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## Introduction

The general problem with which this book is concerned is the classical question of the nature of the most sovereign and legitimate socio-political community modern men and women wish to live in, and to contribute to, for their own as well as their children's security and well-being. The classical answer has been that it is both desirable and worthy of emulation so to rearrange society and political authority that they can be easily recognized by all to be the community we call the *nation-state*.

The question itself has been central to political discourse since it was first asked by intellectuals during the Enlightenment and the answer guided men of rude action towards the end of the eighteenth century. The reaction in the following century to the 'age of reason', which is generally described as the Romantic Movement, rephrased but did not abandon the question. The discourse became less speculative and rationalistic, and became more a commitment to feelings, traditions and the construction of widely shared myths. The changes wrought were consistent with the nationalists' discovery of the potentially revolutionary force of the common people, which could be harnessed in the nationalists' gigantic project of reorganizing power and society. But, alongside the activities of practical men and women, who have ensured that nationalism has found expression in all areas of human endeavour, the political discourse concerning the desirable socio-political unit has continued down to our own time.

The analysis of nationalism and ethnicity offered here is located within this on-going concern over the nature of that community which would be sufficiently broad and all-embracing properly to be designated *national*. In particular, the legitimacy of membership of the national community in Britain forms the central concern of this study. The main contention is that the most powerful and influential of the attempts to redefine the post-imperial British national community is such that membership excludes non-white minorities who have settled on these shores since the Second World War. It is argued that

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whilst the membership of people with backgrounds in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean are accorded formal recognition, this recognition is constructed in such a manner that their legitimate presence and participation in Britain are nearly always questioned.

The study avoids the rather simplistic notion that this exclusion is only a matter of racism on the part of the majority white population. The view is advanced that this exclusion is the result of a combination of a number of powerful factors. Undoubtedly, racism is the most widespread and powerful of these factors. There are, however, others which are perhaps more deep-seated, and more easily defended, but which have been generally seen to be nothing more than manifestations of racism. These include, for example, ethnic awareness, and cultural and territorial identities, on the part of the majority population as well as on the part of minorities. It is not enough, however, simply to label questions of religious beliefs and practices, or conflict over cultural values or customs, as racism. This is to overload a concept to the point which it is no longer useful. The combination of these factors, which act to exclude legitimate membership of Britain's non-white population in the national community, not only complicates the situation but also demands a framework of analysis which goes beyond racism as an explanatory factor. Just as it was necessary to see class as an important – but only one – factor in understanding 'race relations', so it is now necessary to appreciate the combination of the multiple factors of class, racism, culture, ethnicity, religion, territoriality, and so on, as so many inputs in a continuous debate in the negotiation over how the post-imperial, national, British community is to be fashioned.

From early in the discussion which follows, a distinction is made between historical, or traditional, and ethnic nationalism. The latter characterizes the contemporary, post-imperial phase of the nationalist project to effect socio-political communities in which the 'people'/'community' (the nation) is in perfect congruence with authority (the state). The study then suggests that whilst Britain escaped much of the militant, and therefore disruptive, manifestations of historical nationalism, she is now one of the countries at the very forefront of those which are articulating the new, ethnic nationalism. This kind of nationalism is a phenomenon which most societies are presently experiencing. It is a mistake, therefore, to treat the British situation as unique, as indeed much of the 'race relations' literature unwittingly tends to assume it is. This admission in no way detracts from the necessity to combat racism. Rather, it calls for the need to recognize what it is that we must confront in any well-meaning, progressive effort to construct a just and non-racialist society in Britain. From this perspective of looking at the overall problem, it is further suggested that the terms of discussion proffered by the ascendent liberal/radical fraternity and the Right establishment in Britain are far from being unproblematic and may lead us into a social and political cul-de-sac.

The question of the nature of the national community, and a number of the problems related to some of the practical answers, are treated here more in their political than in their sociological forms. This statement relates to how I have carried out the task of examining nationalism and ethnicity; it is not intended as an apology. After all, the posing of the question pre-dates Auguste Comte, Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim, some of the founding fathers of what Comte himself called a 'science of society' – the discipline of sociology. This essay is not, however, concerned exclusively with the unit we know as the nation-state and its attendant ideology, nationalism. The analysis also attempts to bring into focus a number of social questions from the developing multi-disciplinary area of what is generally called, for lack of a better term, 'race relations'. This focus would seem to suggest that the discussion might be more sociologically, or at least empirically, rooted because the field of 'race relations' has generally been dominated by sociologists in Britain, where a rich empirical literature has developed. It is my view, however, that although several aspects of 'race relations' matters await, perhaps too patiently, scholarly attention, there is an ample body of literature in the field to justify the general analysis offered here. It is offered as a contribution to how we may approach the increasingly complex problem of membership of the national community which assimilationist, integrationalist and exclusivist perspectives have done little to elucidate.

The study examines the question of the national community only partly, therefore, from the perspective of discussions over 'race relations', because in spite of much talk about improved or worsened 'race relations' in Britain,<sup>1</sup> a thorn in the flesh of the nation remains. This 'thorn' is the question of the legitimate membership of the British nation by minorities who are physically not white.<sup>2</sup> A number of pressing questions, which arise from this problem, are discussed here. For example, how and why do minorities from the Indian sub-continent and the Commonwealth Caribbean continue to relate to the politics of their past homelands; how do these politics compare; what are the political backgrounds from which these minorities have come to Britain; in general terms, how do the *diasporic* politics in which some non-white minority groups participate, relate to broader questions of nationalism and a new national community in Britain.

Whilst the manner of posing these questions is new, the questions themselves are not. For example, Rex and Tomlinson raised some of them in a similar manner to this work (Rex and Tomlinson, 1979, chs. 1, 2), but these questions were tangential to their main purpose and were left undeveloped and unexplored. In general, however, British studies of 'race relations' tend to treat nationalism almost exclusively as an adjunct of extreme right-wing groups. Thus, the redefinition of the national British community has been left almost entirely to the political and intellectual right. Individuals and groups who stand on this side of the social and political spectrum have, therefore, been able

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to determine the content, contours and pace of the discussion, such as it is. Crucial questions relating to the membership of the national community are hardly ever set alongside the more immediate questions emanating from analyses of race relations.

The linking of questions of nationalism and race relations in Britain have, therefore, been assumed to be illegitimate for progressive individuals and groups to address.<sup>3</sup> One exception is Gilroy's work, which raises the question of nationhood with respect to groups from the Caribbean (Gilroy, 1987). His concerns differ, however, in important ways from mine. For example, his work focuses predominantly on culture. But, important as culture is in any discussion of nationalism, the latter cannot, as we shall see, be explained by reference to this single factor alone; culture is but one of several aspects of nationalism. Moreover, ever an elusive phenomenon, nationalism has always been wont to play shy in its British garb. In Britain nationalism assumes many guises and hardly ever adopts a loud and demonstrative pose. It is not enough, therefore, to look simply at any one minority group and its relationship to the majority population in order to understand nationalism.

Nor do most race relations studies give any serious consideration to the differential social and political backgrounds of non-white minorities. The differential *colonial* and *reception* experiences of these groups who have settled in Britain are usually underplayed in most analyses of their social and political behaviour. This study seeks to contribute to a correction of this, because it is becoming increasingly important to specify the varied contributions different groups bring to the project of constructing a new national community in a post-imperial Britain.

It would be foolhardy to attempt to tackle all the questions involved with the issues mentioned here. What is offered is a perspective on some of those I consider to be most important in trying to understand the general problem of membership of the British national community by all groups who claim this country as their home.

One starting point in an analysis of this kind is to raise problematically the question of nationhood. The end of empire forced the question of membership of the nation not only on the post-colonial states of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific islands once ruled by Britain, but also on Britain herself.<sup>4</sup> In the immediate post-colonial period most new states had to cope with the social and political problems of nationhood and the problems of social and economic development. A large body of literature that attempts to explain these problems exists in the area of development/underdevelopment studies. Less attention has been paid, however, to the reverse side of the same coin. Like post-colonial societies, Britain too has had to make serious adjustments, particularly to her demoted position in a competitive and more equal world order. One of the questions she has still not come to terms with, let alone satisfactorily resolved,

is the question of the *legitimate*, as distinct from the merely formal and legal, membership of the *British nation*. Enoch Powell's view of the problem from the perspective of one white Briton was clearly expressed when he argued that a person of either West Indian or Asian background born in England cannot become an English person (Foot, 1969, p. 137).<sup>5</sup>

The strong emphasis being placed on ethnic *differences* amongst minorities would suggest that for them too it is not simply a question of being accepted as English, or even as British. It would appear that for some it is a question of being Asians and *perhaps* English/British, or West Indians and *perhaps* English/British, whilst for others it is enough to be Asians and West Indians living in England/Britain. But these largely negative responses by native and settler Britishers alike to the problems of a redefined, post-imperial British national identity, are grossly inadequate bases for the construction of a community large enough to embrace all groups, irrespective of their colour, domestic values and preferences.

This study of nationalism and ethnicity is, therefore, concerned with a number of closely related questions which arise from two broad sets of issues. In the first place, it looks at how the classical answer to the classical question of membership of the national community has proved to be highly unsatisfactory. This has been repeatedly demonstrated by the frequency with which subjugated nations or people have demanded national independence from imperial rulers as well as from so-called nation-states during the last two hundred years. At no time has this been more clearly the case than in our own, when the demand for new forms of socio-political arrangements make contradictory demands on the nation-state so that the result may be to undermine this kind of association. In the past, such demands were made in the name of one or other aggrieved 'nation'. Increasingly, however, much the same demands are being made in the name of a more clearly defined, more sharply delimited, ethnic group. Whether the demands such groups make in this regard on the nation-state are intended simply to create *more* nation-states as part of a broad democratic movement, or whether such demands are intended to *transcend* the nation-state construct, remains highly problematic. Perhaps only time will tell whether the nation-state is drifting, ultimately, towards dissociation and atrophy, or is being undermined as part of a more dynamic process towards larger associations, such as that intimated by European integration.

A second set of questions that this study addresses relates to the kinds of politics taking place in homelands *outside* Britain. But a word is necessary here about the utility of studying these kinds of politics. It is to be expected that Britain's non-white minorities are likely to continue for some time to have close relations with their former homelands. These relations are likely to be particularly strong during the lifetime of the first generation of recent settlers. And, contrary to the outburst of Norman Tebbit in April 1990 regarding the

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attachment of recent settlers to the lands of their birth, it is perfectly natural for men and women to develop a new love for the new land of settlement without abandoning the first love for their original homeland. Whilst these loyalties may create undue tensions for some groups, there is also the possibility that individuals and even groups may turn this necessary tension to good use through acts of political, social and artistic creativity. The main point is that the patriotic feelings expressed by 'seven eloquent citizens in a symposium on the nation's destiny as the loom of Europe overhangs us and doubts solidify about 1992' in a 'Fanfare On Being British' (*The Field*, May 1990, pp. 76–85), are not necessarily minimized by the capacity to hold such feelings for more than one country. Indeed, such a capacity has promise of a greater hope for a war-free, if not an entirely peaceful, world.

Two major factors, however, are most likely to determine the *nature* of, if not the prolonged interests in, the politics of 'back home'. The first of these is the attitude of the white majority towards non-whites. As long as a significant number of the majority white population continues to see the presence of people with a different hue of colour as temporary and illegitimate, then, naturally, minorities will need to maintain an interest in the political life of their original homelands, if only as an insurance against a possible rainy day. Given the Nazi experience of only half a century ago, this possibility can never be far from the consciousness of minorities in a rapidly changing Britain and Europe of the late twentieth century. Exclusion of minorities is likely to be a very important determinant in the maintenance of close attachments to distant homelands, however impractical this myth of return (Anwar, 1979) may be.

Of course, the ball is not entirely in the British court. The second determinant set of factors in the situation is the kinds of politics taking place in the homelands. These are likely to determine the intensity with which people in Britain may feel committed to supporting their former countrymen and women. Here a dynamic political situation exists. If, for example, political life 'back home' is highly unstable and the welfare of close relations and family – many of whom Britain refuses to allow to enter this country – is involved, then naturally groups of people resident here may be directly affected. This is particularly so with respect to people from the Indian sub-continent, where questions of national entities and boundaries are far from settled. There are, therefore, sound reasons to believe that it is in the best interests of 'good race relations' in Britain to examine aspects of these diasporic politics.

Chapters two, three and four of this book set out the problems of the national community, the nation-state and the relationships between white majority and non-white minorities. As indicated earlier, the analysis draws primarily upon the literature on nationalism. This is a vast and distinguished literature, which race relations studies often invoke but generally tend to under-emphasize or



ignore. The attempt here, therefore, is to place the emphasis on aspects of this older and critical literature and to try to show its abiding relevance to current discussions of race relations matters in Britain.

The aspects of nationalism focused upon (such as territorial, ethnic, racial or linguistic affinities) are analysed from both a theoretical and an empirical perspective. Chapter five concentrates on the transition from *empire* to *nation* in the post-World War Two experience of Britain. The analysis here draws attention to the changes in immigration and nationality laws between 1948 and 1981, as well as the changes in the attitudes of the two major political parties over these issues.<sup>6</sup> This is a well-ploughed field, but I found it necessary to look for myself at the discussions in Cabinet (particularly in the late 1940s) and within the Conservative and Labour parties in order to gain a closer understanding of how decision-makers at crucial points over the past four decades conceived of the national community as reflected in our laws. Additionally, I have made a careful examination of the parties' manifestoes, pamphlets, conference reports and proceedings, and speeches by leaders. Fortunately, the abundance of available, published material on the issues with which I am concerned here made it unnecessary to conduct interviews of party leaders.

Chapters six and seven explore two examples of what I call *diasporic politics*, that is, the commitment of migrants and their offspring to the politics of their original homelands. These politics are conducted across national boundaries and with greatly improved means of travel and communication these politics are becoming more commonplace. In the past, cross-national politics involved relations between sovereign states or the politics of the exiled. This is no longer exclusively so. Migration, easy travel and the availability of telephones, videos and televisions combine to make it possible for groups of people to overcome the barriers of distance and physical isolation. Groups and individuals separated by thousands of miles of ocean and land mass can now establish close links with fellow-religionists, fellow-ethnics, fellow-adherents to a particular ideology and so forth. Such factors as personal literacy or wealth are no longer prerequisites for involvement in global activities. It would appear, therefore, that just as print (books and later newspapers) helped to extend the boundaries of the franchise, so today a series of factors are enfranchising (some would say empowering) or creating new sources of power across national or traditional boundaries of established authority.

The two examples of diasporic politics analysed in this study are those of Sikhs in Britain who support the call of fellow-Sikhs in India for an independent state of Khalistan, and the support given to groups in Guyana that are actively demanding the introduction of democracy in that troubled country once thought to be the much sought after El Dorado. Here these superficial similarities stop. What is important about the Guyanese and the Sikh situations, from the perspective of my analysis of settlers and the emerging new national

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community in Britain, is the fact that these groups stand in sharp contrast with each other. But the purpose is not so much to compare like with like here; the purpose is simply to illustrate my general point that, to one degree or another, the politics of 'back home', or diasporic politics, are becoming widespread and, with the Rushdie Affair still a very real issue, are obviously an important aspect of the British situation. With respect to groups from the Indian sub-continent this is of course more true than in the case of groups from the Commonwealth Caribbean, as the discussion in chapters six and seven makes clear. The decision to concentrate on the Khalistan issue was determined largely by the fact that this case combined a number of important nationalist questions such as religion, territory and language. The relative neglect of the Khalistan issue amongst researchers in Britain was also an important consideration when I commenced this work in 1986. Whilst the Guyana situation is atypical of the Commonwealth Caribbean, of all groups from the region it comes closest to the experience of groups that have settled in Britain and whose homelands are troubled by some of the vexed questions of nationalism.

It was intended that the analyses of the Sikhs and Guyanese should be complemented by a discussion of the Cypriots who settled in Britain from the 1940s, in much the same period as other British colonial immigrants, but, unfortunately, there was not enough time to complete the necessary research. I had hoped, by the inclusion of such comparative material, to overcome the prevailing (British) practice of comparing the Asian and the West Indian. I have failed. But I hope that I have been successful in avoiding the usually negative comparisons to be found in the literature on these two main non-white minorities in Britain which have nearly always been placed in a *competitive* framework, both in colonial encounters and especially in the literature on 'race relations'.

Material for the empirical chapters involved a good number of interviews with spokespersons and leaders of particular groups in Britain. I conducted over thirty in-depth interviews with individuals in the West Indian/Guyanese and Sikh communities and several more with members of the Scottish National Party (SNP) and the Cypriot community in London. Additionally, many individuals (particularly in the Sikh community) preferred to be interviewed in groups and this resulted in very useful discussions of their views on the matters which concerned them. It was also necessary to attend, as an observer, meetings and gurdwaras (temples, places of worship) in different parts of the country. I circulated a largely open-ended questionnaire to individuals and groups, around which interviews and discussions were conducted. These questionnaires were constructed with the view of gathering comparable material from different groups. This involved framing broad questions which would be relevant to the specific experiences of different groups. Moreover, I gathered as much printed material as was available in Britain about the Guyanese and



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Khalistan situations. Where possible I also drew upon material published in India and the Caribbean, because it is necessary to have a clear understanding of these groups' backgrounds.

Finally, in looking at these groups the aim is not to present a profile of their communities in Britain or in their homelands. There is an abundance of material which treats adequately with these groups in India and the Caribbean. Clearer and up-to-date profiles of the Sikh and Guyanese communities in Britain would, of course, be useful. But this was not the purpose of the work. The purpose of drawing upon the experiences of members of these communities was chiefly to illustrate my overall argument regarding nationalism as articulated in contemporary Britain. In particular, my analysis focuses upon the nature of the demands for an independent Khalistan and for democracy in Guyana. After all, like other occupations, academic work operates within the context of a division of labour, and the task of describing these communities in Britain must be left largely to the sociologist and/or the social anthropologist.

It is now necessary to set out in more detail the central problem of the national community, and to relate this to the specific instances of post-imperial Britain.

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## The general problem

### *Introduction*

However we may wish to describe or define, praise, glorify or condemn nationalism, we cannot but be impressed by its ability to continue to be the single most widespread and most powerful force propelling social and political change in the modern world. Just when we assume that it has spent its enormous store of energy, is being bypassed or transformed, nationalist sentiments or aspirations may emerge or re-awaken, heralding new departures, reasserting past or reaffirming present modes of social and political behaviour. Sometimes progressive, sometimes reactionary in its teachings and actions, nearly always disruptive, nationalism is today constantly throwing up problems which contain new opportunities and challenges. This is true for all kinds of societies, irrespective of the polarities which may distinguish them. In the industrial and affluent North as well as in the underdeveloped and poverty-stricken South, in both the Eastern and Western blocs, in open market capitalist as well as closed communist systems, nationalist upheavals are becoming once again commonplace.

For example, in the newer and less settled states of the post-colonial world in Africa and Asia, new groups constantly emerge to make demands which sound very much like those made forty, thirty or even as recently as twenty or ten years ago by nationalist leaders fighting for freedom from alien imperial powers. In Africa the decade of independence (the 1960s) was hardly over before new wars of independence commenced. Sometimes these new wars of independence were more aggressively pursued than were some of the wars against the European colonialists. The agreement between the Founding Fathers of the Organization of African Unity in 1963 to respect the frontiers drawn, in the main, by the imperialists almost a century earlier at the Congress of Berlin (1884) has not been universally respected. The Congo and Nigeria were examples of this kind of disaffection with the national arrangements