difference of 'race', hand in hand with cultural variation, and manipulated by forces within the migrant population, threatened the survival of the English 'nation'. Powell's theory of nationalism therefore contained the idea of 'race' at its centre. This, in turn, is consistent with his references to the United States and thus, in the paragraph that follows the one cited above, Powell predicts

That tragic and intractable phenomenon which we watch with horror on the other side of the Atlantic but which there is interwoven with the history of the States itself, is coming upon us here by our own volition and our own neglect (Smithies and Fiddick, 1969:43).

The primary emphasis upon 'nation' was closely linked to the solution to the problem he identified. Although he reiterated the demand for further restrictions on entry into England (cf. Smithies and Fiddick, 1969:37), his main concern was to refocus the political debate, away from 'immigration' and onto the natural reproduction of the migrant population within England. He defined this fact as the major problem then and for the future:

As time goes on, the proportion of this total who are immigrant descendants, those born in England, who arrived here by exactly the same route as the rest of us, will rapidly increase. Already by 1985 the native-born would constitute the majority. It is this fact above all which creates the extreme urgency of action now, of just that kind of action which is hardest for politicians to take, action where the difficulties lie in the present but the evils to be prevented or minimised lie several parliaments ahead (Smithies and Fiddick, 1969:36-7; 70-4).

Consequently, 'strict immigration control', although necessary, was insufficient, and an active policy of 'repatriation' was necessary to avert the 'impending disaster' (Smithies and Fiddick, 1969:74). Powell believed that this policy required the formation of a Ministry of Repatriation to organise the necessary 're-emigration', and his defence of the English 'nation' required the physical removal of the 'alien presence'.

The ultimate justification for this was not that the English population would not endure the process which 'dislodged' them from 'their country and ... their home towns' (Smithies and Fiddick, 1969:73), but that such endurance was impossible because of 'human nature':

I do not believe it is in human nature that a country, and a country such as ours, should passively watch the transformation of whole areas which lie at the heart of it into alien territory (Smithies and Fiddick, 1969:74).

The political task, then, was to bring policy into line with 'human nature'. So, in the 1968 speeches, there was a logical link between the idea of 'nation' and the policy of 'repatriation', and the primary emphasis placed on these two categories can be interpreted as the construction and assertion of a new dualism, that of 'nation/ repatriation'. The dualism was underpinned by a reference to a hypothetical 'human nature'.

Powell's 1968 speeches, and the 'nation/ repatriation' categorisation that they promulgated were a challenge to Labour government policy articulated in its 1965 White Paper, and subsequently developed in its attempt to legislate for 'race relations' by making racial discrimination illegal. That challenge developed from an agreement that 'immigration' was a legitimate object of political attention, that it caused problems (e.g. both claimed that it led to increased pressure on hospital facilities) and that it

should therefore be strictly limited. The challenge exposed the emergent contradiction in the Labour Government's interpretation insofar as it was attempting to shift the focus of political attention away from the migrant population and towards the reaction to it (i.e. discrimination and its effects), but only after it had firmly categorised the migrant presence as problematic by endorsing the 'race/ immigration' dualism, and by reinforcing discrimination at the point of entry into Britain.

Powell exposed this contradiction by seizing the Labour Government's 1965 category of 'integration' and typifying the migrant population as the main threat to its achievement. This he did, not with the idea of 'race', but with the idea of 'nation', conceived as a homogeneous cultural unit with a distinctive history (cf. Wood, 1965:144-6). Powell's argument was that the coherence of the 'nation' was subverted by the presence of a migrant group which was consciously reproducing its distinctiveness of 'race' and culture. Consequently, the 'English people' were the real victims of 'immigration' and this inferior position, so the argument continued, was reinforced by the attempt to legislate on behalf of 'race relations'. Powell insisted logically that the 'alien wedge' had to be 'repatriated' if the historical and cultural unity of the 'English people' was to be maintained. Powell's 'nation/ repatriation' dualism, however, carefully subsumed and legitimated the 'race/ repatriation' dualism by implicitly and explicitly claiming that the threat to the unity of the 'nation' came from the reproduction of differences of 'race' and culture, as well as the appropriation of services designed for 'our people'.

The validity and significance of this argument can be illustrated by considering some aspects of the political and ideological context of and reaction to Powell's intervention which I illustrate from reporting in the *Times*.

First, it needs to be emphasised that Powell's speeches were condemned and his sacking from the Shadow Cabinet was supported by leading articles. On 22 April 1968, the *Times* ran a leading article titled 'An Evil Speech' in which his Birmingham speech was defined as 'racialist', while the leading article in the *Times* on 18 November 1968, following the Eastbourne speech, was headed 'A Doctrine of Fear' and included this assertion:

When one reads Mr. Powell's speech, right through, in this light one is bound to conclude that he is hostile to coloured people in Britain, that he is afraid of them, and that they have reason to be afraid of him.

However, and second, these leading articles found little reason to disagree with the policies that he advocated, nor with the general framework of his analysis. The concern expressed was not about the suggestion that 'repatriation' was the key to solving the problems created by migration

but, as it was argued in the *Times* leader on 22 April 1968, about the fact that Powell did not discuss the problems in 'reasonable terms'.

Third, and most significantly in this context, much of the reporting employed the 'race/ immigration' dualism. This is evident in the quotation cited above. In addition, on the 10 February 1968, the *Times* had reported:

By the end of the century Britain would have a racial problem as big as that of the United States unless immigration policy was changed, Mr. Enoch Powell, Conservative front bench spokesman on defence, said at a Conservative dinner in Walsall last night.

This picked up Powell's unspecific reference to the problem in the United States and explicitly labelled it as a problem of 'race'. This was repeated and reinforced by a lengthy analysis in the *Times* on 22 April 1968 titled 'What Britain can Learn from America' in which it was argued that legislating to make racial discrimination illegal was not a 'cure-all for the race problem'. Again, on the 23 April 1968, the leader of the Opposition, Mr. Heath, was described as holding the view that:

The law was only part of the solution to the race problem. Experience in North America showed it was only a limited part.

The transposition also occurred although not systematically, in the *Times* headlines:

'Appeal for Restraint on Race' (23 April 1968): 'Widespread Split over Powell's Race Speech' (25 April 1968): and 'Mounting Volume of Race Protest' (25 April 1968).

Finally, there was an explicit repetition of the 'race/ immigration' dualism in a *Times* leading article titled 'Incomers from Kenya' on 13 February 1968 in which it was argued that

... any large influx of coloured immigrants to Britain at this time is likely to put an added strain on race relations in this country ... The great danger for Britain is of a depressed coloured proletariat, where the problems of race and of poverty are synonymous.

Of equal significance is the political and ideological interaction between Powell and the British population. One insight into this interaction can be found from the large number of people who wrote to him following his speeches. Spearman analysed a sample of some 100,000 letters that Powell received following the Birmingham speech of 20 April 1968, which demonstrates the interaction between the ideas of 'race' and 'nation' in commonsense. Of those letters supporting Powell, a sample of 3437 were analysed to identify the reasons given. Only a small minority (71) were classified as articulating racism while approximately one third (1128) were

classified as claiming that immigration was threatening British culture and traditions. Some of the extracts cited in the report echo this interconnection of 'race' and 'nation':

I want above all else an integrated society and I am convinced this can never come about if a large racial minority is allowed to build up. In my work as a town planner I come across the problems posed by too hasty immigration.

No reasonable man would hate another just because he has a darker skin, but it would be blind to pretend that coloured immigration on the scale we now see does not endanger the Englishness of England. It is not ignoble to wish one's children and grandchildren to grow up in the English traditions and way of life which our forebears fostered. Nor is it ignoble that we should wish to avoid the danger that these traditions and beliefs would be distorted by too many of alien origins and 'ethos' (Spearman, 1968:668).

More generally, Spearman's analysis demonstrates the widespread categorisation of the migrants in the letters by reference to phenotypical characteristics and of the migrant presence as creating problems for the English population:

The words foreign or black or coloured invasion are freely used. A sense of being overwhelmed by an unforeseen, unplanned event is expressed ... The letters reflect the feeling that *they* by their actions have produced problems for *us*, which do not in any way affect *them* and which they are not doing anything to help us solve. *Their* idea is to tell *us* what we must and must not do (1968:669).

There is some evidence to support the contention that Powell was successful in shifting the 'race/immigration' dualism articulated by a large proportion of the English population to incorporate the 'repatriation' theme. First, and here opinion poll data is uncritically accepted, in April 1968, 64% of a sample agreed that 'coloured immigrants who are already here should be encouraged to go home' (Studlar, 1974:377). There was, therefore, majority support for what was assumed to be Powell's demand. However, and secondly, there is significance in the fact that the question was asked at all. Studlar notes that the first time such a question was asked was in March 1968 and goes on to imply that because this preceded the April 1968 speech, Powell is shown again to have been following public opinion, although he also notes that the proportion supporting such a policy increased after the Birmingham speech (1974:375-6). This is misleading, if not incorrect. Powell made an explicit reference to the policy role of 'voluntary repatriation' in the Walsall speech in February 1968 (Smithies and Fiddick, 1969:20) and the NOP organisation asked a

'repatriation' question in March 1968. Opinion poll organisations are themselves part of the political and ideological process, and not neutral observers, because they are engaged in the selection of topics and questions as indicators of public opinion, and this is a necessarily selective process. This is revealed by a decision to ask a new question as this means an addition to the stock of issues considered to constitute 'public opinion'. As Edelman argues:

To define beliefs as public opinion is itself a way of creating opinion, for such a reference both defines the norm that should be democratically supported and reassures anxious people that authorities respond to popular views (1977:49-50).

The decision to ask a 'repatriation' question was a legitimisation of Powell's analysis and an indication of his success in redefining the political agenda.

But Powell's 'nation/ repatriation' dualism only overlaid and did not replace the already established 'race/ immigration' dualism. This is evident in the discrepancy between the various questions asked by the opinion poll organisations and the precise terms of the policy that Powell advocated. Powell demanded the 'repatriation' only of 'immigrants', a term that was occasionally made more specific by the adjective 'Commonwealth'. In March, May and December 1968, the opinion poll question was; 'Do you think the immigrants already in Britain should be encouraged by government grants to return home?' In June 1969, the question was; 'Mr. Powell has suggested that grants be made available to help coloured immigrant families go back to their countries of origin. Do you agree or disagree with this suggestion?', a formulation that does not accord with the precise wording of Powell's 1968 speeches. These discrepancies are a measure of the way in which the 'race/ immigration' dualism filtered the 'nation/ repatriation' dualism and are therefore a measure of its predominance as commonsense; 'immigrants' was an established ideological category which referred to those of different 'race', and hence they were liable to 'repatriation'. Powell's contribution was to offer the category of 'nation' to justify such a policy, but this primary category subsumed the idea of 'race'.

### *Conclusion*

Powell's political intervention in 1968 occurred at a critical juncture. The Labour Government, although ideologically trapped by the 'race/ immigration' dualism, was partially attempting to transcend it by strengthening the law which made racial discrimination illegal. This initiative meant shifting the focus of political attention away from the 'immigrants' and onto the reaction within England to their presence and its implications for their quality of life. Although the necessary legislation was passed, Powell gained the political initiative and ensured that the 'immigrant' presence and its supposed effects remained the primary object of attention. This was

achieved not only by means of what he said but also by the political and media reaction to what he said. The resulting intensification of the racialisation of domestic English politics was maintained by a series of speeches in which the category of 'nation' predominated but in which there were allusions to the phenotypical characteristics of the migrants. These allusions drew upon and were sustained by a widespread, commonsense acceptance of 'race' as a biological reality and by the media's use of the 'race' category. These were moments in an ideological process that sustained the fiction that 'race' was a reality which needed to be legislated for. But in the light of this, how are we to categorise the content of Powell's speeches?

I have emphasised throughout that Powell did not systematically employ the idea of 'race', nor did he assert that the migrants were biologically inferior. The content of these speeches does not accord therefore with the main features of the scientific racism of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the primary object was not the migrants but the English 'nation' or 'way of life'. Powell's central assertion was that the continued existence of this 'nation' was threatened by the presence of an 'immigrant' population which he emphasised as being both culturally and phenotypically distinct. He further predicted that the consequence of this presence would be an American-style tragedy, his most powerful allusion to the idea of 'race'.

I have argued elsewhere that the defining characteristic of racism as ideology

... ascribes negatively evaluated characteristics in a deterministic manner (which may or may not be justified) to a group which is additionally identified as being in some way (phenotypically or genotypically) distinct (Miles, 1982:78).

Using this definition, Powell's 1968 speeches warrant description as racism. Indeed, his argument reproduced the main features of the racist theory of history which asserts a natural or biological foundation for conflict between discrete populations characterised by a distinct biology and culture. His intention was to highlight and reinforce a sense of national cohesion or 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983) by signifying the Asian and West Indian presence as a disintegrative intrusion. This worked not by labelling these migrant populations as inferior 'races' but by signifying the English as a 'nation' whose very existence was threatened by the creation, through immigration and then natural reproduction, of a 'race' problem. It is not necessary to posit a hierarchy of biological superiority/ inferiority to ascribe to a group a cultural and biological homogeneity and capacity to bring about the dissolution of a similarly constituted group. What matters is that the two, or more, groups are reified as natural entities, each with ascribed, unchanging characteristics, and are

then said to be naturally incompatible. In this sense, whether the 'race' of the 'nation' category is explicitly applied is of secondary significance for each is capable of working ideologically with the same outcome. In other words, each category can subsume the other.

The racialisation of domestic English politics, and the articulation of racism that sustained that process, were central features shaping the incorporation of migrant workers and their families into English civil society and into the relations of capitalist production. The migration from the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent had its origin in the uneven development of the capitalist mode of production in what an increasing demand for labour in England in the 1950s articulated with an economically surplus population in colonies and ex-colonies where capitalist development was weak. These migrants were recruited to semi- and unskilled positions in the hierarchy of wage labour, but only because no other labour was available. A study conducted in the early 1960s demonstrated that employers had only engaged 'coloured workers' during the 1950s when all other sources had been exhausted (Wright, 1968:40-7): they were recruiting labour on the basis of a racialised hierarchy of acceptability, as the following illustrates:

After the war there was firstly a shortage of workers, and secondly, a sense of freedom amongst the workers generated by the attitude of the people coming home from the forces. They felt that because they had fought for freedom, they deserved a job, and could pick and choose, so they didn't like settling down. We tried employing continentals and refugees, etc., but it didn't work out in our industry. The Chairman after the war wouldn't have foreigners (this meant coloured workers). He died in 1949, and in 1950 the succeeding Chairman employed Indian workers (Wright, 1968:42).

It is therefore no surprise that Asian and Caribbean workers were also found to be more likely to be unemployed in periods of unemployment (Wright, 1968:85).

Subsequent studies have confirmed Wright's conclusions and have demonstrated the pervasive influence of discrimination in the recruitment and promotion of such workers (Daniel, 1968; Smith, 1977; Brown, 1984). The implication of these findings is that discriminatory practices ensured that Caribbean and Asian workers were retained in those positions to which they were recruited because no other labour was available. In such circumstances, racism becomes an ideological relation of production because its articulation legitimates the processes which locate and confine agents, categorised using the idea of 'race', to specific positions in the hierarchy of wage labour. In other words, the capital accumulation process leaves certain sites in the production/ circulation process vacant, and

racism operates as one of the allocative mechanisms to those positions.

By the late 1960s, the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent no longer served as a labour reservoir for the capitalist mode of production in England, although a migration of dependents of earlier migrant workers continued. The state was faced with the contradictory effects of the articulation of racism. The labour power of these racialised migrants had been incorporated into key sectors of the economy, and was retained there by discriminatory practice, yet in the course of the racialisation of political relations, racism defined the migrant presence as undesirable. The response of the Labour government to this contradiction was to attempt to eliminate discriminatory practice in order to allow these racialised agents to compete equally for scarce resources (e.g. hospital beds, housing and, by this time, jobs) while simultaneously legitimating the 'race/immigration' dualism. Such a response reinforced the contradiction. Powell's intervention was ideologically consistent and politically radical. Within civil society, the 'race' problem was to be resolved by repatriating its alleged source, the migrants, but Powell was equally aware of the role of migrant labour in a capitalist economy. Consequently, he argued that

... the remedy for shortage of labour in a developed economy is more capital and better organisation (Smithies and Fiddick, 1969:69).

Where conditions ruled out such an increase in constant capital relative to variable capital, another solution was available:

It need not even follow that the income from work done here in Britain would be suddenly lost to the home communities if permanent settlement of population were replaced by what many countries in Europe and elsewhere are familiar with - the temporary, albeit often long-term, intake of labour (Smithies and Fiddick, 1969:76).

Whether such a solution should have avoided the problem that Powell identified is unlikely, given the consequences of contract labour migration elsewhere in Europe (cf. Castles, et al., 1984). But what is significant here is that Powell's political intervention in 1968 had an ideological consistency in that it identified the migrant presence and the consequences of that presence as problematic and offered a solution which required the removal of that presence. Moreover, by careful allusion, his political intervention was able to utilise the commonsense conception of 'race' in the construction of a radical nationalism which the *Times* of 18 November 1968 labelled 'the new tribalism'. In so doing, Powell played a key role in sustaining the ideological conditions under which the myth of 'race' continued to give meaning to the process by which migrant workers and their families were incorporated into the political and economic relations of English capitalism. The maintenance of that myth obscured the racism that sustained it and the inferior position of the migrants in political and economic relations.

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