

The legend of self-segregation: what are they talking about?

Polarisation into Asian and other segregated residential areas in Bradford is a legend that has gained powerful acceptance in the past year. To what extent is the legend true? And more generally, what use are 'race statistics'?

"When I leave this meeting with you I will go home and not see another white face until I come back here next week." This quote was used to summarise the concern that informed the rest of *Community Cohesion*, the Home Office Report looking forward from riots in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford in 2001.

Polarisation, self-segregation (Sir Hermann Ouseley's phrase), separate arrangements for education, voluntary bodies, employment, places of worship, language, social and cultural networks: a rash of reports last year reported "a series of parallel lives".

In accepting the Home Office recommendations, the government now insist that each local authority measure, monitor and encourage 'social cohesion'. To date council officers are considering taking a broad view of that term, to include three aspects. First, the extent of physical separation, where people live, study and work. Second, the social inequalities between groups that indicate inclusion or exclusion from the main means of fulfilling lives, such as employment, educational provision and housing opportunities. And third, the perception of friction and disquiet, measured partly by opinion surveys like *Speakout*.

The talk of social cohesion and integration is a far cry from the tolerance of difference which is the hallmark of the multicultural approach that is championed by other government policies.

One has to be careful, because the very terms polarisation and segregation, and certainly the aim of reducing segregation, are often accompanied by a fear. The fear is that increasing spatial separation of social and ethnic classes will lead to ghetto-like developments that will finally result in the disintegration of urban society.

While the national CRE at present agrees with the reports that segregation should be seen negatively, locally this is not the case. Bradford Vision Chief Executive Sharmila Gandhi has put the social and business case for established residential communities, while Councillors and educationalists alike rejected a proposal for racial quotas in schools.

One has to be careful with language too. 'Self-segregation' and 'White flight' are both phrases that turn attention to supposed problems within communities that are not 'White'.

Claims of polarisation are legends, passed orally like folk tales. Nowadays they are also passed from news item to news item, political commentator to political commentator. They are not based on evidence of real events and practises, which we can now turn to.

Bradford is unique in Britain for its population statistics, updated since the last Census and made available through the Community Statistics Project in which Bradford Resource Centre is a partner. Although the 2001 Census results are not yet released, changing residential patterns can be followed for each electoral ward and for the smaller Enumeration District areas, which have just 100-250 households each.

The table shows the 'Index of Segregation' between South Asian and other residents, which is nearer to 1 for greater segregation, and nearer to 0 for less segregation. It is the proportion of either population that would have to move for the distribution across areas to be the same for both populations.

The Index of Segregation is a very broad measure, an average over all Bradford; it does not distinguish the Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian populations within 'South Asian', nor the differences within these categories; nor does it look at what is going on in specific areas of

Bradford. All those are very important for an understanding of Bradford. But the claims about polarisation are general and so they require evaluation at a general, average level.

	1991	1996	2001
Index of segregation: 30 electoral wards	0.59	0.59	0.59
Index of segregation: 927 EDs (100-250 households)	0.75	0.74	0.74
Wards			
75% and higher South Asian residents	0	0	0
25%-75% mixed South Asian and Others	5	6	9
75%-95% Other	9	9	6
95% or more Other	16	15	15
EDs (100-250 households)			
95% and higher South Asian	0	1	0
75%-95% South Asian	29	43	77
25%-75% mixed South Asian and Others	152	154	163
75%-95% Other	129	136	134
95% or more Other	617	593	553

There are well over ten thousand people in each of Bradford's electoral wards. I would expect that residential separation between groups would take place in smaller areas, according to the available housing, family ties and local services. So it is no surprise that the table shows higher segregation when measured at the scale of the small EDs than for wards.

Two other facts stand out from the table. First, that the segregation indices are not very high. The equivalent index for Greater Belfast between Protestant and Catholics is 0.86. The table shows that in Bradford there are no small areas where as much as 95% of the residents have a South Asian family background. The person who reported not seeing a White face for a week doesn't leave their home often!

Second, the segregation has not increased over the 1990s, whether large or small areas are considered. There are many more mixed areas than ten years ago. Other analyses suggest that those who can afford to move, buy housing out of the inner city, irrespective of their family origins. There is no increased polarisation in residential patterns.

If there is anything that stands out, it is the growth of the South Asian population. Residents with a South Asian background make up 20% of the District's population now, compared with 14% a decade ago. This is why the table shows that there are more small areas with a large majority of South Asian residents than a decade ago. This growth is partly a consequence of its youthful age structure – common to any recent immigration – so that the number of births will outstrip the number of deaths for some years to come. To a lesser degree it is due also to the continued immigration of family members.

Both natural growth and immigration tend to re-fill the inner city, so that the dispersal that has occurred has not resulted in lower segregation. Perhaps the legend of segregation, now seen to be a myth, is in fact concerned at the growth of the population.

If the statistics had shown increasing segregation, this might not be so surprising, given the difficulty of finding appropriate housing, social welfare and support in areas away from family and friends. Surveys repeatedly find that many 'South Asian' young adults would like to move, with others, to areas outside the current settlements. Without those barriers more de-segregation would have been observed.

Above all, the statistical patterns do not reflect some essential quality of 'South Asian' residents or 'Others'. They are the result of real choices by individuals, and a variety of practices in the housing market, by estate agents, government and local government, and by community organisations.

So what use are statistics about 'race' and 'ethnic group'?

Categories in official statistics arise primarily as a response to the needs of government policy. They are also shaped by which questions the public are prepared to answer! The Census categories for ethnic group reflect the needs of race relations legislation, multi-cultural policy, and immigration debates. This mixture of needs results in a mixed bag of categories referring to colour, appearance and country of origin, while the whole is labelled 'cultural background'. The categories also include terms usually associated with nationality.

If we are researching something in Bradford, and can collect and make the statistics ourselves, we can and should choose to measure what is appropriate to the issues under investigation. With Census and many other government statistics we don't have a choice but to use the categories already decided, or to ignore the evidence altogether.

At the Resource Centre, the community statistics and anti-racism education projects are among those who have to find ways of making the most of the evidence that exists, including local statistics. Perhaps there are three ways in which 'race statistics' can be of use:

Myth busting. The government's *Social Cohesion* report recommended that myth busting be part of the support for local community cohesion plans. This article counts as myth-busting.

Exposure of inequalities. Statistics of inequality, on unemployment or income for example, measure more the end product of discrimination than the sources of that discrimination. Measuring the extent of inequality is also necessary to plan and to implement serious anti-racist public initiatives, though its rôle is subsidiary to the will and the power to carry through those initiatives. Myth-busting and exposure of inequalities are statistics' contribution to anti-racist education.

Statistical modelling of institutional racism. This isn't so easy. It might involve experiments to compare different institutional practises, longitudinal data, and measures of processes as well as outcomes. It is virtually absent from existing reports.

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